

Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes
Via Hybrid
2700 Posvar Hall and Zoom

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

1. Call to Order

President Robin Kear called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Past Faculty Assembly Meeting

Kear asked for a motion to approve the minutes. On a motion (Songer) duly and seconded (Parker) the minutes of the January 18, 2023 Faculty Assembly Meeting were approved as written.

3. Items of New Business.

None

4. Report of the Senate President, Robin Kear (submitted in written form)

I hope your spring break week was more relaxing than mine...it was fairly busy.

Leadership Changes

- I have no update on the search for a Chancellor, as you know that is a closed process.
- Provost Anne Cudd has accepted a position to be the next President of Portland State University. We thank her for her service to Pitt and wish her well in this next opportunity. I have not received any information on the search process or any possible interim steps.

Access to free exercise facilities at Trees Hall and Bellefield Hall

- After discussion by the CUPS and Benefits committee, there was a question of whether the exercise facilities and pools at Bellefield and Trees Halls would remain open and free for use for faculty and staff after the new wellness and rec center is finished. After working with Linda Tashbook, Chair of Benefits & Welfare, David Salcido, Co-Chair of CUPS, and Dave DeJong, SVC for Business and Operations, I am happy to say that yes, these exercise facilities will remain open and free for faculty and staff for the indefinite future.

University Policy Open for Comment

- There are currently no policies open for public comment.

Vaccination and Immunization Policy Update

- Updated at last Senate Council but wanted to also mention here. The draft policy is now on pause. The policy committee had completed a draft, it had been open for public comment, and Senate Benefits & Welfare Committee had endorsed it. It had been waiting for Faculty Affairs Committee review.
- Due to the uncertainty in the federal environment and medical advice regarding COVID vaccinations University leadership has decided to pause this policy so that it can incorporate the stabilized positions into the policy, hopefully in late spring or early summer.
- I am hopeful that this work continues because not only does this work help to protect campus, the Policy also streamlined student vaccination requirements and other vaccine requirements for certain kinds of work in labs.

Network Policy

- The revised Network Policy was passed at last month's Faculty Assembly, with one change. There has been continued discussion of that suggestion regarding private networks. The Network Policy will likely come back to us in April for further discussion.

ELI Update

- Discussions did continue between the university, the union, and ELI faculty last week. At the Department of Linguistics meeting today, chair Scott Kiesling shared that Pitt will permit the English Language Institute (ELI) to remain open through June 30, 2024.
- Details are still being worked out.
- The ELI thanks Provost Cudd and the University for the extension and reiterates its thanks to all who have expressed support.

Union Relations

- The Union's Council of Representatives has voted to create a standing committee to facilitate senate-union communication. We are meeting for the first-time next Tuesday. I look forward to this continued communication.
- Observer status to a negotiating session is not something that I was aware of until recently. I suspect many of you in the bargaining unit might also be unaware of this possibility. The way the union and admin have chosen to negotiate is through a closed process. However, either side can have observers. These can vary in number and are decided by each side for themselves.
- I indicated my interest to be an observer to my area's communication and action team, and it was approved by the bargaining committee. Thank you to the bargaining committee for permitting me to take a peek into the negotiation process. I attended a short observer orientation with Robin Sowards of USW where he shared the ground

rules and what to expect. I was permitted to observe the joint sessions, but not the union caucusing, this is where they hold discussion on what has been presented or prepare responses. I was invited to one bargaining session March 9th on Zoom.

- The ground rules do not permit me to share the content of what was discussed on the day I attended, but I can share my views on the process.
- I can see how progress towards a full first agreement is maddeningly incremental. I commend the bargaining committee's commitment and effort; they must keep sight of all of their goals through the minutia. More meetings would help, quicker decision making would help. However, as part of the process, either side can bring any article back to the table at any time until compromise or consensus is reached on it, and it becomes a tentative article. Each side can call a caucus at any time, where they consult among themselves. I think you can imagine the time involved.
- Because this progress is slow, observing did solidify my belief that more direct information should be shared by both sides, to further the goal of transparency, including the text of proposals. An article checklist on exactly how many articles there are and their titles would be helpful. The text of tentative articles would also be helpful to get bargaining member feedback as slow negotiation is ongoing. A summary does not provide the same opportunity for feedback. Tentative articles can still be modified up until the final contract is ready for a vote. My worry is that a final contract of all the articles will be presented all at once and by that time it is too late to change anything, and it is a straight up or down vote.
- It is my understanding that any bargaining member can ask to be an observer and if you are interested, I would encourage any of our Assembly members to do so.

Senate Plenary

- The Senate Plenary will be in-person on Tuesday April 4th from noon to 2:00 pm in the William Pitt Union Assembly Room. The Plenary is open to the entire Pitt community and includes lunch. A read green will be in your inbox by the end of the week. It will be livestreamed, and a recording will be available for viewing.
- The topic for this year's plenary will be 'Unsettled: Frames for Examining Generative Artificial Intelligence'.
- Large language models and generative artificial intelligence have growing potential to change many aspects of our lives in higher education, including how we interact with information, teaching, and research. The late 2022 pop culture splash of ChatGPT awakened many of us to the existing permeation of these kinds of AI into our lives and jolted us to the exciting and unsettling aspects of this AI for our future. How do we take a step back and do what we do best? We examine the impact through our disciplinary expertise and experience, and then we imagine and influence the future. This year's Senate Plenary brings together seven Pitt experts in wide-ranging areas - philosophy of

science, art, engineering, computing & information, language, english, and law - to present and discuss what comes next.

- The speakers will be:
 - **Colin Allen, Philosophy of Science, Distinguished Professor**
 - **Morgan Frank, SCI, Assistant Professor**
 - **Na-Rae Han, Linguistics, Teaching Professor**
 - **Alison Langmead, History of Art & Architecture**
 - **Michael Madison, Law, Professor of Law and John E. Murray Faculty Scholar**
 - **Annette Vee, English, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Composition Program**
 - **Joseph Yun, Electrical and Computer Engineering**
 - **Novel data science algorithms, user-centric analytics systems, and societal considerations of AI-based advertising and marketing (e.g., privacy, ethics)**
- Please share the information about the plenary with your areas.

Upcoming Speakers at Pitt

- I will admit to you that I am struggling with this one. I will share my thinking with you.
- Currently, there are three upcoming events at Pitt related to views on the transgender community that I think are extremely problematic, at best. My personal opinion is that the positions are appalling and hurtful. The type of views in the descriptions of the events are not values and positions that I hold. There are many in our community that are upset, and I can understand their outrage and concern.
- And yet...
- We must keep in mind that there are students at this university that invited these speakers, these are registered student organizations that sponsored the events, and they wish to hear from these speakers. I have spent time reviewing the Registered Student Organization Handbook. Student organizations must have at least 10 currently enrolled students. They must have a full-time faculty or staff member as an advisor. They must submit event and speaker contracts with signatures, including advisor, three weeks prior to events. Keep in mind that if any of these conditions are not met, events won't be able to happen.
 - One of the events includes a distinguished professor, Deirdre McCloskey, who is publicly transgender.
 - I pose these questions to you. Would you want this administration or any other academic administration telling you that you could not invite a speaker to an event you were planning? Or that you could not hold that event when you were following all established protocols?
- We are an educational institution; our mission is to educate all of our students. This moment is another lesson. How is our Pitt community responding and giving that lesson? By expressing their views, signing petitions, stating their values, planning

counter speech, planning counter events, celebrating our community, and upholding the inclusion goals for all. All of our community members have a right to do this. I am heartened by the outpouring of support.

- Another question: Should we be reacting by limiting the free speech and free inquiry of some of our students? It is extremely difficult to not want to do so when part of our community feels devalued and debased by another part of the community and when some think that the free speech becomes hate speech and that they are not being protected.

The political reality of outside group influence on these events muddles this educational proposition. These groups want our larger community to be intolerant, to cancel events, Thank you.

Kanthak: I wanted to add to the points that you made. One of the things that has come out is that the planning of these events is a stress test on our community, and I feel that we have failed. A lot of us who want members of our community to feel safe, included and supported realize that they do not feel that way and I think it is important for us to look at this. I want to highlight that the media description and social media discussion of these events have highlighted only 3 of the participants. These news articles in various papers did not mention Deidre McCloskey who is part of this event and how she is a distinguished professor of economics and an out trans woman. This is evidence that we are not doing well as a community. This is trans-erasure and this is not OK. It is important because it changes how we think about these issues. As a cis-woman it is not my place to tell Deidre McCloskey how she ought to do her advocacy for trans rights, which she has been doing since the mid 1990s. I do think it is my place to call trans-erasure when I see it, and this is what I am doing here. I also encourage you to read Deidre McCloskey's work, as she has been an inspiration to me. She is a brilliant economist and her critique of academia being overly masculine is worth reading.

Tashbook: My comments are about the availability of free recreational centers to faculty and staff. Two things: I want to acknowledge that Staff Council has also done very good advocacy on this issue. Some people need these facilities when they are going through rehabilitation following an injury and these are things we had in mind when we advocated for this.

Bonneau: I would like to read a tweet. "A thousand people have signed a petition against Michael Knowles "debating" me on transgender matters on April 18 at Pittsburgh. They should be ashamed. True, Knowles is an anti-Jesus Catholic, a fascist advocating state power over ideas. But we live in a free country". This tweet was written by Deidre McCloskey. I think there is some wisdom in her position.

Epitropoulos: I wanted to recognize the role of the Senate Athletics and Recreation committee

in also looking at maintaining accessibility to recreational facilities. A whole meeting was dedicated to this topic to get the word out that faculty and staff accessibility to these facilities is important.

Keown: I would like to read something into the minutes. According to Human Rights Campaign at least 34 transgender and gender non-conforming people were killed in the past year. The uptick in hateful rhetoric and misinformation about transgender and gender non-conforming people has also led to an almost 200% increase in hate crimes against those individuals. I am extremely uncomfortable with framing something as a debate when we have practical information that those words can translate into real world violence and real-world harm for our community. I am deeply concerned about how we, as a community, protect those vulnerable students if we are saying that this kind of speech is not hate speech on our campus.

Kear: Thank you – this is why I struggle with this. I know that this language can cause real pain. I did not go into legal definitions of hate speech. It is unclear what would constitute cancelling an event due to incitement to violence. You are right that these ideas can spread hate in other ways, that may not meet the legal definition, and that is why I am struggling.

Songer: We are educational institution and many of our students are not sure how to deal with all of this. They are young and forming their minds. This is a growth process for us as a university community but especially for our students who are developing how they move forward with their lives. By shutting off any conversation does not allow them to develop and become informed.

Kear: It is very real for students that are hurt by this. I know that there are counter events planned that are to these events. A positive response is a good thing. Some groups just want to inflame it.

Kanthak: Universities are many things. For many of us they are homes and communities. They are also places where bad ideas go to die. To be both of things is a challenge. To me this is call to action. Students are not feeling safe on our campus whether these go forward or are canceled, and we need to create an environment where no pitcher can show up and say anything that may affect how safe the people in our community feel.

Parker: It is important to think about the different ways that members of our community feel feel safe or unsafe. It is important to draw a distinction between physical safety or safety to have a discussion. I am aware that there are student faculty staff are concerned about their physical safety on campus. This is not unfounded.

Second – It is true that universities are places where bad ideas go to die and they are not places where people go to risk their lives, so we need to make safety a priority.

Third: There is a possibility that there is a false status being given to the ideas being put forward here. A difference between ideology and identity. The concern here is that the existence of, and the right to exist, of people is being called into question and that seems to be an issue of different order from some of the debates that we have had and tolerated in the past. So, I feel that there is a difference here in magnitude, as outlined in my first two points and a difference of kind and I think we need to consider that in our discussions here and elsewhere.

Kear: We are monitoring this and if you want to send me concerns, please contact me.

5. Reports by and Announcements of the Special and Standing Committees of the Senate

Shephard: On behalf of the Library committee, we are announcing that we were awarded funding for a proposal to have a “Journaling for Emotional Well-Being” workshop. There will be three sessions, one in March, one in April and the third in May. The first session will be on March 22nd and you can find details on the University events calendar.

6. Unfinished Business and /or New Business

None

7. Announcements

None

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:42 pm.

Documents from the meeting are available at the University Senate website:

<http://www.univsenate.pitt.edu/faculty-assembly>

Respectfully submitted,

Penelope (Penny) Morel

Secretary, University Senate

Members attending: Balaban, Bell, Bircher, Bonneau, Buchanich, Burton, Conley, Cousins, Epitropulos, Fort, Glynn, Guterman, Jacobs, Jones, Kanthak, Kear, Keown, Kohanbash, Labrinidis, Lemery, Maier,

Mauk, McCormick, Melnick, Molinaro, Morel, Morris, Nguyen, Paljug, Parker, Paterson, Pitetti, Potoski, Reed, Shafiq, Shephard, Songer, Streeter, Swigonova, Tashbook, Tudorascu, G. Wood, Zack

Members not attending: Almarza, Archibald, Bench, Bratman, Cutsumbis, Dallal, Damiani, Denman, Lewin, Mahboobin, I. Murazashvili, J. Murtazashvili, Oyler, Salcido, Sant, Schmidt, Schuster, Scott, Stoner, Tokowicz, Triplette, Wert, K. Wood, Yates, Yearwood

*Excused attendance: Kovacs, Massanelli, Pacella-LaBarbara, Taboas

Others attending: Dean, DeVallejo, Finder, Graham, Hart, Houser, Johnson, Jones, Keating, Manges, SantaCasa, Tuttle, Wells, Wilson, Wisniewski

*Notified Senate Office