THE MINUTES OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

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January 22, 2018

Members excused: N. Delich, M. Jenkins, T. Lone, J. Mullooly, M. Schettler, B. Singh, A.M. Tawfik

Members absent: P. Adams, M. Golden, R. Maldonado, P.L. Martinez (ASI), K. Mcbee, M. Raheem, W. Wu

The Academic Senate was called to order by Chair Holyoke at 4:01pm in HML 2206.

1. Approval of the agenda

MSC approving the agenda

1. Approval of the Minutes of December 4, 2017.

MSC approving the Minutes of December 4, 2017

1. Communications and announcements
   1. Provost Zelezny

The Provost wished the Senate a happy new year.

The Provost additionally stated that she had no position on the student evaluations matter being discussed by the Senate at this meeting, but was eager to hear the discussion and dialog before moving forward on an option.

1. New business

Chair Holyoke asked unanimous consent for Senator Neil Chowdhury (Art & Design) to vote on behalf of his department pending a new election held by his department. Senator Chowdhury was serving in the role ex officio when Vice Chair Durette was in office. There was no objection raised to Chair Holyoke’s proposal.

1. Consideration of student evaluations

Chair Holyoke provided background to the options being presented to the Senate at this meeting. The previous transition to IDEA center was a process involving three years of action. The campus contract with IDEA is approaching its end. The Senate liaison previously led a task force of faculty to evaluate perspectives about IDEA through surveys. There was not a very robust response rate, but overall faculty who responded expressed displeasure with IDEA for a variety of reasons. While the Provost will make the final decision on the system that will be adopted, it was worthwhile to have the Senate make its opinion known.

The choice before the Senate was twofold. Option 1 would be to send out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for vendor, who would have to comply with existing APM requirements. The APM requires a bank of questions faculty can choose from.

The second option would be taking the student evaluation system in house. Dr. Xuanning Fu, interim director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), had previously expressed interest in developing internal online system. IDEA would also be online, as would probably any other vendor.

The intention would be to create a faculty task force to come up with the questions. Faculty would develop the bank of questions, and Chair Holyoke had already reached out to other CSUs to ask for questions. They have already provided some. San Jose State is reportedly in the process of analyzing their questions so that experience could be drawn upon. Fresno State would therefore wouldn’t be starting completely from scratch. Under this option, a faculty task force would also have to come up with best practices for administering surveys to maximize student response rate. So far, response rate for some online evaluations has been concerning. Specific wording for the internal and external options were shown to the Senate.

Senator Brady (Earth & Environmental Sciences) asked whether an RFP could be sent out while OIE also put in a bid to maximize the options from which the senate could choose.

Dr. Fu (OIE) responded that OIE would not be involved with an external option. If outside vendors bid, OIE would not be involved.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) clarified that Senator Brady was asking whether the university could include OIE in the bidding process while also comparing external vendors.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated OIE can look at the technical implementation, but OIE would not be in a position to evaluate competing systems. That would be up to the faculty.

Senator Bryant (Universitywide) asked if we went with the internal option would allow for the development of discipline-specific questions, or whether all questions would be campus-wide.

Chair Holyoke clarified that the APM does not authorize campus-wide questions at this time. A policy change would be required.

Senator Brady (Earth & Environmental Sciences) stated that faculty can already ask additional questions on the IDEA form and have a degree of control over what data is collected. Additionally, she asked whether the faculty task force could develop its own option while the senate also took proposals from outside vendors and compared the options.

Chair Holyoke responded that timing is a pressing issue. The contract with IDEA ends in the spring 2018 semester. The university needs a new system in place for fall 2018.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that there is some sentiment against in-house option. The survey of faculty feedback was not a representative sample, so the university does not know what faculty think overall. IDEA has been tested and been around for decades. Some faculty have also expressed reluctance to take student evaluations online, which OIE would have to do if given the charge to implement a new system.

Dr. Fu (OIE) additionally clarified that OIE used to handle evaluations on paper. OIE has that experience and if the system is taken online there is existing technical expertise. However, OIE cannot be part of the instrument design. OIE is a technical implementation arm only.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that the paper version of IDEA is going to disappear in a short time regardless. The online option offers a number of benefits, but there are also some technical shortcomings. At this time OIE cannot allow individual faculty specific start time and end times, it can only do it for a range of days. There is no way to do specific times within those days.

Senator Brady (Earth & Environmental Sciences) asked if faculty could decide to only open the system for a specific period during the semester.

Dr. Fu (OIE) introduced Chris Hernandez (OIE) and Matthew Zivot (Assoicate Director, OIE) to discuss technical aspects of the proposed implementation.

Chris Hernandez (OIE) stated that student rating open and closing times would set it for the entire campus and could not be separated for individual faculty.

Dr. Fu (OIE) clarified that faculty could work around this in Blackboard by only making the link available for a certain time, even though the link in the OIE central system would be active all the time.

Senator Karr (Music) asked what student rating numbers are being used for, and how that should be factored into the senate’s decision. If student ratings are being used in tenure decisions, how faculty committees use and interpret the numbers is important. IDEA has a nation-wide database to benchmark. In some disciplines it may be difficult to compare even within departments.

Senator Jones (Communication) expressed departmental concern about how the switch would play out technologically with the internal option. Faculty would not be able to see the raw data so there might be no way to know if a radical outlier was present. The department also expressed concerns about IDEA requiring the university to purchase a new dashboard. Finally, there were questions raised about data security and how the data would be housed securely with the internal option.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that data storage methods would be a matter for the Academic Senate.

Chair Holyoke added that the APM states the data must be housed in the Senate office. Currently all the documents are held in the Senate office.

Matthew Zivot (OIE) that that from a technical standpoint, it could be feasible to have the raw data be available to faculty.

Senator Ram (Universitywide) asked what software would be used in the internal implementation.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that the campus would use Qualtrics, linked to Blackboard.

Senator Ram (Universitywide) asked what the internal option would cost the campus.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated there would be no additional cost to the campus since Qualtrics and Blackboard are already in use.

Senator Chowdhury (Art & Design) stated that his department colleagues have a problem with IDEA not measuring what is being done in Art & Design. The prevailing view is that the system is geared toward writing/reading, not visual art. The department wants the ability to develop its own questions and is not sure an outside vendor would have that opportunity.

Senator Gilewicz (English) stated that she had received a feedback from faculty member who worked at another university that when that university’s system was taken online the student participation fell and more disgruntled students left feedback. Senator Gilewicz inquired whether there would be a system in place to incentivize student participation, and also what the overall costs associated with the internal option might be.

Dr. Fu (OIE) answered that faculty could designate a time in class to do the evaluations. OIE could make it possible to complete evaluations from phones and other mobile devices. Dr. Fu reiterated that there would be no additional software costs with the internal option, but there might be some increase in staff time associated with getting the implementation up and running. In addition, the current cost of IDEA is approximately $60,000 a year. The internal option might also require purchasing a new server, but predicting exact costs is difficult.

Senator Sullivan (Sociology) asked whether any RFPs might still offer a paper option.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that the campus had only looked at online options. Chair Holyoke added that most CSUs have been going online, though CSU Bakersfield still uses a paper system.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) asked if results would still be separated by class under the internal option, and whether qualitative responses could still be collected from students.

Dr. Fu (OIE) answered affirmatively to both questions.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) asked whether the Provost had a clear idea of what IDEA and other vendors might cost the campus in the future.

The Provost stated that the campus would have to go through the RFP process to obtain that information.

Senator Bryant (Universitywide) asked whether new staff would be needed in OIE to complete the internal implementation.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that additional staff time would probably be required to get the internal implementation up and running, but would probably decline after the system was operating. Chris Hernandez (OIE) added that since the campus had never implemented this type of system before, it was difficult to predict exact staffing requirements. However, from experience most of the work comes with setting up the initial implementation.

Senator Dangi (Geography and City and Regional Planning) asked whether the internal option would allow for the development and use of discipline-specific questions.

Chair Holyoke stated that this would be a matter for the faculty task force to decide.

Senator Dangi (Geography and City and Regional Planning) asked if the adoption of a new system would require the development of new standards for tenure and promotion.

Chair Holyoke answered that this matter would have to be examined.

Senator Alexandrou (Industrial Technology) offered the Senate some historical background and stated that the campus went to IDEA because it was taking so long to get evaluations back. He added that it is important to have validity and reliability. If the campus adopts a new instrument it would be critical to offer a base set of questions to choose from so we know they’re reliable and valid. This process might take years. Senator Alexandrou concluded that moving to an internal instrument is risky and might lead to grievances being filed by faculty members.

Chair Holyoke clarified that the APM does state that the questions be deemed reliable.

Senator Lewis (Kinesiology) added to the historical background and stated that she had been on the committee that originally chose IDEA. The committee looked at other vendors at that time. There was a vendor who had greater flexibility in the questions, but they were not able to bring forth the data desired by the committee in the time frame required. Senator Lewis expressed concern about the costs for OIE, especially if new staff were to be required. Senator Lewis stated she was not prepared to vote on the matter, but would like to see a task force examine the internal option and also look at the RFPs.

Chair Holyoke stated that the Senate needed to take the vote now so the campus could get moving on whatever option was chosen. If the internal option were chosen, OIE would pilot something during the spring 2018 semester and fully implement a new system in fall.

Senator Kim (Economics) expressed her department’s will to learn more about external vendors before choosing an option. Senator Kim additionally asked how long a new contract with IDEA would run.

Dr. Fu (OIE) and Chair Holyoke stated they did not know how long a new contract would run at this time.

Senator Karr (Music expressed concern about how student evaluations have been linked to the tenure and promotion process. He stated that he was not comfortable being asked to vote on this matter without knowing more about the internal and external options.

Senator Youn (Biology) stated that department faculty had expressed concerns with moving the system online, and asked whether there would be ways to incentivize student participation.

Chair Holyoke answered that this would be a matter for the task force to consider.

Senator Sanmartin (Modern & Classical Languages & Literatures) asked whether one solution might be to prevent students from seeing their grades until they have completed a course evaluation.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that this was not a purely technical question, so there is no easy answer. He added that OIE would not compete against an external vendor but was ready to provide the service to the campus. He added that faculty satisfaction would be OIE’s most important consideration.

Senator Ram (Universitywide) stated that there are advantages of adopting an online option. Student ratings would hopefully be returned to faculty much more quickly. Additionally, Senator Ram asked when a final decision needs to be made, and whether faculty would write their own questions or choose from a bank of pre-written questions.

Chair Holyoke clarified that the decision needs to be made quickly because the IDEA contract runs out at the end of the spring 2018 semester.

Chris Hernandez (OIE) answered that allowing faculty to write their own questions or choose from a bank of questions would complicate the system dramatically and perhaps delay implementation.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) asked whether the Senate could be given additional time to consider its decision. Additionally, Senator Kensinger inquired why some CSU campuses had decided to keep their systems in-house, while others chose to go with vendors. Finally, Senator Kensinger asked what the implications might be for both campus and department policies due to changing systems.

Dr. Fu (OIE) stated that if the internal option were to be chosen, OIE would need to get started creating a pilot implementation quickly.

Chair Holyoke stated that CSU Bakersfield had reported that the campus in-house paper system works well, and the campus had rejected IDEA because they wanted to keep it in-house. However, CSU San Diego went online because they were having data security issues with a paper system.

Chair Holyoke added that the Senate would potentially have to revisit the APM if a new system were to be adopted.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) stated that department policies were built around the IDEA numbers so it may be desirable to keep the same numeric range IDEA uses so departments are not forced to revise their internal policies. Senator Kensinger added that every probationary plan might need to be amended if a new system were chosen.

Chair Holyoke answered that he would advise the faculty task force would be to keep the range in place so department policies would not have to immediately change.

Senator Brady (Earth & Environmental Sciences) stated that her department is not comfortable voting on an option without knowing more details about the internal option.

Senator Nisbett (Recreation Administration) expressed concern about the expertise of faculty on the task force, and added that questions would need to be developed that speak to all disciplines and modes of course delivery.

Senator Van Camp (Criminology) expressed concern over not having access to the raw data and asked whether cross-campus comparison of student rating is necessary.

Senator Bryant (Universitywide) stated that campus human subjects policy forbids offering an academic reward for participation, suggesting that faculty could not force students to take part and could not offer extra credit for completing course evaluation. Senator Bryant asked the provost if the campus could negotiate a one-year extension with IDEA.

The Provost responded that she would contact Procurement to ask about this possibility.

Senator Chowdhury (Art & Design) stated that the Senate does not have enough information at the present time to make an informed decision.

Senator Ram (Universitywide) asked if there is any downside to asking for an extension but also putting out a RFP so the Senate can compare a full range options.

Chair Holyoke suggested the Senate determine whether IDEA is willing to grant a contract extension before moving forward with the RFP or any other action.

Senator Botwin (Psychology) moved that the Senate hold a second special meeting on Monday, January 29, 2018, to consider the question further.

Motion was seconded.

Senator Kensinger (Women’s Studies) spoke in favor of the motion and encouraged to provost to obtain more information about the various options by the next meeting. The Provost answered that she would do so.

The motion was approved (1-nay).

The Academic Senate adjourned at 5:15pm. The next meeting of the Academic Senate will be on Monday, January 29, 2018.

Submitted by Approved by

Bradley Hart Thomas Holyoke

Vice Chair Chair

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