THE MINUTES OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE (AS-12)

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

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Office of the Academic Senate

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March 22, 2021

Members excused: L. Herrera, Y. Luo

Members absent: L. Brillante, J. Crane, A. Culbertson, S. Laha, B. Mason, N. Smith, B. Taylor

The Academic Senate was called to order by Chair Holyoke at 4:01 p.m. via Zoom video conferencing.

1. Approval of the Agenda.

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1. Approval of the Minutes of 3/15/2021

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1. Communications and Announcements:

Interim President Jiménez-Sandoval shared a published letter in the Fresno Bee in which he described the dedication and degree of effort made by our campus community during the pandemic thus far, and he commended us all. He also described a new partnership with Valley Children’s Hospital to help with our goal to get 500 faculty vaccinated per day, and then move to getting vaccines to our students at 500 per day. He briefly described aspects of how HEERF funding will be allocated, and that some of the money will come to campus for our own COVID-related needs and expenses, and he emphasized that a transparent and consultative process will be used to distribute these funds. Finally he updated the Senate on commencement planning, that it is coming along pretty well, and will involve college level in-person ceremonies but, unfortunately, we will not hold affinity group ceremonies this year due to a lack of available resources.

Senator Herrera (Chicano and Latin American Studies) expressed her concern that some pandemic related funding should be used to support tenure track faculty parents (and care-givers), as there are many that are a year behind where they should be professionally due to these obligations. She inquired if any funds will be directed in this area. The President described some limitations imposed by our CBA and other negotiations that limit directing these funds in this way, but he is open to suggestions on how best to help, specifically at the department level, and that he will consult and canvas the college Deans on this matter.

Senator Walter (Biology) inquired about what the term “COVID-specific” meant in terms of directing pandemic funding. The President described some examples in reply, that we know students have lost a lot of lab time, so a “lab boot camp” might be a way to build skills and catch up, and pandemic funding could pay for that. However, these funds cannot be used on deferred maintenance or toward any need identified prior to the COVID crisis.

Senator Walter (Biology) asked if we have any plans to allow traditional hooding of graduate students at graduation ceremonies that would mean a lot to our students. The President told us that this is still being worked on, but that it is a priority.

Senator Parra (Accountancy) inquired if pandemic funding could give ongoing support to resources such as virtual labs, video application software, and other online modalities proven to be very helpful to our students. The President stated that these specific programs and software elements would qualify.

Interim Provost Fu made no announcements, but invited questions.

Senator Pooya (Food Science and Nutrition) expressed concern and asked how we can guarantee the safety of faculty and students, especially in large classroom environments, if we return partially or in full to in-person teaching in Fall 2021. She also inquired about how we can capitalize on all the virtual and hybrid developments made so far to address workload issues. The Provost described the basic plan that if the health guidelines limit face to face instruction, we will move down the list of prioritized classes moving some to virtual mode. In terms of safety, he noted that we can look at the track record for face to face classes for both semesters during the pandemic, and that we have not had a single active case coming from a classroom session so far. He emphasized that safety is foremost above all, including student success. In addressing the second question he told the Senate that we will take advantage of what we have learned about these new modalities and continue to use them where best suited.

Senator Kim (Economics) inquired about the needed survey of faculty, described that that faculty are waiting and eager to see the survey results, and expressed concern that it might be too late to act on the results if we don’t act soon. Second, it was noted that classrooms are allocated to full capacity in the current schedule. If social distancing is mandated, how will we address the reduction in class size, and will such a mandate severely impact students? The Provost stated that he shares the concern about a timely survey, yet conditions change so quickly that our questions became out of date before we finalized the survey. He stated a revised survey will go out soon and it will be useful.

Senator Parra (Accountancy) asked if there is sufficient funding to reduce the faculty/student ratio per class to allow for 3 or 6 feet social distancing if needed. The Provost stated that the CARES act does address this need, so rooms and additional sections will be attempted and tailored to the needs of each college. However the task is more limited by space than funding, as a 3 feet social distancing would mean an almost 50% reduction in course enrollment.

Senator Jakobs (Nursing) expressed her concern about getting this survey out sooner rather than later, so we can assess how our faculty are feeling. The Provost thanked her for her statement and agreed with her.

Senator Maldonado (Philosophy) inquired that if faculty will not be forced to come to campus as previously stated, why can’t we now allocate classrooms with this in mind, as this would help open up seats for the remaining face-to-face classes, if needed. The Provost stated that we are awaiting health guidelines, and then from there we will assess which courses need to be in-person with priority to student success. He shared details of a potential classification scheme of how the decisions might be made, mostly by learning outcomes, including accreditation needs, mentoring needs (musical instruments, glass blowing), and student success (freshmen courses- we lost 10% of our freshmen, a serious retention issue and English is the roadblock), and campus engagement (at least one course per student should be face to face). So we are not yet considering the abilities of faculty to teach in person, but we will address this after we receive the needed health guidelines.

Senator Hooshmandrad (Music) noted that numbers and stats are important in making decisions for the Fall semester, however it is also important to think and talk about the experience of faculty with different class modalities, and noted further that faculty can teach online if they have the training. She stated that she is not advocating for an online school, not at all, but the Fall would go smoother if department chairs would be allowed to make these choices now (virtual vs in-person). She read a statement from the music faculty that the expressed concern about needing to require vaccine status before allowing face to face attendance. The Provost reiterated that the prioritization of courses that need to be offered face to face will address some of these concerns, and that decision making has started with departments to create this list. He emphasized that without health guidelines our process is stalled.

Senator Walter (Biology) asked how we know that the issue with freshman success was due to online modalities and not some other issue. The Provost said that although we cannot establish causation, we have a very strong correlation, and that other student populations (seniors, juniors, etc.) did not see this negative effect under similar situations. He also pointed to dorm students v. other populations that support this hypothesis. Senator Walter asked if faculty can have access to the data, to allow us to take it back to our departments to discuss and investigate the correlation described. The Provost said that he will have to check with OIE for the BIOL 10 data.

Senator Ram (University Wide) asked if is there a specific percentage of classes that need to meet face to face. The Provost said that if the need arises he anticipates a disciplinary difference in needs, so this is a very hard question to answer. Senator Ram asked if there is an accreditation percentage we must meet. The Provost told the Senate that WASC will give a waiver for this point for the Fall if needed. Senator Ram noted that it’s possible we will not need social distancing in the Fall, but if social distancing is needed, Chairs will need to find instructors for a number of extra sections. The Provost recognized the situation could involve much effort and that we are all in this together, and we will do our best once we receive the needed health guidelines.

Senator De Walt (Liberal Studies) expressed concern that we will need more than two weeks to change or update our modality, and he hopes that this will be considered. He also asked what the procedure for adding new sections will be if social distancing is mandated. The Provost noted that the default is teaching in-person, and we are all trained for that, and if we must again go to virtual teaching we can draw upon our recently developed skills. To the second question, he said we just won’t know until we have the needed health guidelines.

Senator Jenkins (Statewide) asked why we can’t ask for vaccine status if K-12 schools and Airlines can, and the legal basis that prevents us from asking. The Provost said that he will need to investigate before he can address this question.

1. New Business.

none

1. APM 241 –Proposed Changes. GE Assessment Subcommittee. Second Reading.

No Senators engaged discussion.

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1. APM 335 – Policy on Periodic Review of Academic Administrators. Personnel Committee. Second Reading.

No Senators engaged discussion.

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1. Resolution Protecting Fair Workload for Faculty at CSU, Fresno – Michael Jenkins. Second Reading.

No Senators engaged discussion.

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The Academic Senate adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

The next meeting of the Academic Senate will be April 5, 2021.

Submitted by Approved by

Raymond Hall Thomas Holyoke

Vice Chair Chair

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