Faculty Senate, Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 5:00 PM
Via Zoom

Voting results are in red.

1. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM.

2. The October 6, 2020, minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

3. Announcements and Information:

   Speaker Simon Lewis reminded faculty that book orders for the spring semester are overdue. He asked everyone to be assiduous with advising, especially since a strong spring enrollment is critical. The deadline for QEP course proposals (theme: Sustainable Cities and Communities) is November 15. Faculty can report incidents of students recording zoom class sessions to COVID-19@cofc.edu or to Dean of Students Jeri Cabot (cabotj@cofc.edu). The Student Government Association is voting tonight on a resolution calling for a Pass/Fail option this semester; the issue also came up in the previous week’s meeting of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the President. Speaker Lewis conducted a poll on senators’ availability for a brief in-person meeting on Reading Day (December 7), which indicated that a quorum is possible for that date. A doodle poll will follow.

4. Reports

   a. Speaker Lewis thanked everyone for their diligence this semester, keeping up with extra- and co-curricular events as well as academic courses. He recognized the particular challenges faced by faculty with school-age children. Speaker Lewis expressed optimism for a return to normalcy with the fall 2021 semester. With that in mind, he encouraged faculty members to familiarize themselves with the strategic plan and continue to work toward its implementation.

   b. President Andrew Hsu thanked everyone for their efforts and noted that, against all odds, we’ve accomplished a lot this fall. He noted recent faculty and student accomplishments and recognized the creation of the Critical Conversations series. Recent accolades in national media include US News and World Report including the College among its top ten regional universities in the South; within that designation, we were ranked a top five college for veterans, top five in undergraduate teaching, and top five in public universities. We were recognized for the first time as a top-value school and a top three innovative university. The Honors College was named one of the top forty honors programs in the country by Inside Honors.

President Hsu reported that we are moving forward with the strategic plan, which was approved by the Board of Trustees in May. The plan has three pillars: Student Experience & Success, Academic Distinction, and Employee Experience & Success.
EVP for Student Affairs Alicia Caudill is championing efforts associated with the first pillar, focusing first on student retention. Provost Suzanne Austin is championing efforts related to the second pillar, focusing on developing and strengthening academic programs that lead to national distinction. EVP for Business Affairs John Loonan is championing the third pillar, with the goal of making the College a great place to work.

President Hsu added that working groups for accomplishing these goals would be formed within the next few weeks, with a public rollout scheduled for early spring semester.

In response to a question from Senator Henry Xie (Management and Marketing), President Hsu said that faculty and staff will be high on the priority list for vaccines when they become available, though not as high as frontline healthcare workers. Bridget McLernon Sykes added that the College has a very good relationship with DHEC, and she asked faculty about the availability of cold storage for vaccines. Senator Andy Shedlock (Biology) and Professor Gorka Sancho (Guest, Biology) responded that the Biology Department has minus-80-degree-celsius freezers.

Professor Giovanna De Luca (Guest, French, Francophone, and Italian Studies) expressed concern about retaining students. She said that the students she has talked with are tired and seem to be considering taking next semester off. She asked what we as faculty can do to help. President Hsu responded that we can help mainly by providing students with a meaningful educational experience. He added that he believes our students are faring better than many of their peers at other institutions, and that while he is concerned about retention, he is cautiously optimistic that most students will return in the spring. He said we are also seeing many students who skipped the fall semester returning for the spring semester.

Senator Ashley Pagnotta (Physics and Astronomy) asked if it is possible for the College to lower the number of hours required for students to count as full time (for the purpose of financial aid and scholarships) to help students who are struggling? President Hsu replied that the rules are strict for federal aid and state scholarships, but we will try to find ways to lighten the load for students.

c. EVP of Business Affairs John Loonan gave a report (linked). A few points of emphasis: Business Affairs is committed to transparency and cooperation with all stakeholders; the budget is balanced, for now, but a decline in spring enrollment could have a serious negative impact; and a transition to RCM (responsibility-centered management) is coming, but it will be implemented carefully and adjusted as we go.

Speaker Lewis read a question from a guest, asking for the cost of administrative positions relative to faculty positions and how that has changed over the past ten years. Mr. Loonan replied that they would be looking into all faculty and staff cost structures. He added that
there had been a disturbing rumor that administrators had received raises this year, when in fact senior staff voluntarily took five-day furloughs.

Senator Paul Young (School of Sciences and Mathematics) asked about the future of revenue sharing (with academic departments) from summer courses, specifically whether that revenue sharing, which was suspended this year, would be restored. Mr. Loonan responded that he could not answer that specific question, but it is the kind of thing that RCM will address. He added that not everyone is going to like the RCM model, but that it will be implemented and adjusted with input from everyone involved.

d. Student Health Services Director Bridget McLernon Sykes gave a report (linked).

In response to a question about the equivalence in effectiveness between mask-wearing and a vaccine, Ms. McLernon Sykes said that vaccine-level effectiveness of masks presumes that everyone is masked and maintains six-foot distancing.

Senator Irina Gigova (School of Humanities and Social Sciences) asked about testing plans for the spring semester, and Ms. McLernon Sykes replied that the plan is to test every residential student when they return the first week, as well as off-campus students who are coming to class in person. She added that it is easier to mandate testing for on-campus residential students than others, and that we are hoping to provide testing every week as we’re doing now.

Senator Thomas Ivey (Mathematics) commented that, especially on weekends, he has observed that the general public walks through campus without masks. He asked if the latest positivity rate of 7.5% was consistent throughout the fall semester. Ms. McLernon Sykes replied that 7.5 is a “jump,” but also that the samples on which the rates are based have been limited. Sen Ivey asked where to send students if they say that they feel sick; the answer is to have them call Student Health Services. If the situation occurs after hours, Student Health Services has a link on its web page to MUSC 24-hour care.

Senator Henry Xie (Management and Marketing) said that he has heard that many students avoid getting tested; he asked how confident we should be about the numbers being reported. Ms. McLernon Sykes replied that she is confident that we are reporting what we know, but she shares the concern about students’ reluctance to get tested. She asked faculty to help by encouraging students to get tested and to get tested themselves.

5. New Business

a. The Curriculum Committee (Nenad Radakovic, Chair) made the following proposals:

1) AAST: Program change:
The proposal passed by online vote.

2) GRMN: Program change, deactivating minor and courses:

The proposal passed by online vote.

3) SOCY: Teacher Education BS program change

The proposal passed by online vote.

4) LING: course change:

The proposal passed by online vote.

b. The Committee on Graduate Education (Prof. Sandy Slater, Chair) made the following proposal:

1) Creative Writing, MFA

   i) ENGL 564: course description change

   The proposal passed by online vote.

   ii) ENGL 565: course description change

   The proposal passed by online vote.

   iii) ENGL 706: course description change

   The proposal passed by online vote.

The proposal (which included all three course changes) passed by online vote.
c. Committee on Academic Standards, Admissions, and Financial Aid (Prof. Meta Van Sickle, Chair): Proposal to add the Duolingo English Test to the College’s list of approved English proficiency tests. PDF

Professor Van Sickle introduced the motion, noting that the Duolingo test is as efficacious as other language tests, but cheaper. Accepting it will help international students, who often can’t afford other tests; thus, it has the potential to increase our pool of students. She added that the Provost’s Office supports this motion.

Senator Chris Starr (School of Sciences and Mathematics) said that he supports the motion but noted that biases can find their way into artificial intelligence algorithms, which Duolingo relies on. Prof. Van Sickle said that the company sends video of the tests, which are reviewed here.

The motion passed by online vote.

6. Constituents’ General Concerns

Senator Tom Carroll (School of Education, Health, and Human Performance) conveyed concerns from colleagues about very low student attendance in face-to-face class sessions. He said that we may be doing students a disservice by not holding them accountable for attendance this semester. Senator Ashley Pagnotta (Physics and Astronomy) added that the attendance problem is widespread among faculty she has talked to. She reported that Professor Chris Korey (Biology) has compiled a 20-page document with data from faculty on attendance in face-to-face sessions of hybrid classes, which supports what many faculty members have reported anecdotally. In general, she said, given the options of coming to class or “zooming in” (or watching a recording of class), students tend to choose not to attend in person.

Associate Provost Mark Del Mastro asked faculty to email him with their observations and suggestions regarding this issue.

A few others in attendance testified to the problem of poor student attendance this semester.

Senator Merissa Ferrara (Communication) asked if we are going to implement a pass-fail model this semester, as we did in spring. Associate Provost Del Mastro replied that the pass-fail discussion is ongoing and that a decision has not yet been made.

7. The meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.