

Laura's Faculty Senate report for the Board of Trustees (September 2021):

Chair Roberts and members of the WCU Board of Trustees

First of all, I'm excited to be working with you over the course of this academic year. Over the summer, with the help of Erin McNelis (Secretary of the Faculty) and Vicki Szabo (Senior Faculty Assembly representative), I put together a guide for you that introduces you to our senators for this year. I hope that you enjoy learning more about us, including our teaching and research areas, favorite student success stories, personal interests., and commitment to our students, who are the reason why we do what we do: develop innovative curriculum, stay current on the latest pedagogical and scholarly innovations, and remain consistently available to mentor, advise, and prepare our students for life, even after they leave WCU. The WCU faculty are as accomplished, dedicated, and impressive as any faculty body anywhere. We are here because we are committed to the mission of this place, to our students, and to this region. **And we also prepared a guide for the senators with information about members of the Board of Trustees, so that they might learn more about you as well.**

Faculty senate is planning to live stream senate meetings this year, as we realized during the last year, when everything was happening via Zoom, that more people were attending than had ever been the case previously. We invite you whenever possible, to watch us work. Even though we hope to be able to meet in person at some point this year, we plan to continue to make our meetings available to anyone who would like to watch remotely.

Aside from overseeing the implementation of cutting-edge curriculum for our students, faculty Senate's top priority for this year is, as always, compensation, and we appreciate your advocacy for us in this regard. We are also focused on quality-of-life issues – in terms of issues such as childcare, for example – that might help offset the lack of regular cost-of-living and merit-based pay increases that we have lived without for far too long. Further, we are working to implement a new student assessment of instruction instrument that we hope to pilot in the fall.

Finally, as you can imagine, faculty are nervous and deeply concerned about the continued threat of Covid. We appreciate the protections that the administration has already implemented and are pleased that the mandate for vaccination and testing has been moved forward. Faculty are expected to be on the front lines, in classrooms full of students, and we will insist that we are involved in discussions and decision-making processes with regard to messaging – and we have already worked with the administration on ways to communicate with the WCU community during this complicated time -- enforcement of mask mandates, and other critical aspects that will impact our lives in the classroom.

For the entirety of my career, as a scholar of African literatures, women's literature, and environmental studies, I have been fierce advocate for equity, inclusion, stewardship, and compassion. I will continue to champion these values in the service of WCU's faculty to help shape our agenda for this year. I appreciate your dedication to WCU, to its mission, students, faculty, and staff. Again, I look forward to working with you and getting to know all of you this year.

Best,

Laura

Faculty Senate Business Meeting
August 25, 2021
3:00-5:00 PM EST
UC Multipurpose Room

Agenda

I. Administrative Procedures

- a. Cherokee Land Acknowledgement
- b. Roll Call
- c. Approval of Minutes - Business Meeting on April 21, 2021

II. External Reports

- a. Chancellor's Update: Chancellor Kelli Brown
- b. Provost's Report: Provost Richard Starnes
- c. Staff Senate: Chair Deidre Hopkins
- d. Student Government Association: President Rebecca Hart

III. Senate Reports

- a. Academic Policy and Review Council: Will Lehman
- b. Collegial Review Council: Chair Drew Virtue
- c. Faculty Affairs Council: Chair Cheryl Waters-Tormey
- d. Rules Committee: Chair-Elect Indi Bose
- e. Senate Report: Chair Laura Wright
 - i. September Board of Trustees Visit
 - ii. Faculty Priorities

IV. New Business

- a. Forming the Rules Committee
- b. Finalizing Representation for Faculty Senate Planning Team
- c. Discussion of Faculty Conversation Topics

V. Motion to Adjourn

Laura Wright, Comments at Opening Assembly

Chancellor Brown, Provost Starnes, and esteemed colleagues, I am honored and humbled to serve as the faculty senate chair for academic year 2021-22. And I'd like to share briefly what drives my service as a long-serving member of this faculty senate. I used to work at a small liberal arts college in New York, where once a month, the entire faculty met for what was called the Committee of the Whole (or COW, for short). This was an opportunity for colleagues from all disciplines to discuss matters of shared governance, policy, and student successes. One of the reasons that I became a faculty senator in my first year at WCU in 2005 – and have served subsequent terms off and on since then -- is because in some ways, our senate reminds me of that body: it provides a chance for faculty from all disciplines across the university to come together to work for the greater good of our colleagues, students, and institution. In my time on senate, I have come to learn so much about the way that the university works and the ways that our collective disciplines are diverse and different but also in many ways collaborative and driven by the common goal of service to our various constituents and to the ideals of excellence, professionalism, and our mission as teacher scholars to help shape, mandate, advocate for, and enforce the core values that we aspire to as a regional comprehensive institution of higher education.

As I put together a get-to-know your faculty senate guide this summer, I've already learned so much about the diverse group of amazing faculty who will serve as your senators this year. We are a collective made up for folks who, among other things, belly dance, do cross-fit, take care of rainforests, love dogs, garden, roast coffee, love the Michigan Wolverines, play the banjo, play tennis, and love playing boardgames. They obtained degrees from all over the US and abroad. They publish, are awarded amazing grants, serve as public intellectuals, and work across disciplines. And, of course, they are amazing, dedicated, and creative teachers.

I won't take this time to drive home an agenda – we all know that we all want raises, equitable compensation for the vast amount of work that we do for WCU, and we all know that, yet again, we face a year of uncertainty as we head into fall while a pandemic we had hoped might have dissipated continues to rage in new and different forms. We know that our administration will have to shift and adapt to ensure our safety, to be nimble and implement policy driven by science, and that we will have to hear from them often to keep us up to date on the ever-evolving circumstances related to Covid-19 and the Delta variant. And we know that we will have to continue to make our voices heard with regard to issues of compensation, even as I also know that our administration is committed to finding creative solutions to address wages that have been stagnant for too long... Ok, so maybe I will drive home an agenda. 😊

I look forward to serving with Staff Senate Chair Deidra Hopkins and SGA president Rebecca Hart on shared initiatives and objectives; I know that they are both, as I am, excited for this leadership opportunity. In whatever leadership capacity I have served at WCU, as a former Chair of the English Department or co-chair of the campus theme committee, for example, I have strived to work always to find the best solutions, and these are not always the easy ones, or the ones that might seem best in the moment. I know of myself that I am thoughtful and like to consider all the options, that I am highly empathetic and collaborative, and I promise to bring

those qualities to this position to work for my colleagues and with the administration to ensure that faculty voices are heard and respected.

Faculty Senate Planning Team Meeting, pertinent notes

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Members Present: Indi Bose, Mariana Fisher, Scottie Kapel, Will Lehman, Erin McNelis, Kade Otto, Brandon Schwab, Richard Starnes, Vicki Szabo, Drew Virtue, Colin Wasmund, Cheryl Waters-Tormey, Laura Wright

Provost's Update:

- Salaries and Budget:
 - The budget is not finalized yet. The House and Senate working on a compromise.
 - We'll receive a fair amount for our capital budget (renovation and repairs, etc.)
 - We do not yet know what they could add to staff and faculty salaries
- Questions
 - UNC Related Provisions, Item 8.17 (request for salaries of graduating students)
 - Will we receive guidance on NTT Promotion Path, Submissions, Guidelines? Yes.
 - Enrollment and Funding
 - Enrollment down 4% (5% if including non-payment) currently and down 5% in SCH production which feeds into the funding model. Freshmen and first-time-full-time retention rate is down (74.8% right now)
 - Other UNC Institutions enrollment and retention varies (both increases and decreases)
 - Impact from SCC's free tuition this year (more for saving SCC)
 - Likely we will be reverting \$4 million of the \$6 million in enrollment growth of Year 2 of the budget for NC Promise. Other NC Promise schools numbers are up.
 - COVID Protocols:
 - Why wait until October for testing?
 - Time for documentation verification and creating database
 - Those starting vaccination sequence will be done by October 1st
 - Still determining where testing occurs and who pays
 - Reagents needed for testing with PCR tests and other testing supplies are at a premium, and we don't have an adequate supply on hand yet
 - Response rate
 - Best from on-campus students, not great from off-campus students
 - Staff outnumber faculty in vaccinations as of today
 - Comments received from other faculty:
 - Move up the October 1st date!

- Rumors of high numbers of people seen at Byrd and concern we'll go to online by Labor Day
- Richard had to leave to join the Chancellor in College Meetings*
- Communication Issues:
 - Update on E&T leadership to be shared with campus? Yes, and also Student Success Transitions, but not in writing yet.
 - We haven't received enough information/not enough communication.
 - At a minimum, our websites need to be updated and provide needed information; also recommend daily emails with WCU info and happenings (similar to those from Bill Studenc and at the system level, Joshua Ellis)
 - Student Assessment/Perceptions of Learning, Process and Moving Forward
 - Need at several levels for training (how to use and how to respond to student feedback); department heads, collegial review committees, faculty
 - Catch-22, need/desire for an instrument before training can occur; disagreement on whether training can occur without an instrument
 - Bring Terry Pollard to Senate to discuss the "Faculty Forward" workshop on peer evaluation and observation of teaching.
 - Communication with Housekeeping – we've hear housekeeping told not to remove trash more than once a month, but they've also been told there will be no cleaning of white boards and chalk boards; severely understaffed housekeeping leads to cutbacks in services
 - Need an update on available parking

Chair's comments for Council Chairs:

- Please include Laura on invitations to your council meetings; starting as soon as possible is best.
- Council membership was included in an email from Laura this summer
- Zoom meeting options, should we consider this?
 - Live streaming such as last year and today's opening meeting drew more observers, and we'd like to continue this
 - Senators should be present (no Zoom option)
 - Worst case scenario is hybrid; it's better to do fully online before hybrid (face-to-face and Zoom) – it's too hard for those at a distance to participate in discussion
 - If committees want to meet over Zoom, that's okay.
- Erin will be contacting colleges about the additional council members needed from each college (Dean's Advisory Committees, Collegial Review Committees)

Council Reports

Academic Policy and Review Council – Will Lehman

- Work for this year
 - APRC membership – clarifying which members can vote

- Updated curricular process, UCC now involved in major proposals at first stages (information, tutorials, videos, etc. would be helpful to get faculty informed)
- Increasing Faculty Senate involvement by junior faculty and dissuade wariness about running for Faculty Senate (potential negative impact on tenure decisions)
- Consider alternate representation strategies for Faculty Senate (e.g. one senator per department)

Faculty Affairs Council – Cheryl Waters-Tormey

- Last year's committee was split: most worked on SAI/SPL and Sean worked on salary issues
- Discussion of what is best handled by the Salary Standing Committee versus Faculty Affairs Committee, though it's important to keep pressure on the salary issue
- FAC can focus on benefits (at the system level, university contributions, health care, retirement benefits); David Hudson did a study on health care benefits in the past
- Faculty attrition speaks louder, and we aren't leaving
- Laura's charge to council: focus on completing SAI/SPL work
- Note: Some items, such as travel policies, are changing based on working directly with administration; not everything has to come through a committee and a resolution
- History of the SAI Work by FAC:
 - 2018-2019: Task force had recommendations, focus on making courses and teaching better, not on faculty evaluation
 - 2019-2020: FAC and Coulter Faculty Commons worked on bigger picture, made proposals based on 2018-2019 work and new research; the SAI tool was one part of these recommendations
 - 2020-2021: Focus on SAI instrument helped lose picture of the bigger issues¹
- There will be no perfect instrument. Use a tool that's been peer reviewed and validated for review of a course (not faculty). Focus on training people on how to use the tool to empower us.
- Consider collaborating with CRC in reviewing university standards for evaluating teaching. Make sure university standards articulate our values and indicate how instruments and training and practices can be used to support these rather than quantify performance.

Collegial Review Council – Drew Virtue

- Last Year's Priorities & Accomplishments:
 - Electronic TPR process: SharePoint for this year, and other possible tools to look at in the future
 - COVID statements from department heads and faculty
 - Adding CV's to first and third reappointment process
 - NTT-faculty, got language in the handbook changed so there are three levels to replace; got rid of lecturer and started with instructor
- This year's priorities

- Continue to push on pay bumps for NTT-faculty promotions, as well as status for those who've been here a long time
- Looking into possible discrepancies between department and college with university level decisions
- Review Faculty Handbook language and how we evaluate and the weighting of the three legs of the stool; it will work well with how we assess teaching in the collegial review process
- Questions:
 - What is the desire in the committee to look at the split decisions referred to above? Discussion of likely issues in size and breadth of each level of review committee.
 - Interpretation of DCRD criteria as “meeting” conditions, others as “baseline” for meeting criteria
 - Suggestion: Rethink the tenure process and procedures

Rules Committee – Indi Bose

- Inquiries as to last year's activity:
 - Creation of a form
 - Reviewed committee structures at other universities
- Look into the email policy, Policy 93, in particular Section VII. **PRIVACY OF EMAIL:** The University does not routinely monitor the content of electronic mail. However, no user of University Email or the University Email System should have the expectation that any Email content, whether personal or business-related, will be private. To the extent permitted by law and policy, *the University reserves the right to access and disclose the contents of any users' Email, including discarded messages, without the consent or knowledge of the user*

Chair's Comments – Laura Wright

- See information on the Board of Trustees coming to campus. Encourage attendance by senators.
- Guide to Faculty Senators was appreciated and will be shared with the Board of Trustees too
- Fill positions on Senate Planning Team – senators from HHS (Mariana) and FPA
- To follow up on Faculty Senate invitation to Ricardo to come speak on diversion and inclusion issues
- Read the Land Acknowledgement statement at the start of every senate meeting
- Asking for information regarding Kadie's resolution about including a bias statement with SPL's in Fall 2021 – need to follow up!

Other Comments:

- We've already had some people asking about S/U grading, we'll need to have this on the radar
- Remove Faculty Assembly Report from the agenda as there won't be a report from FA for our first Senate Meeting

