

# FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

## SPECIAL MEETING

Tuesday, 16 May 2023  
4:00 p.m. – Via Zoom

## ACTION MINUTES

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bill Thompson, Chair; Yong Tang, Vice Chair; Julia Albarracin, Secretary

**ALSO PRESENT:** Manoochehr Zoghi, Provost; Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager

**ABSENT:** Craig Whetten, Parliamentarian

**GUESTS:** Trustee Polly Radosh; CAGAS Chair Julie Cox; Associate Provost Mark Mossman; Registrar Sarah Lawson; Admissions Director Doug Freed; Vice President for Enrollment Management Amber Evans

The Executive Committee convened a special meeting to hear concerns about students admitted at the lower end of the GPA scale expressed in an email from Trustees Kisha Lang and Polly Radosh. Chair Thompson stated that in order to further this process with additional clarity, the various stakeholders involved were invited to attend and speak. Trustee Lang was unable to attend, but he invited Trustee Radosh to share her concerns.

Trustee Radosh stressed the job of the Board of Trustees is not management; it is oversight. She said trustees read a lot of reports and have had a number of individuals that have related stories about completely unprepared students who are not engaged in the life of the university in any way and spend their entire days in their residence halls. She stated that WIU has lowered its standards in order to admit students, and Trustees Radosh and Lang would like to know 1) how low standards have been lowered, 2) how many students are being admitted under the lowered standards (i.e., are there 1% admitted with a 2.75 or lower GPA? is there a quota of 40?), 3) how serious this problem is, 4) and whether CAGAS has determined the lowest possible point at which this situation is counterproductive.

Vice President for Enrollment Management Amber Evans explained that as most institutions transitioned to test-optional admits during the pandemic, WIU also made this change, which meant that admission decisions were based solely on GPA. The regular and REACH admissions criteria were modified during that process to coincide with just using GPA. Vice President Evans said that when she arrived at WIU, she felt that this was not a strong enough predictor of college success. She recommended, based on the literature and best practices at other campuses, that the university adopt a process used with success by Northern Illinois University and elsewhere. She related that the decision was made to modify the conditional admissions program to incorporate William Sedlacek's research on non-cognitive variables as opposed to using the previous REACH admissions process. She recalled that Admissions Director Doug Freed presented the transition to the non-cognitive variables process to CAGAS, who approved the change because of the research it is based upon.

Vice President Evans explained that there is a workflow associated with the non-cognitive variables process that was presented to CAGAS at that time. She stated that students who enter with a 3.0 GPA or better are automatically admitted to the university, while students with GPAs of 2.75 to 2.99 are automatically admitted to the REACH program. Vice President Evans noted that in the past this group of students would have been automatically admitted rather than admitted to REACH, which led to some of the retention issues being seen right now since those students who need wraparound services are not getting them. She stressed that the changes will impact students entering WIU in Fall 2023 and not the students who were admitted previously. Vice President Evans said that students entering with GPAs of 2.0 to 2.74 are placed under review, which includes answering non-cognitive variables essay questions which are scored based on the literature, and admission decisions are based on this score. Finally, all students applying to the university who have a 2.0 GPA or lower are automatically denied.

Vice President Evans said this is the first year Admissions has implemented the non-cognitive variables process. Those students in the 2.0-2.74 bucket who score well enough on the non-cognitive variables essay test will be admitted to the REACH program beginning this fall. Vice President Evans said that students scoring in the mid-range on this test would normally be reviewed by an associate director, but since that position is currently vacant

she is performing this review. Students scoring below the mid-range on the test are denied even if their GPA would previously have allowed them to be admitted.

Vice President Evans said that WIU is in a unique situation because the university was yielding more students in the lower GPA bucket than what has occurred at other institutions and what is occurring in the literature. She said WIU students with 2.0-2.24 GPAs responded to the non-cognitive variables test at a very high rate; she suspects other institutions must have either changed their criteria or not have given these students a chance. She stated that when Enrollment Management and Admissions realized this, they had to switch gears because WIU currently does not have sufficient services to support a large number of these low academic profile students. In March, Vice President Evans made the decision to change the lowest GPA allowed for review to 2.25 rather than 2.0, and students below a 2.25 were automatically denied based on the large number of students already admitted in this GPA bucket. This change (from a basement of 2.24 rather than 2.0) has not yet been reviewed or approved by CAGAS or Faculty Senate, but Vice President Evans stated that sometimes admissions decisions must be made quickly, and based on conversations she had with CAGAS members she did not anticipate opposition to shifting this number up. Vice President Evans stated that the university will see a higher percentage of students admitted with 2.0-2.75 GPAs this coming fall than have been seen in past years, but this does not represent a change in the admissions criteria but rather a change in the number of students who actually followed through with the process.

Trustee Radosh asked if CAGAS approved all of these changes. Vice President Evans responded that CAGAS approved the original 2.0 GPA basement and the 2.0-2.74 review process. Associate Provost Mossman confirmed that CAGAS approved the changes; the issue is the unexpected increase in the lower performing student enrollments. He agrees that WIU is in an attendance crisis; this used to be a chronic problem, but now it is an acute problem, and it is directly tied to student success. He stated that over half of freshmen during their first semester last year received at least one failing grade, and this is not unique among institutions; even the University of Michigan has seen this same set of issues. He thinks all FYE faculty members fear this situation will be even worse this fall. Associate Provost Mossman thinks that CAGAS, the Council on General Education, and other committees of the Faculty Senate need to investigate this problem because there needs to be an institution-wide commitment. He noted that efforts are being made to move in this direction, and money and resources have been devoted to the first four days of the semester, but this is a wave that the university must handle. Associate Provost Mossman likes the idea of charging a subcommittee to tackle this institution-wide problem.

Trustee Radosh asked how much enrollment of students with 2.0-2.24 GPAs has increased. Vice President Evans responded it is unknown yet what the fall yield will be. She showed attendees a document comparing admits by GPA bucket over time. She stated that currently there are 98 admits coming in with a 2.0-2.24; last year there were 34 admitted in this range, and 55 percent of those 34 yielded enrollments. Vice President Evans does not think 55 percent of the 98 admitted for this fall will yield, but even 20 percent would be slightly more than the 19 who enrolled last year and the 11 students who enrolled the year prior; the year before that there were only three. She stated that the exponential increase in the number of students with this GPA range is pushing WIU's resources, which is why the decision was made to discontinue admitting students in this range.

Chair Thompson remarked that this group of students by themselves do not account for the lack of retention, lack of attendance, students not turning in work, and disengagement. He thinks the retention crisis is being driven by a lack of what *The New York Times* has called "willingness to learn." Associate Provost Mossman stated that in 2018, pre-Covid, WIU students had four or more measurable engagements and an average GPA of 3.02, while in Fall 2022 they still had four or more engagements, but the average GPA was 2.6. He thinks today's students clearly show content loss from the pandemic and a shift in learning. He noted that doing the same work that was done five years ago is not yielding the same retention numbers, and students are not performing as well. He believes everyone needs to focus on turning this into a priority for the institution because it is a nationwide problem that will take awhile to solve.

Senator Albarracin said she is concerned about students in the 2.0-2.74 range because they were not automatically put into REACH last year and will lack that support. Vice President Evans reported that prior to her arrival at WIU, REACH automatically admitted students entering with 2.75-3.0 GPAs, but for some reason this was changed during the pandemic, and for a year or two these students were automatically admitted into the general population. When she arrived at WIU, the previous rule of admitting these students to REACH was

reinstated. She worries about this population of students, too, because they would have benefitted from the wraparound services received through the REACH program and would be retained better with this help. She noted that it is difficult to retain students on the lower end of the academic profile, even with a great deal of help.

Trustee Radosh asked what the percentage refers in the statement that students in the 2.0-2.24 range yielded at 55.8 percent in Fall 2022. Vice President Evans responded it is the yield of admitted to enrolled students. She noted that the yields and resulting numbers have been increasing in this group. Trustee Radosh asked what percentage of enrolled students admitted as freshmen last year had a GPA below 3.0. Vice President Evans responded it was 29 percent. Trustee Radosh asked if it is expected that this percentage will be higher this year. Vice President Evans responded that there are goals and campaigns in place to try to increase the yield of students with GPAs of 3.0 and above, so it depends on how successful those are, but there is the potential to have more this coming year. Trustee Radosh asked if CAGAS and Faculty Senate are worried about such a high percentage of the freshman class entering the university with GPAs below 3.0. Chair Thompson admitted he is worried. Vice President Evans related she meets with Provost Zoghi, Associate Provost Mossman, and Executive Director of Retention Initiatives Justin Schuch nearly every week to try to assure that the university is ready to provide services for this group of students.

Trustee Radosh remarked that it seems the tuition dollars the university will receive will all be spent on these services. She asked if CAGAS could consider raising the bottom level for admits to 2.5 or 2.75 and completely forget the 2.0 basement. Vice President Evans responded the bottom level was already moved up to 2.25. Trustee Radosh observed that 2.25 is barely above 2.0 and asked if it would be possible to move the bottom level back up to where it was formerly. Vice President Evans responded that Enrollment Management is currently working with a consultant to figure out how the university can maximize institutional aid spent, increase student retention, and still achieve some headcount goals. She said extensive conversations have occurred over several months about where the institution's priority should be: headcount, long-term student success, or fiscal sustainability, because those three are competing issues. She stated that so far to date, headcount has been the primary concern, but when the only concern is headcount these types of issues will occur. She realizes that the university needs to find a way to balance these three priorities. Vice President Evans predicted that raising the bottom level for admits to 2.5 will definitely lead to headcount decreasing because WIU does not have the institutional aid dollars to compete with other institutions recruiting those same students. She added that the landscape is too competitive for WIU unless more money is invested in marketing and institutional aid, and that is not an option for WIU which is actually trying to keep the cost of institutional aid down.

Trustee Radosh asked if someone could provide the Board of Trustees with a summary of what WIU receives in tuition dollars after the discount, taking into account the amount paid for services and extra personnel for students who are not equipped to be at WIU. She does not think this can be very much because it must be very expensive to run programs to salvage students who are not prepared. Chair Thompson remarked that WIU has not hired any new academic coaches and has not increased the number of advisors, so Trustee Radosh might be imagining more services to address this situation than there actually are. Trustee Radosh asked if this means that these students come to WIU to fail. Chair Thompson responded that UPI has been pushing for hiring more academic coaches and advisors. Trustee Radosh said Board members are hearing anecdotally about students who are unprepared for college and might be better served in another venue until they are better prepared, and that these students might be driving away students that transfer elsewhere because the culture at WIU has become so negative.

Vice President Evans related that she recently attended a meeting of enrollment management officers at Illinois public institutions and, as Associate Provost Mossman noted, everyone is working with populations of students that are less prepared for college, may be less mature, have some learning loss issues, and are often struggling socially, mentally, and academically. She believes the university needs to work on improving its value proposition, reputation, and marketing so that the right students choose WIU, but the institution has not invested enough to beat out its competition from Illinois State. Vice President Evans believes there are ways that the university can meet students where they are and will need to do so because students are coming to WIU, and other institutions, with a lower profile. She stated that UIUC is saying the same thing, and they can pick who they want to admit, so WIU is not unique in this. She added that if WIU says it will not admit these students, it will lose its market share to another campus. Trustee Radosh remarked that maybe WIU would have a more wholesome institution if it were to let more students go and lose that market share. Vice President Evans reiterated that in March she made the decision to eliminate the lowest bucket, which she anticipates will stay

permanent as it is brought to CAGAS in the fall, but this will affect Fall 2024 admissions, not the coming year. She said that to continue to increase the lowest GPA limit the university will admit means serious headcount challenges and the need to invest in some other areas with money the university currently does not have.

Chair Thompson remarked that a 3.0 GPA today is not the 3.0 it once was; there are students who seem like they are prepared but really are not. He thinks the attendance issue, for example, occurs across all GPAs, as well as the issue of not turning in work and not seeming to care. Associate Provost Mossman thinks WIU is walking on a tight rope and that there needs to be a clearer vision of what the university's academic profile should be. He thinks there are a lot of barriers to get to that point, and a number of these barriers cross GPA lines. Associate Provost Mossman remarked that most faculty have strict attendance policies, but it does not seem to matter to students. He thinks it is important to figure out how to engage these students, but it is a very complicated problem, and he is not sure that sculpting classes in a different way or raising the bottom GPA for admission will really create a different culture.

Senator Albarracin remarked that these students whose GPAs are being looked at so closely have years of remote learning under their belts, which brings a set of other problems. She thinks that until the pandemic generation graduates out, it will be difficult to define the standards. She would recommend giving this some time and assessing in three years where the university is at and what its market share is at that time. Senator Albarracin noted that WIU enrolls about 12-15 percent of students with GPAs of 3.7 or above, but a lot more students enroll whose GPAs are lower. She stated that the whole education system currently is kind of upside-down; her husband teaches at the high school and said freshmen have to be reminded of basic things such as bringing pencils to class, and this is because of the pandemic. Senator Albarracin said she did not have any problems with her fall in-person FYE class this past year, but it is small, they do come to class, and they do a lot of group work.

Vice President Evans stated that last year the university experienced things that no one was ready for with the Gen P student population, the challenges they bring with them, and the challenges with students who should have been in REACH population that were not. She stated that several changes have already been made to impact Fall 2023, but now the impact of poor decision making in Fall 2022 is being felt. She agrees with Senator Albarracin that some time needs to be allowed for the changes that were made this year to have the opportunity to work. Vice President Evans, Provost Zoghi, Associate Provost Mossman, and Mr. Schuch have been talking all year about how to improve the student experience from the first semester onward through programs such as FYE, the first year advising experience, and other efforts, but there is still work to do. She hopes that the changes in the admissions process as well as the changes in the student experience will lead to some improvements, but it might take some time.

Provost Zoghi remarked that Mr. Schuch is launching a new summer bridge program this year, but this needs to go even deeper in future and reach out as far back as the middle school level to create a lifecycle flow. Chair Thompson said it sounds like there will be an increase in the number of students entering the REACH program but wonders how this can be accomplished without increasing the number of advisors and academic coaches. Vice President Evans agreed that there will be an increase because not only are students in the 2.75-2.99 end of the GPA scale being added back in but there is also a larger number in the 2.0-2.4 bucket. Chair Thompson remarked that if advising is already understaffed and new students are being added into the program, that does not seem like a good recipe. Vice President Evans agrees, adding that this was just discussed again this morning. She said efforts are being made to find the right solution for WIU, but the clock is ticking and a decision needs to be made very soon.

Senator Albarracin asked Trustee Radosh whether she would be okay with 4,000 fewer students in 2024 if the standards are raised and no students are admitted with GPAs below 2.5. Trustee Radosh responded that the BOT does not believe in enrollment at any cost. She believes that if WIU right-sizes itself to the place where the institution can provide for its students and they can be successful, the Board would be fine with that. Vice President Evans asked if the Board would be fine with the impact of being a 4,000-student campus. Trustee Radosh responded that WIU will never be an 8,000-student campus again, so it needs to concentrate on doing what it does well and attract good students who can be successful without reaching for the bottom to get students who are not engaged. Chair Thompson observed that in that case there would be the need to offload staff as revenues shrink. He added that UPI has been strongly pushing for a retirement incentive. Trustee Radosh responded she does not know how this can be accomplished without a retirement incentive because the only way that people with the top salaries will leave is to incentivize them to leave early.

Chair Thompson asked what kind of report Trustee Radosh would like to receive from CAGAS. Trustee Radosh replied she would like to know what CAGAS thinks is the best route forward – not what is necessary because of whatever parameters are driving the institution but what the best route would be if other aspects could be controlled and not worried about. She would also like to know, since it is not always possible to do what is best, what CAGAS thinks would be the next best alternative. Trustee Radosh would like to see some data on the success rate of those students who have been admitted with GPAs lower than 2.75. She wants to know what happened to those students. She would also like to know why students are leaving WIU because she has heard that good students are leaving at high rates because the culture of the university has changed. She would like to know if this is true or just grumbling. Chair Thompson remarked it sounds like Trustee Radosh would like a study done on student persistence. Trustee Radosh said she would like a cost benefit analysis of admitting students at the lowest end of the GPA scale: what does WIU gain and what does it lose?

Vice President Evans stated that advisors have been doing aggressive outreach to get students to register for fall, so she can hopefully prepare some preliminary retention data for Fall 2023, although the real numbers will not be available until after tenth-day count. She will try to go through the Fall 2022 admits by GPA bucket to see who is registered for Fall 2023. Chair Thompson noted that every student is now assigned a unique identifier when in kindergarten that stays with them throughout college. Vice President Evans said that her preliminary data should be able to show by GPA which students are being retained, although it is well known that students with lower GPAs are less likely to retain. Chair Thompson asked if the data will also include information on gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Vice President Evans responded that the Institutional Research and Planning team is supposed to have three people but currently just has one data analyst, but she will work with him to get this information.

Trustee Radosh would also like to know what guardrails are in place. She noted that currently students with 2.0 GPAs at the end of the fall semester will be retained with their financial aid intact into the spring even though there is no way they can achieve a 3.0. Vice President Evans replied that although this has been past practice at WIU, Mr. Schuch has a proposal on the table going through the approval process to address this. She said past practice has been to not suspend students or put them on probation until the end of the first year rather than at the end of the first semester.

Chair Thompson would like to know what the dollar amount is for every student retained or lost. He would like to know how many millions of dollars the university loses, for example, if its 66 percent retention rate decreases to 64 percent. Vice President Evans responded there were 994 first-time, full-time freshmen enrolled in Fall 2022. She said that if nine more students are retained it would result in an increase of \$60,000 in net tuition revenue. Chair Thompson remarked that if a student is not retained, the university loses all of the tuition going forward for four years, which is a big loss. Vice President Evans responded that using the previous number of \$60,000 would mean \$240,000 when taken over four years. Chair Thompson asked what it looks like when students are lost as sophomores or juniors. Vice President Evans responded it is certainly cheaper to put money into retention than to continue to pour money into recruitment. Chair Thompson said he would like to know the cost of retention at all levels. He said this is similar to the discussion about dual credit classes and how much money WIU loses by having its Gen Ed outsourced. Vice President Evans remarked that Eastern has been able to use dual credit as a pipeline to have those students continue at EIU as degree-seeking students. Chair Thompson pointed out there are other issues involved with that since Eastern uses a lot of adjuncts.

Provost Zoghi remarked that there are a lot of challenges ahead of WIU. Vice President Evans observed that demographic challenges for universities nationwide began in 2008, but for 2023 universities are supposed to be at a little bit of a level, although WIU is not seeing that for some reason. She stated that WIU's enrollment indicators, such as RSVPs for housing and orientation, look healthy, although the admit pool is down compared to past years while other state institutions are seeing a leveling off. She noted that the demographic cliff direct from high schools and community colleges is predicted to decline through 2037 and get steeper as it grows closer to that year. Vice President Evans remarked that a lot of data now is also reporting a declining rate of students choosing to go to college; fewer seniors are opting to go to college right away after high school, especially males.

CAGAS Chair Julie Cox asked what the timeline is for providing this report. Chair Thompson replied that it will not be reported to Faculty Senate until fall. The Executive Committee discussed the charge to CAGAS with Dr. Cox and the Registrar.

Senator Albarracin remarked that she believes the university should increase the access to higher education, and many of those students with lower GPAs are students of color who have no other resources. Dr. Cox remarked that some students with the lowest GPAs are some of the best humans who will do the greatest work in their fields. She said they sometimes have to be taught how to think, but they are wonderful people who need support along the way. Chair Thompson remarked that once students get through their sophomore year, WIU retains them at a pretty good rate; the first two semesters are the most challenging.

The Executive Committee adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager  
and Recording Secretary