Faculty Senate, Tuesday, October 6, 2020, 5:00 PM
Via Zoom

Voting results are in red.

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

2. The September 1, 2020, minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

3. Announcements and Information

Speaker of the Faculty Simon Lewis reminded senators that Faculty Research and Development Grant proposals (for Round One, Jan. 1, 2021-May 15, 2021) are due Friday Oct. 16 at 5pm. Applications should be sent to committee chair Professor Michael Larsen.

Mid-term grades are due Oct. 20.

4. Reports

a. Speaker Lewis thanked everyone for working to make students’ experiences as normal as possible, especially employees with school-age and pre-school children to care for during the pandemic. He also noted that we have a long haul ahead of us this semester and will likely be working under similar conditions in the spring. He believes that underlying conditions at C of C are good and that enrollments will increase once the COVID crisis passes.

Speaker Lewis highlighted two agenda items, which he sees as very much in line with the strategic plan: the Environmental Geosciences major proposal and the Race, Equity, and Inclusion (REI) proposal. He reminded senators that the latter proposal is to endorse the report in principle; the specific curricular changes will be scrutinized by multiple faculty committees before returning to the senate.

b. Provost Suzanne Austin echoed Simon’s thanks and acknowledged the challenges everyone on in the college community has faced this semester. She believes that things have gone as well as we could have expected so far and that the three-week period of remote learning in August and September was helpful in that regard.

Regarding budget reductions, she said that the 1.5% cut was spread equally to all units on campus. Both she and Chief Financial Officer John Loonan come from institutions where there was a commitment to transparency, and they want to share information and educate the community about the financial situation we find ourselves in. If we change the budget model, she said, we will all be in it together and there will be opportunity for everyone to weigh in.
She and others in senior leadership are increasingly concerned about spring enrollment. If there is a significant decline in enrollments, we may need further budget reductions. The Board of Trustees for the past several months has required a balanced budget, but it won’t be balanced if enrollment declines sharply in the spring.

She pointed out that faculty can apply for two one-year modifications to the tenure clock, and Academic Affairs has added pandemic-related issues to the justifications for such modifications. This policy also covers senior instructors.

Looking ahead to the REI proposal, Provost Austin encouraged those working on the curricular changes to allow faculty colleagues with discipline-specific expertise to deliver REI courses in the way they see fit, so as not to make it more complicated than it needs to be.

Prof. Henry Xie (Guest, Management and Marketing) asked for clarification about the distribution of the budget cuts. Provost Austin reiterated that the 1.5% reduction was applied to all units: the dollar amounts varied, but the percentage was consistent.

Senator Jonathan Neufeld (Philosophy) asked if the current budget assumes that the current enrollment will remain stable in the spring, or does it assume a decrease in enrollment? Provost Austin replied that while she would defer to CFO John Loonan for a definitive answer, her understanding is that the budget anticipates a small decline for the spring, which is normal. Her concern is the possibility of a larger-than-usual decline in the spring.

Prof. Lisa Covert (Guest, History) asked if the College is negotiating with the state legislature for increased funding due to the pandemic, and if the board might reconsider requiring a balanced budget. Provost Austin replied that the College did receive federal COVID relief through the state, but that the state is probably going to be facing losses in tax revenue and is unlikely to allocate increased funding to higher education. The Board of Trustees is quite concerned about the College’s finances, which is why they have been requiring a balanced budget.

Senator Bob Podolsky (SSM) asked what proportion of the budget deficit is COVID-related, and if that is a large proportion, why are these cuts said to be permanent? Provost Austin said her understanding is that there was already an eight-million-dollar deficit before COVID hit, and the lower enrollments due to COVID created another three-million-dollar deficit. She does think that once we get out of this difficult situation and enrollments stabilize, some cuts may be restored, but there were structural issues and budget practices that led to the eight-million-dollar shortfall. The institution was spending money on recurring costs using one-time money. We are now trying to create real budgets with recurring funds.
Senator Ashley Pagnotta (Physics and Astronomy) asked, in regard to promotion and tenure, if making the choice to teach online during the pandemic will be held against faculty? Provost Austin replied, absolutely not.

c. Godfrey Gibbison, Interim Dean of the Graduate School

1) Temporary waiver/option on standardized test scores for graduate admissions: Dean Gibbison described the policy as a one-time change with the goal of staying competitive. He said the Graduate School will revisit the issue next year.

2) Proposal for common practices/requirements for bachelor’s-to-master’s combined programs: Dean Gibbison pointed out the need for consistency in rules for accelerated bachelor-to-master’s admissions requirements. He described the research that led to the new policy and outlined the policy itself:

   • Once admitted to the ABM (Accelerated Bachelor’s to Master’s) program, students may take graduate courses while still undergraduates.

   • Some courses may count toward both the undergraduate and graduate degree, but the number is capped.

   • To be eligible for this plan, a student must have earned 90 credit hours and have a minimum GPA of 3.2.

   • A maximum of 12 hours of graduate-level coursework may be applied to the bachelor’s degree.

   • The total credit hours earned toward the bachelor’s and master’s must be at least 150 credit hours; that is, the credit hours counted toward the bachelor’s degree plus the credit hours taken after the bachelor’s is awarded must total at least 150. 30 hours must be at the graduate level, defined as 500-level or higher.

   • This total may also contain a maximum of six credit hours of graduate-level research enrollment.
• The total enrollment for an undergraduate student in any semester that includes a graduate-level course must not exceed 18 hours.

• As determined by the participating bachelor’s program, only 500- and 600-level courses may be substituted for undergraduate program or degree requirements.

• In the case of undergraduate/graduate cross-listed courses, students pursuing a Combined Bachelor’s-to-Master’s Plan must complete the graduate-level course.

Senator Anthony Leclerc (SSM) asked if there were requirements as to the number of hours in a major, to which Dean Gibbison replied that those sorts of specific requirements are left up to the program. The Graduate School is establishing minimum requirements; individual programs can create additional requirements.

Senator Irina Gigova (HSS) asked whether these changes applied only to existing 4+1 programs or to all graduate programs. Dean Gibbison responded that they apply to all graduate programs going forward.

5. New Business

a. Election of Speaker Pro Tempore: Sen. Irina Gigova (HSS) was elected by unanimous consent.

b. Committee on By-Laws and the Faculty-Administration Manual (Merissa Ferrara, Chair): By-Laws revision regarding electronic meetings PDF

Speaker Lewis explained the need for by-laws language to legitimize and guide online meetings. He reported that Parliamentarian George Pothering consulted the latest version of Robert’s Rules of Order and adapted its language for our purposes, with the help of the Committee on the By-Laws and FAM. Speaker Lewis further explained that the Senate will need to convene physically at an outdoor space to approve this change, which will then need to be ratified (electronically) by the full faculty. Assuming it passes, the Senate will be able to legally ratify (at a future online meeting) all votes taken via Zoom during the COVID pandemic. The purpose of this vote is to clear the way for an in-person vote that can be taken without further discussion.
The motion to amend the by-laws was approved unanimously by online vote, with the understanding that there will be an in-person vote on the same motion as soon as possible.

c. Curriculum Committee (Nenad Radakovic, Chair):

1) SOST: Program change

https://cofc.curriculog.com/proposal:2645/form

The proposal was approved unanimously by online vote.

2) GEOL: new major in Environmental Geosciences and two new courses:

https://cofc.curriculog.com/agenda:163/form

Senator Annette Watson (Political Science) asked what effect the new major will have on the minor, and possible future major, in Environmental Studies, specifically whether it would become a BA as opposed to a BS major.

Professor Tim Callahan (Guest, Geology) responded that the two programs should be complementary and not in competition; he foresees potential engagement between the two programs.

Senator Chris Starr (School of Business) asked how the proposed major connects to the strategic plan, and he asked about justifying a new program during a budget crisis. He made clear that he was not speaking in opposition to the program but rather asking questions that should be asked of all new programs.

Prof. Callahan responded that the program aligns closely with the strategic plan’s emphasis on developing “citizens who create innovative solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges.” He said that by the sixth year of the program they expect to have at least 60 students, and that the program should attract students to the College who would not otherwise enroll here. The department has the faculty to teach the courses, so the costs are modest enough that they would be offset by the tuition of just one new student.

The proposal was approved unanimously by online vote.

d. Senator Jonathan Neufeld (Philosophy), on behalf of the ad hoc Committee on the Creation of a Race, Equity, and Inclusion Requirement:

Resolved: The Senate supports pursuing the proposal for the addition of a two-course Race, Equity, and Inclusion requirement to the undergraduate graduation
requirements at the College of Charleston, and charges the Speaker to move the proposal to an appropriate standing committee for further consideration and implementation.

**REI Report**

Note: The senate discussion of the committee’s report at the April 2020 meeting can be found in the April minutes.

Professors Anthony Greene (African American Studies) and Morgan Koerner (German and Russian Studies), co-chairs of the ad hoc committee, provided background on the proposal. They pointed out that the committee completed its work in the spring when it brought the proposal to the Senate, but that they are still informally discussing and promoting the initiative. They stressed that most of the courses that would satisfy the REI requirement (as currently described) would double-count with some general education requirement. They do not foresee students being required to take additional credit hours. Prof. Koerner estimated that there are currently 179 course sections that would count for the REI.

Senator Pagnotta (Physics and Astronomy) reported that her department strongly supports the proposal but has some concerns and questions. She conveyed their concern as to whether the number and range of courses would provide students with adequate choices for general education/REI. She asked if training would be provided for instructors who wanted to incorporate REI content into their classes. She asked for clarification as to whether the one-third race-related content meant that (a) courses would be devoted entirely to REI, out of which one third must be about race, or (b) in order to count for the REI requirement, one-third of the course must be about race (while the other two-thirds might not be directly REI-related). And she shared that a member of her department, who is Black, said that any time he has participated in diversity-related training at the college he feels singled out and patronized.

Prof. Koerner responded that there would be a training component. Provost Austin added that she understands that for some professors the REI content is already deeply woven into their courses, while others will be expanding the scope of their course content. She hopes that we can partner with Vice President of Access and Inclusion Renard Harris and the Office of Institutional Diversity to help provide training. She would also like the REI to be a focus for the center for faculty development that she has been promoting.

Responding to Sen. Pagnotta, Prof. Greene, and later Prof. Larry Krasnoff (Guest, Philosophy), clarified that one-third of the overall content of a course would have to be “REI,” and that for the purpose of meeting the requirement, the REI component must, by definition, concern race. Prof. Greene said that the committee expects that many of the qualifying courses will deal with other diversity issues and address
intersectionality, but they were deliberate in making race the defining feature of the REI requirement because of its significance to Charleston and the region, and because diversity requirements often sidestep race.

Senator Tom Carroll (EHHP) asked who would certify the courses, and whether they would go through the Curriculum Committee for approval. He also expressed concern about defining outcomes so that we can know whether or not the program is successful.

Sen. Koerner said that he expects the General Education Committee will certify the courses for REI.

Sen. Irina Gigova (HSS) said that she wants to be sure that the effect of this requirement is not to reify constructs of race. Prof. Greene replied that in fact the whole idea behind the proposal is to question rather than reify constructs of race.

Sen. Anthony Leclerc said that the meaning of the requirement ought to be better defined, and that the choice of two courses to meet the requirement seems arbitrary. He added that in terms of the distribution of courses, some departments will be much more affected than others. Senator Bob Mignone (Mathematics) suggested making the requirement a single course, at least initially, in order to see what the impact is. Prof. Koerner responded that when the committee considered a one-course requirement, the REI component was the entire course. They favor a more integrated approach in which race and inclusion issues presented in one course can be revisited in a later course.

Prof. Chris Korey (Guest, Biology) suggested that the proposal will have a positive impact on teaching simply by encouraging us to think more about how we teach and the kinds of scholars we include in our classes.

The resolution was approved by an online vote of 39-6, with two abstentions.

6. Constituents’ General Concerns

Senator Thomas Ivey (Mathematics) voiced his concern that random COVID testing on campus is not actually happening. Voluntary random testing is not random, he said, and people are not responding in sufficient numbers to provide a meaningful sample. As a result, the numbers the College is reporting may lead to a false sense of security. He called upon the College to make its testing truly random and mandatory, so that we can get a sufficient sample size.

7. The meeting adjourned at 6:48.