

# FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 November 2023  
4:00 p.m. – Via Zoom

## ACTION MINUTES

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Julia Albarracin, Chair; Everett Hamner, Vice Chair; Denise Gravitt, Secretary

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mark Mossman, Interim Provost; Jeremy Robinett, Parliamentarian; Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager

**GUESTS:** Heidi Elbe, Rich Filipink, Dave Hunter, Sarah Lawson, Katherine Perone

Senator Hamner led the meeting since Chair Albarracin was in Washington, D.C. with a group of students to learn about immigration policies and advocacy, meet with legislators, and attend a rally. [Chair Albarracin was able to attend part of the meeting briefly.] Senator Hamner welcomed Interim Provost Mark Mossman to the meeting and congratulated him on his new position.

### 1. *Update on returning to in-person Faculty Senate meetings in spring*

Parliamentarian Robinett reported that 16 senators have indicated they can regularly meet face-to-face in Spring 2024, which will be sufficient to meet quorum. Senators based on the Quad Cities campus will be able to join the meeting remotely, but only senators attending in person are counted toward quorum, according to the Illinois Open Meetings Act. Three senators travel regularly for their jobs and will plan to attend meetings in person when not traveling. Parliamentarian Robinett stated the remaining senators have requested not to be required to meet in person for legitimate reasons which should be able to be accommodated. He will send out a Google form to senators the Sunday before each meeting to determine attendance and asked senators to contact him or Ms. Hamm if they find out after completing the form that they cannot attend the meeting in person.

### 2. *Continued discussion of removal of gender question from President evaluation survey for 2023-24*

Senator Hamner serves as the Executive Committee representative to the Committee on Provost and Presidential Performance (CPPP), chaired by Senator Hunter. CPPP members were invited to the Executive Committee meeting to continue the discussion of inclusion of the gender question which was begun at the previous ExCo meeting; Senators Hunter, Perone, and Elbe were able to attend. Senator Hamner read a statement from Chair Albarracin outlining her position on this question: “Right now, the gender question seems unnecessary, but it may render helpful information in the future if the leadership seems to have a gender bias. As a social scientist, I believe that more information is always better; however, I understand that getting more demographic information makes respondents identifiable.” Senator Hamner spoke with Chair Albarracin before today’s meeting and related that the two agree that it would be wiser to add demographic data information to the survey rather than to remove it. He and Chair Albarracin agree that questions about race and ethnicity are particularly important.

Senator Hamner thinks ExCo and CPPP need to establish and agree that respondents’ anonymity will be protected. He thinks on this subject the groups are on solid ground as long as CPPP is the only entity with access to the raw data and promises that it will not leave the committee. He thinks that if the committee can establish the trust of respondents, it makes sense to seek demographic information from them. Senator Hamner noted that feedback from the administrators indicates the most valuable part of the survey to them is the open-ended comments, particularly given the relatively low response rate. He thinks the hard data is of somewhat limited value because it comes from a self-selected group rather than a randomly selected sample.

Senator Hunter recently completed the Social Behavioral Research Course which is required prior to conducting research at WIU, which he said frequently addresses the need to equalize the cost benefit with the harm benefit. Senator Hunter remarked that if CPPP is not doing anything with the data, then it is collecting data which could harm someone and has no real benefit. He understands Chair Albarracin’s statement regarding gender bias but thinks this could be handled in other ways than this simple survey. Senator Hunter also stressed that if the gender question is retained, it needs to be more inclusive than its current choices of

male/female/other. Senator Hamner expressed his agreement and admitted he also questions whether anything will be done with the data collected. He wonders whether it would lead CPPP to see patterns where statistically significant differences exist in a particular group's responses.

Interim Provost Mossman can see both sides of the question but tends to agree that more demographic data will be helpful and beneficial and may lead to certain decisions. He agrees that the gender question should be fleshed out so that it is not built on outdated demographic categories, a change that in itself would be a suggestion toward inclusion. He added that the question of using the data is not a policy question but a practice question as part of shared governance. He thinks more inclusion would be better but understands that it is complicated.

Senator Hamner related that his opinion when this was discussed at CCCP was that the gender question either needs to be removed or improved because it seems strange to just ask about gender alone and not in a sufficiently rich manner. Senator Gravitt thinks the additional demographic information could be useful if it is needed, but once it is determined it is needed you cannot go back and collect it after the fact. She took the same training as Senator Hunter and related it stressed consent, anonymity, and data storage. She thinks it is important that respondents can skip questions; Senator Hamner related that Ms. Hamm confirmed that all questions in the survey are skippable. Senator Gravitt thinks this would allay some faculty's concerns about being identified but also makes the results less statistically valid if they are used; however, it would provide a starting point for comparison.

Senator Perone said she echoes Senator Hunter's statement about the gender question and finds the Other category offensive. She thinks this question should be improved but does not have a strong opinion how this is done. She agrees it would be nice to have the additional demographic data but is not sure what the purpose is of collecting it. Senator Gravitt thinks the purpose would be if specific groups are shown to be having more issues than other groups in certain areas; for instance, if women or a certain population group are feeling discriminated against in specific areas, that might show up in this survey and begin to be addressed by reaching out to the group. Senator Hamner related that he and Chair Albarracin talked about looking into what categories the US Census or other universities use for identity characteristics; he added that the University of Pennsylvania's website is particularly helpful.

Senator Elbe remarked she would tend toward removing the gender question, but if the decision is made to retain, it should be updated. She can see how the additional data might be helpful to correlate what is occurring among groups and see what could be done to resolve their issues. Senator Hamner believes that everyone involved is cautious about how the data could be weaponized unfairly but recognizes that it could also illuminate different patterns. He thinks that since the survey data comes from a self-selected respondent pool and not a lot of responses are received, it may be data that will not be as helpful in proving something as in hypothesizing that a group has certain feelings about something.

Senator Hunter suggested that the introductory text dealing with the confidentiality of the survey be reworded; currently it just says "This confidential, secure survey is being used to provide eligible faculty members opportunities for providing input regarding the performance of President Guiyou Huang." He thinks CPPP should explain how the data will be collected and stress that confidentiality will be maintained. Senator Hamner agrees this is critical. Senator Hunter thinks this will result in more trust when collecting demographic information. Senator Hamner asked if the raw data collected through Qualtrics can be retained through the group; both Senator Hunter and Parliamentarian Robinett responded affirmatively. Senator Hamner thinks this is critical to establish if CPPP is to receive helpful feedback.

Senator Hamner summarized that he is hearing support for improving the gender question and adding demographic information. He noted that there are a number of demographic questions that would possibly be of interest, but reiterated that he and Chair Albarracin think it is particularly important to collect data about race and ethnicity. He asked what everyone thought about developing those questions in a way that is much more inclusive and gives all respondents more options to choose from, including multiple options or abstaining completely.

Parliamentarian Robinett remarked that when an online education survey was conducted for CITR/ODES as part of its strategic planning process, many of the responses to the demographic questions being discussed

were not statistically meaningful, but one question that did result in meaningful data was rank. He noted that responses to the rank question were more indicative of differences, and when talking about faculty engaging with the President or Provost, rank will play a role when looking at who is doing what across campus. Parliamentarian Robinett added that, as a faculty member who looks at a lot of data for this institution, that is one question he thinks would lend more results. Senator Hamner noted that the previous survey asked questions about Unit A/Unit B, years of service, and unit, but none specifically on rank. He asked if that is needed beyond the question of Unit A/Unit B. Parliamentarian Robinett thinks some delineation of that would be helpful. He added that one could almost draw the years of service data from the responses to the rank question. He thinks that a discussion for next year might be to consider what meaningful demographics are needed to understand the relation of the various groups in working with the President and Provost.

Senator Hamner asked what others think about fleshing out the Unit A/B question to add a rank question. Senator Hunter responded that if Parliamentarian Robinett thinks this question has resulted in significant data CPPP should go ahead and include it this year because, for example, it would be interesting if a majority of professors were responding one way to a question and other ranks responding differently. Interim Provost Mossman thinks the question of rank is important because, for instance, female faculty members at WIU are more likely than males to get stuck at the associate professor rank, so that might affect their relationship with the President and Provost.

Senator Hamner summarized that the consensus supports improving the gender question, adding an ethnicity question with much inclusivity, fleshing out the Unit A/B question to one that includes rank, and adding an introductory statement that the data stays with CPPP and people can trust that process while also giving them the opportunity not to answer any questions they wish to skip. If CPPP can complete these changes in time, the surveys will go forward to Faculty Senate for the November 28 meeting under Reports of Committees and Councils. Since Dr. Zoghi is no longer Provost and Interim Provost Mossman recently was appointed to that position, CPPP will only administer a survey of President Huang this year.

### 3. *Report from CAGAS on admissions and retention*

CAGAS Chair Rich Filipink presented the Executive Committee with a report in response to questions submitted to the council earlier this semester. After a discussion with Trustee Polly Radosh in May and a subsequent discussion with Dr. Filipink in early fall, ExCo asked CAGAS to provide them with 1) persistence rates broken down by starting GPA, 2) GPA of admitted students by race, 3a) persistence rates by gender, 3b) persistence rates by race, and 4) reasons students drop out. CAGAS worked closely with Institutional Research and Planning and the Office of Retention Initiatives to obtain the data, which was provided in full to the Executive Committee.

Dr. Filipink noted that it is no surprise that the highest retention rates correlate with those students with the highest high school GPAs, but there is also a small spike among Reach students with high school GPAs of 2.4 to 2.6. He foresees that a future problem will be post-Covid grade inflation which will make GPA rates less predictive over time unless this is remedied at the high school level. Dr. Filipink observed that the GPA for all students regardless of race remained around the 3.4 range from 2019-2023. Overall, female WIU students have a higher graduation rate. Retention falls for all groups after year 3; pre-Covid, Hispanic student retention up to year 3 steadily increased and still remains above 50 percent post-Covid. Dr. Filipink thinks those gains could be recaptured with a little investment from the university. He also noted that the data supports that the Reach program clearly benefits WIU students and should be supported. Dr. Filipink stated that WIU is the second highest ranked public institution in Illinois in the category of improving the economic standards of its graduates, but this statement will be stronger if more students complete their degrees. He noted that information about why students drop out is available primarily for those who leave early in their college careers but is not as readily available for those students who leave after completing, for example, 100 hours, and WIU needs to find out why these students are not finishing.

Chair Albarracin remarked that when Trustee Radosh visited with ExCo during the summer break, she had asked for a cost-benefit analysis of money spent on students below a certain GPA threshold, but Chair Albarracin was not comfortable with this language. She said Trustee Radosh had proposed the idea of raising the GPA for admission, but Chair Albarracin thinks this will hurt students of color, which she believes the CAGAS data also show. Dr. Filipink stated that this type of change would also hurt any student who comes from a high school without significant grade inflation because at some high schools a 3.0 is a

3.0 while at other schools a 3.8 is a 3.0. He thinks it would also hurt students at schools that actually maintain rigorous academic standards. Interim Provost Mossman remarked that one reason the charge was requested was the impression that the Reach program was not working, but he thinks the data shows that the program is effective. He believes that funding first-year programs and determining what happens to students in year 3 is where the work needs to be done toward an institution-wide effort to improve graduation rates. Dr. Filipink agrees that the Reach program is effective within the size of the program, the money that can be spent on it, and the number of academic success coaches available to help with the program. He thinks the university has the ability to buttress itself by not writing off students who may have gotten a 2.5 in high school because admitting more students with 3.5 GPAs does not guarantee higher graduation rates. Interim Provost Mossman clarified that the university has two academic success coaches, but they work with sophomore students. He agrees that more are needed.

Dr. Filipink noted that the data shows that WIU has been doing a decent job expanding the enrollment of Hispanic students and helping them persist to their degree, but not as good a job with black students, especially black males. He added the data does not show whether this is a recruiting issue, a result of the way WIU has presented itself over the past five years, or part of what happens once students get to campus, but it is clear the university needs to improve in this area. Senator Hamner remarked that it might be good to look at the ratios of Hispanic and black faculty members because it matters a lot for students to have models. He thinks one result of this data is that the university would do well to take every opportunity to expand this population of faculty.

Parliamentarian Robinett thinks that the university needs to more closely explore the cohort effect and whether first-year students, who often have similar schedules, are failing together. Interim Provost Mossman stated that last spring a group composed of first-year advisors, representatives from the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's office, Provost's office representatives, the Director of Writing, and others looked at all first-year schedules. The group is developing an initiative to retain first-year students, part of which involves how to amplify the sense of a cohort, perhaps with mini learning communities and a team effort on the part of instructors of the courses that all first-year students take, such as Math and English. Senator Hamner noted that the Quad Cities campus does have some cohorts in place, particularly with Engineering students, where an effort is made to align their Tuesday/Thursday schedules, and this may be able to be used as a test or a model program. Dr. Filipink noted that the easiest time to develop a cohort is when students are freshmen because that is the time that a university has the most control over what classes students take; after that point, students will take what classes they want, when they want or are able to take them, despite ideal degree plans.

Dr. Filipink will review the CAGAS report with senators during Reports from Committees and Councils at the November 28 meeting. The report includes CAGAS's recommendations for next steps. Senators will be provided with all the raw data with the exception of the reasons that students drop out of WIU since this is confidential and could lead to identification of student respondents or professors they may have mentioned in their responses.

4. *Need for increased communication from administration to faculty regarding administrative changes*

Senator Hamner read an emailed statement from Chair Albarracin in which she related that she told President Huang there needs to be greater communication from the administration to the faculty to address anxiety after former Provost Zoghi announced faculty reassignments followed by the recent provost change. She asked that this be communicated to Interim Provost Mossman as well. Interim Provost Mossman agrees that everyone at the university needs to communicate better, and he has some ideas to facilitate this. He does not want people to find out things at a board meeting, for example, and thinks that communication needs to be improved top to bottom, right to left, across the institution, and he is firmly committed to that.

5. The Executive Committee finalized the agenda for the Faculty Senate meeting of November 28, and the ExCo meeting adjourned at 5:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager  
and Recording Secretary