**Faculty Senate Minutes**

**08/10/2020 Called Emergency Meeting 9-10 am via ZOOM**

**ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

**ROLL CALL**

* Present: Michael Boatright, Indi Bose, Chancellor Brown, Kristin Calvert, Todd Collins, David de Jong, Heidi Dent, Heather Mae Erickson, Mariana Fisher, Enrique Gómez, Yancey Gulley, Ian Jeffress, Bora Korayaki, Will Lehman, Niall Michelsen, Sean Mulholland, Leigh Odom, Kadie Otto, Matthew Rave, Carrie Rogers, Roya Scales, Interim Provost Starnes, Marco Lam, Garrett Fisher, Elizabeth Tait, Martin Tanaka, Laura Wright, Jessica Zellers, Elizabeth Wark, Vicki Szabo, Drew Virtue
* Members with Proxies:
* Members Absent:

**Call for Quorum**

We meet quorum to move forward.

**Call for Motion**

Yancey Gulley moved that the resolution for **Opposing Residential Opening for Fall 2020** be open for discussion. Laura Wright seconded.

**Discussion of Motion**

***Resolution Opposing Residential Opening for Fall 2020***

WHEREAS, a pandemic (COVID-19) has changed the nature of how the world operates, particularly in terms of human interaction;

WHEREAS, cases of COVID-19 in the United States, North Carolina, and Jackson County continue to rise;

WHEREAS, the UNC System has mandated a residential opening, and WCU Administration has confirmed that WCU does not have the authority to move to fully online instruction;

WHEREAS, on August 5th, Governor Roy Cooper signed Executive Order No. 155 “Extension of Phase 2 Measures to Control Public Health Risks and Save Lives in the COVID-19 Pandemic” through September 11, 2020, wherein:

WHEREAS, there are many public health benefits, economic benefits, and societal

benefits to reopening K-12 schools, colleges, and universities for in-person instruction, but these in-person gatherings of students, staff, teachers, and professors will increase the risk of COVID-19 spread, even after all health and safety measures are put in place. (Executive Order No. 155, p. 2 at para. 16)

WHEREAS, the population of Jackson County greatly increases with the influx of WCU students and employees who live in other counties and states, and it is unlikely that the healthcare systems of the county are equipped to handle an increase in cases anticipated with a return to residential instruction; and,

WHEREAS, university towns across the country where students have returned have realized a lack of adherence to CDC guidelines, and some of WCU’s current “Fall 2020 Operations and Procedures” fail to meet CDC guidelines.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the WCU Faculty Senate is gravely concerned about the health and well-being of the Catamount community and those in the region we serve (particularly those from vulnerable populations); thus, we oppose a residential opening for the Fall 2020 semester, and stand in solidarity with School Systems, Faculty Senates, County Health Departments, and The Governor of North Carolina.

**Yancey Gulley** shared the following, “While not exclusively, in many ways the decision of many colleges and universities (whether directed by system offices or other pressures) to open in residential formats center economic outcomes for institutions and personal liberties for students who desire a well-deserved college experience, as well as their families’ desire for such experiences. Yet, they set to the side the very collective good that public universities in the United States were founded upon and which our missions purport.

During the founding of our public institution, faculty governance was a key component of institutional independence to meet our missions through appropriate pedagogy and democratization of thought. Over the years, the faculty governance model has changed to one of shared governance between a myriad of campus constituents. Today, our role as faculty senate is to serve in a mostly advisory capacity, sharing our educated and rational opinions to not only our own institutional administrations but those governing bodies that oversee our institutions. Today the faculty senate of Western Carolina University is gathered to consider a resolution regarding the residential opening of our institution during the Fall of 2020 given the global pandemic that our state, nation, and world are currently experiencing.

Let me reiterate for those present, both guests and members of this senate – this vote is a symbolic one and an important one. Despite my very personal desire to not open WCU for residential instruction – I do not have that authority. Nor does the faculty senate. What we do have is an obligation to speak out to our institution, our system leadership, and those in our overall community when we see injustice, changes in educational direction, or pedagogical practice that are counter to our educational mission or impedes our commitments to it.

This brings me to the resolution at hand. Earlier last week, a special meeting of this body was called after I sent a resolution to the leadership of faculty senate. That resolution made the rounds and was shared with various constituents. Given some feedback from a variety of institutional stakeholders and consultation with other members of faculty senate, that resolution was adjusted to be edited for brevity. The core message of the resolution remains – it is a dangerous thing to open WCU and other institutions in the UNC system amid the pandemic, as there is currently no vaccine and positive cases in the state and country continue to rise.

Some have asked why nothing has been said sooner than last week or today – rest assured that many have been speaking up in opposition to a residential opening. The UNC system has hosted some meetings online where faculty and other members of the institutional community could submit questions prior. Our institution has done the same. Additionally, both have provided opportunity for thoughts and specific responses to be provided in other formats. In many cases these questions posed by attendees have not been answered in satisfactory ways. Further, in the cases where we, the faculty, were asked to give feedback, it was frequently about how we, as faculty, are going to provide a face-to-face instruction given the huge hurdles that would need to be met to do so. These opportunities to speak have left out a very fundamental question. What we have not been asked, despite the shared governance model, is our opinion on the very idea of face-to-face opening.

And so, as the pandemic continues to exist with no vaccine available, we face the start of face-to-face instruction, and many of us are not convinced that this is a good idea. Further, many of us think it is a bad idea. Yes, there are economic reasons to open. Yes, there are students who desire the experience of living with friends and making new ones while earning a college degree. Yes, the institution needs to survive financially. However, the balance of lives in danger for these things to happen are not actually in balance, especially when the UNC System has not answered the repeated question of how many students or employees are acceptable positive cases—or worse, deaths—before a last-minute pivot to online instruction, similar to the one we saw in Spring. University towns across the country where students have returned have realized a lack of adherence to CDC guidelines. News articles and photo journalism pieces show us this in Chapel Hill, NC (home of UNC Chapel Hill), and where I used to live in Athens, GA (home of the University of Georgia). Additionally, intuitions that previously planned to bring back athletics have since cancelled some athletics due to COVID cases amongst athletes being brought back to campus.

While bringing this resolution forward for debate, I acknowledge the repeated messaging from our own administration and the UNC system that individual institutions within the system do not have the authority to move to a fully online instructional format. That decision seems to be a system-level one. Yet, despite the local administration’s inability to do so, it is our responsibility as faculty senate, in the shared governance model in which we operate, to speak up and share our voice. We have a strong history of doing so in both instances where we were asked to do so directly, and in which we have not.

And so, I bring to you this resolution not simply on behalf of myself but many faculty members (some afraid to speak on the matter) across the University who have significant concerns for the health and safety of all members of our campus community as we begin face-to-face classes for Fall 2020.

Again, the draft of this resolution before us today is one that has resulted from voices garnered from a variety of faculty following the dissemination of the first. There has been some good dialogue regarding this version of the resolution in email discussion of faculty senate before this meeting, and I’m sure there will be more in our time together today. I hope that the resulting dialogue allows for a much-needed statement as to how faculty feel about the face-to-face reopening of the institution in Fall 2020, in whatever format that takes.”

**Chancellor Brown** shared that she appreciates the faculty senate’s voice in the resolution and she has a commitment to open communication, transparency, and shared governance. WCU has been thinking strategically about making reopening safely. The plan is positive for the wellbeing of students, faculty, staff, and community. Chancellor Brown communicates regularly with stakeholders and health leaders. We have a plan in place to move forward.

**Interim Provost Starnes** echoed the chancellor's comments on the importance of shared governance and acknowledges that this has definitely been a challenging time as we all transition for fall. WCU gathered strong representation while developing the instructional plan for the fall. He also understands the lingering concerns. No one really knows what the future holds for us, yet we are required to make decisions to allow faculty, staff, parents, and students to plan. We are poised with a good plan for the opening of the semester on Monday.

**SGA President Dawson Spencer** shared the student's perception and its complexity. We had 156 students say no and 159 said yes to face-to-face instruction in the survey that SGA ran. Most students are eager to return to as much normalcy as possible. There are still concerns. We agree, however, that we are safer together when we wear our masks. The university has done their best to address issues. We do have a town hall scheduled tomorrow with Chancellor Brown. Students are ready to get back to normalcy. As long as the expectations in and out of the classroom are clear, we want to follow those. We appreciate the dialogue.

**Patrick Baron** shared that we are dealing with a lot of unknowns. We need to be flexible and adaptable and the plan is as good as it can be in the face of uncertainty. This could go on for a very long period. We need to be adaptable and be able to change to the fluidity of this period. We need to have the most up-to-date information and guidelines based on that information, and we need to be able to adapt the contingency plan and be able to shift things around in real time. The timeline and transmission dynamics are uncertain.

**Staff Senate Chair Ben Pendry** shared that staff senate supports faculty senate in their role of shared governance and their role as a partner. For the staff senate, however, we do not support the resolution as written. The resolution does not support the varying staff views on reopening. The impact of residential opening or non-opening to staff members is very, very different. We are proud of staff and faculty to be able to prepare for us exactly what we need to reopen safely and successfully.

**David de Jong** brought up many points that were outlined in great detail in an email to the senate body prior to this meeting.

Have we thought through how such a statement might be perceived, considering that students are already arriving on campus? I could imagine it being perceived as laudable, but perhaps also as too little too late, or an implied political statement (seems to be a strong correlation between COVID concerns and political orientation, my casual observation only) and little else?

We should take a step back and given this current situation and the audience of the resolution, what is the goal? What are we trying to accomplish here? I think this resolution could be greatly improved upon in light of our goals. I suggest a shift of a statement that we should not open to a more of a statement with steps and blind spots. Offering concrete recommendations. Based on feedback from the department, 6 would not support the resolution and 1 is on the fence.

For example:

1. Apparent lack of transparent, centralized reporting of current COVID cases. Notice the Campus Updates webpage <https://www.wcu.edu/operations-procedures/campus-update.aspx> does not state the cases recently found in athletics. Considering the reports of serious mismanagement (or, misrepresentation) of COVID data elsewhere, this is very concerning to me.

2. Apparent lack of criteria for number of COVID cases, illness, or deaths that will trigger the clearance of campus.

3. Apparent lack of planning for faculty illness and/or death—who is going to cover our classes if/when we get sick, die, or have to quarantine at home, some of us with poor (or no) wifi at home?

Some of this is feedback from others, some gleaned elsewhere, some might be a partial rehash of what I mentioned the other day:

-As seen on the blog’s comments, there is widespread public misunderstanding about this resolution and what it could achieve. Enrique’s emails clarifies many things, including issues around the late timing of this, but some of that important information doesn’t actually appear in the resolution, and perhaps should be added

-Regarding this being a moral statement, it’s not clear what acting as a moral conscience would achieve (especially regarding the timing issue, more on that below). For example, the rationale “because it’s the right thing to do” (not Enrique’s words, someone else’s from earlier) is circular logic, begging the question, and may strike some people as insufficient. Greater clarity may be desired on those things, and what value could be found in a moral statement. At the least, considering the widespread misunderstanding about the function of the resolution, it should be explicitly framed as a moral statement, and clear explanations added regarding the apparent late timing of it

-My casual observation is that attitudes towards COVID seem to fall along political orientation (liberal = Very concerned, shut things down, conservative = less concerned, open things up). If correct, this resolution risks being perceived as little more than a political statement. Are we prepared for that? What would the implications of that be?

-Considering that a switch to remote at some point is inevitable, there may be a risk that a move to remote (with no refunds) was caused by the FS. Or, the resolution could be used to blame faculty when a move to remote (inevitably?) happens. Consider this as a future statement from the UNC BoG: “UNC must switch to remote due to faculty complaints and refusal to teach; No refunds can be provided; Blame the faculty.” Truthfulness of this statement is irrelevant. It could be a highly effective PR strategy. Considering the make-up of the UNC BoG, and the politicization of COVID, this seems a plausible scenario, and might actually be a pretty clever move for the BoG.

-I’d like to stress that there are concerns about the optics of this due to the late timing. Clarification has been offered as to the timing of this (e.g., new developments). However, many people have believed residential opening is a terrible idea for many months, yet the FS was silent through the entire summer. The fact that students have just paid non-refundable fees and have already moved in is going to play a huge role in how this resolution is perceived (and see comments on the blog). The rationale for why this statement comes after move-in and fees paid will have to be very strong.

-We risk the perception of undermining WCU’s preparations, and of investing time and resources into this resolution (moral statement only, no actual effect on fall opening) rather than other issues.

**Vicki Szabo** thanked Yancey for the bravery of bringing this forward. She will vote against this if it comes to a vote. The timing - we don’t have the controls, cleaning supplies. And I want the discussion raised to highlight the practical aspects of what is about to happen next week. We do not have the basic safety measures in place in the office that I am sitting in right now.

**Will Lehman** sent a few friendly amendments to the senate in an email yesterday. For the benefit of those who have not seen the latest iteration of the document, my problem is what I think could be perceived as a lack of good argument. The final sentence says we oppose a residential opening…. There is no evidence presented that the governor of NC would support this resolution, but it could be inferred. We should eliminate reference to the governor. Saying we stand in solidarity with all of those other folks without qualifying that could be addressed by changing the final wording to be more specific. We should call on the legislature to support the many hundreds of jobs on campus should we have to close down again. A friendly amendment is suggested as follows:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the WCU Faculty Senate is gravely concerned about the health and well-being of the Catamount community and those in the region we serve (particularly those from vulnerable populations); thus, we oppose a residential opening for the Fall 2020 semester and stand in solidarity with those School Systems, Faculty Senates, and County Health Departments who have spoken out against face-to-face instruction during this pandemic. We furthermore call on the state legislature to guarantee funding to the UNC system, and financial assistance to affected students, if and when further outbreaks force schools to return to online-only instruction.

**Yancey Gulley** accepted the friendly amendment.

**Laura Wright** thanked everyone for their thoughts around this conversation. In her experience, timing will always be a thing. We have a model where we have a senate chair who serves for a year term and they go out in June and a new one comes in in July. Allowing a conversation in a very public way allows folks to look at faculty governance in a way they may have not looked at it before. Faculty are always perceived to have a privilege. We can also stand up for those who don’t have it. It is worrisome to me and I want to speak to the safety of everyone.

**Leigh Odom** shared that online education will affect their college. We look at readiness of our students in terms of knowledge and skills, but with clinical skills, there are things I cannot do to make sure they are meeting those skills before we send them out to the world to provide care. We need to have interactions with hospitals and the community. Certification, licensure, etc., is a big thing for HHS. Most faculty are willing to go online where it is feasible but there are some courses where it is just not an option. We need flexibility.

**Ben Pendry** commented that from a staff standpoint, so many are in frontline positions, doing the cleaning, etc. We remain concerned about this as well. We are in contact with all of those folks to make sure they have the resources they need to do the jobs that they are doing.

**Niall Michelsen** thanked everyone and their work and appreciated David’s work to change language and he is in support of those changes.

**Enrique Gómez** shared the adjusted resolution on screen and via email.

**David de Jong** shared again that he believes the senate needs to step back, reorganize, and rewrite the resolution. He makes a motion to move the resolution to a taskforce or council in order to give it the attention it deserves. David made the motion to move the resolution to the Faculty Affairs Council to review and bring back to the senate.

**Ian Jeffress** seconded the motion to move the resolution to the FAC.

**Laura Wright** asked again what is the point of tabling this.

**David de Jong** said this would allow us to give this resolution the attention it deserves in a smaller group, more effectively.

**Laura Wright** again shared that she isn’t sure we need to table this.

**Kadence Otto** shared that by granting that motion, it would simply be moving the resolution to FAC to work on it.

**Martin Tanaka** shared that the idea to table this goes around the original idea that Yancey was proposing. A tabling is killing the proposal. We should do the best we can in the time we have and vote on it.

**Yancey Gulley** clarified that we actually have two motions on the floor currently. The resolution was timely in May, March, June, and here we are...it is still timely. Anyone can bring a resolution at any time. I say we call to question the resolution. Anyone else can bring forward another resolution as well at a later date.

**Enrique** **Gómez** shared that we need to clear the motion to refer to a council or not before we can move back to the resolution. Enrique called to question and directed folks to poll everywhere to place their vote on whether or not to send the amended resolution to the FAC.

***Vote proceeded. 9 aye, 18 nay, 1 abstention. The resolution will not move to the FAC for further review.***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Michael | Boatright | No |
| Indrani | Bose | Yes |
| Kristin | Calvert | No |
| Todd | Collins | No |
| David | de Jong | Abstain |
| Heidi | dent | No |
| Heather Mae | Erickson | No |
| Garrett | Fisher | No |
| Mariana | Fisher | Yes |
| Yancey | Gulley | No |
| Ian | Jeffress | Yes |
| Hayrettin | Karayaka | No |
| Marco | Lam | No |
| William | Lehman | No |
| Niall | Michelsen | Yes |
| Sean | Mulholland | No |
| Leigh | Odom | No |
| Matthew | Rave | No |
| Carrie | Rogers | Yes |
| Roya | Scales | Yes |
| Vicki | Szabo | No |
| Elizabeth | Tait | Yes |
| Martin | Tanaka | No |
| Andrew | Virtue | No |
| Elizabeth | Wark | No |
| Cheryl | Waters-Tormey | Yes |
| Laura | Wright | No |
| Jessica | Zellers | Yes |

**Vicki Szabo** asked for the revised version with amendments and Enrique forwarded it along via email.

***Kadence Otto called to question the vote for the amended resolution.***

***Vote proceeded and passed. 15 aye, 13 nay, and 1 abstention.***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Michael | Boatright | Yes |
| Indrani | Bose | Yes |
| Kristin | Calvert | Yes |
| Todd | Collins | No |
| David | de Jong | No |
| Heidi | dent | No |
| Heather Mae | Erickson | Yes |
| Garrett | Fisher | Yes |
| Mariana | Fisher | No |
| Enrique | Gómez | Yes |
| Yancey | Gulley | Yes |
| Ian | Jeffress | No |
| Hayrettin | Karayaka | Yes |
| Marco | Lam | No |
| William | Lehman | Yes |
| Niall | Michelsen | No |
| Sean | Mulholland | No |
| Leigh | Odom | No |
| Matthew | Rave | Yes |
| Carrie | Rogers | Abstain |
| Roya | Scales | No |
| Vicki | Szabo | No |
| Elizabeth | Tait | No |
| Martin | Tanaka | Yes |
| Andrew | Virtue | Yes |
| Elizabeth | Wark | No |
| Cheryl | Waters-Tormey | Yes |
| Laura | Wright | Yes |
| Jessica | Zellers | Yes |

**Yancey Gulley** shared his thoughts and said a thank you to everyone thinking about this. All of our voices are important and thank you for taking the time to use your voice today.

***Enrique Gómez made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Jessica Zellers. Approved.***

**MEETING ADJOURNED 10:21 am**