

Report from Faculty Senate

Brandon Dupont

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Dear Trustees,

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the work of the Faculty Senate since the last time we met in April. In this final report of the academic year, I summarize the main actions taken by the Faculty Senate over the past couple of months.

I will begin with some Senate staff updates. Not long after Lysa Rivera went on compassionate leave as Faculty Senate President, Lizzy Ramhorst, our Shared Governance Operations Manager, also unexpectedly went on personal leave. Thanks to the hard work of our Senate Executive Council and others, we have managed to keep things moving forward, even if less robustly than we otherwise would have. On a positive note, Abby Peterson was recently hired as a graduate student assistant in the Faculty Senate office. She has thus far produced excellent minutes for the Faculty Senate, UPRC, and ACC. This alone is an important step in the right direction, but we are in the process of hiring long-needed permanent staff for the Senate office including a Curricular Analyst and a Records and Communications Specialist. We hope to have these new staff members in place before the start of the academic year.

At its April 17 meeting, the Senate approved a revision to the Outstanding Graduate Policy that we believe clarifies the policy while allowing majors with larger numbers of students to select more than one outstanding graduate. The revised policy allows for an outstanding graduate to be selected for each major, as opposed to the old policy which allowed an award from each department rather than for each major. The new policy also extends this honor to graduate students. We believe these are important improvements to the process for formally recognizing the university's top students.

After consultation with Shelli Soto, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Faculty Senate voted at its May 1 meeting to eliminate the Z-grade from the university grading policies and procedures. The Z-grade was originally intended to indicate failure due to nonattendance, but this specific reason for failing a class was only meaningful as an internal indication of nonattendance for financial aid purposes. However, it was included on external transcripts, a practice that had no parallels at any other Washington public baccalaureate institutions. Additionally, it was apparent that some faculty were not appropriately using the Z grade. With the introduction of a new version of Banner in the fall quarter, the university will now have a way to manage the administrative need for information regarding unofficial withdrawal without using a grade to record the information.

At our final meeting on May 30, the Senate approved the recommendations of our ad hoc committee on course evaluations. We will be using their recommended evaluation questions beginning in the Fall 2023 quarter. The core questions, which will appear on evaluations for all the different class types, were guided by the following key principles:

- *The evaluation forms should consist of questions that target research-based pedagogies and practices that support student learning and belongingness.*
- *Questions should emphasize, to the extent possible, students' perceptions of their learning experience and **not** the instructor's teaching practices.*
- *Questions should be transferable across all disciplines.*
- *Questions should center the individual student's perspective so the respondent is speaking for him/her/themselves and not for all students.*
- *Questions should help instructors understand **how** teaching is working/not working.*
- *Questions should be applicable to both majors and non-majors.*

These core questions will be accompanied by form type questions which vary based on the type of class (lectures, labs, studio classes, etc.).

The Senate also received year-end reports from ACC and UPRC at its final meeting. The ACC has done the challenging work of curricular approvals and policy throughout the year, particularly as it tries to deal with the variety of new course modalities. And UPRC has met regularly throughout the quarter, engaging in several important discussions about the budget cuts announced earlier this year. UPRC continues to discuss what role it has in the new strategic budgeting framework and how it should function given the new University Budget Committee. We also got an update about the important work of the new Strategic Enrollment Management process.

I should also note that the Senate Executive Council actively participated in the recent dean searches for CHSS, CBE, and the Western Libraries. A core group of us from the Senate Executive Council met, along with our colleagues from the UFWW Executive Council, with all twelve candidates across the three colleges. We are looking forward to working with these new leaders over the coming academic year and beyond.

As I look forward to the next academic year, there are a few key things on which I am focused. My highest priority is to reconstitute the standing committee structure of the Senate. Some of the Senate's standing committees unfortunately fell victim to the Covid-19 pandemic and simply stopped meeting. But, as I am sure you will agree, the robust shared governance structure that we all value requires an active and engaged Senate, which can only operate when its committee structure is functioning at full capacity. I will soon meet with Madeline Kelly, Interim Dean of the Libraries, and Mark Neff (former chair of the committee) to discuss how best to reconstitute the Senate Libraries Committee. I have also recently communicated with others who have been

part of the Academic Technology Committee about getting that group up and running again. My goal is to have the standing committees meeting regularly and reporting to the Faculty Senate in the Fall 2023 quarter.

Another key priority is to form an ad hoc committee to be charged with reviewing the Faculty Handbook and proposing revisions to the Board of Trustees. There are several issues motivating this work. The Board of Trustees has asked that the Faculty Senate no longer require approval for certain handbook revisions, so we need to look at those issues and decide how to proceed. There are also many “housekeeping” tasks that need to be undertaken. The handbook has not been updated since 2008 and overlaps in some areas with the Collective Bargaining Agreement. There are also some policies and practices in the Faculty Senate bylaws (Appendix 1) that no longer reflect how the Senate functions.

We should also continue conversations that only recently started in the Faculty Senate about the College in the High School program. There are mixed views about this program, but however we decide to proceed, I am committed to ensuring that the faculty play a key role in the process.

We therefore have a lot of important work in front of us, so I am pleased to report that there are several new members of Senate leadership who will bring wisdom, experience, and good judgment to these and other issues next year. Camilo Ponton (Department of Geology) and Shevell Thibou (Libraries) will be joining the Senate Executive Council, in the roles of Secretary and Elections & Appointments officer, respectively. I am excited to announce that Amites Sarkar (Department of Mathematics) has been elected as Vice President and President-Elect. Amites has been a faculty member since 2007 and has prior experience on the Senate and Senate Executive Council. I am confident that he will be a thoughtful and effective leader of the Senate.

On behalf of the university faculty, I want to thank the Board of Trustees for your work this year and I look forward to working with you in the year to come.

Thank you,

Brandon Dupont