TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FROM: Brandon Dupont, Faculty Senate President
DATE: June 14, 2024
SUBJECT: Faculty Senate Report
PURPOSE: Information Item

Purpose of Submittal:

Faculty Senate President Brandon Dupont will present brief reflections on faculty issues of interest to the Board.
Faculty Senate Report to Board of Trustees

June 14, 2024

Dear Trustees,

In this final report for the 2023-24 academic year, I have summarized what I see as the key work of the Faculty Senate this year.

As we began the year in September, the Faculty Senate office needed significant restructuring. We had two standing committees that had not met since 2018, and minutes of our meetings were not being produced. Fortunately, we were able to make significant structural changes that I believe will have long-term positive impacts in supporting the Senate and its important role in shared governance.

In December, we hired a new Faculty Senate Specialist Becky Johnston who has done exceptional work on behalf of the Senate over the five short (but eventful!) months since she joined the WWU community. Becky has taken the lead in improving communication with the colleges, the Senate standing committees, and the full Senate. She has also been a trusted and valued advisor for me as we navigated the events of the past several months. We have also had valuable support from Abby Peterson, a graduate student who has done excellent work producing minutes for meetings of the Faculty Senate and ACC.

We have also successfully revitalized two important standing committees of the Senate that had not met for several years. As I pointed out in my first report to you for this academic year, the Senate could not effectively do its work with two of our five standing committees not functioning.

The Senate Outreach and Continuing Education (OCE) Committee was reconstituted in the fall quarter and has been meeting throughout the academic year. The OCE committee is charged with the following important tasks:

- Provides advice on current and future policies, procedures, and programs offered or considered by or through Extended Education to the Senate and relevant committees
- Discusses ideas about Outreach and Continuing Education programs
- Reviews and assesses the activities and direction of Outreach and Continuing Education
- Reports annually during the winter term to the Faculty Senate and ACC the following:
− the mission and budget of Outreach and Continuing Education
− programs run through Outreach and Continuing Education
− students served during the previous academic year, including summer term
− the number of undergraduate and graduate courses offered for credit during the previous academic year, broken up by program, site, mode of delivery, and type of faculty (NTT or T/TT)

The Senate Library Committee (SLC) was also reconstituted in the fall quarter and has also been meeting through the academic year. The SLC committee is charged with the following important tasks:

- Reviews documents provided by the Dean of Libraries
- Provides advice on current and future policies and procedures relating to the library’s collections, services, facilities and budget
- Introduces the Dean of Libraries to the opinions and sentiments of the faculty at large
- Assists, by way of recommendations, the development of library collections to improve levels of information literacy and research for faculty, students, and staff

We have also worked to improve communication with faculty across campus and with college and university leadership. We have worked on the following specific improvement to our communications:

- Clearer and more regular communication with college faculty governance bodies, especially on elections procedures.
- Regular blog posts that are distributed to campus.
- Occasional emails to all faculty with important information and reminders.
- New quarterly meetings (along with the UFWW president) with the Council of Deans.
- New and vastly improved Faculty Senate website with important resources for faculty (thanks to Jamie Lawson and Becky Johnston for the work on this).

The Senate restructured the UPRC this year, opting to replace that committee with a Budget Representative and a Deputy Budget Representative, both of whom will sit on the University Budget Committee and report regularly to the Faculty Senate (and our Executive Council). The full rollout of this structure will not happen until the fall quarter, but we are optimistic that it will help pull key budget-related discussions into the Senate Exec and into the full Faculty Senate as needed.
The Faculty Senate-sponsored forum on Academic Freedom and Free Expression was our first venture into what I hope is an ongoing series of campus-wide events like this. As I described in greater detail in my April report, we had an engaging discussion with Dr. Jennifer Ruth (Portland State University) and Dr. Thomas Merrill (American University) on the differences between free expression and academic freedom, and the ways that the American University Faculty Senate developed specific approaches to supporting these principles.

While we have a little more work to do, we made considerable progress revising the Faculty Handbook this year. Our ad hoc committee met regularly throughout the year and the full Senate approved a new preface, a new constitution, and the bulk of our bylaws.

As a reminder, the committee has proposed a new organization for the Faculty Handbook that we believe will make it a more useful reference for faculty. The new organization will be as follows:

Preface: Based on Current Handbook

Section 1: Constitution & Bylaws of Faculty Senate & Senate Standing Committees

Section 2: Statement on Academic Freedom

Section 3: Code of Faculty Ethics

The ad hoc committee will continue its work and we expect to complete the remaining sections on academic freedom (Section 2) and our code of faculty ethics (Section 3) in the fall quarter. I anticipate that the fully revised handbook will be presented to you for approval at the December 2024 meeting.

***

Our standing committees have done excellent work throughout the academic year.

The Academic Coordination Commission (ACC), chaired by Kristi Tyran, had a busy year approving 875 curriculum proposals via Curriculog (Western’s curriculum management software tool). The number jumps to 1,008 total if large-scale memo approvals are included, a 37% increase over the 2022-23 academic year. ACC averaged 59.3 curriculum approvals every two weeks (15 meetings) from October through May. As noted in its year-end report to the Faculty, Senate, “Throughout this process, the ACC discussed how to improve the Policy on Credit Hours and how to provide additional guidance to meet the accreditation and Federal regulatory requirements regarding Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI). The resulting Policy revision
and additional RSI Guidance Document were solidly based on our experience with the 166 alternate modality proposals approved during the year.”

The Academic Technology Committee (ATC), chaired by Derek Moscato, has been focused on Artificial Intelligence and recommendations for the Student Technology Fee. Thanks to support from the university and colleges, and the hard work of ATC members from prior committees, ATLAS.ti was rolled out for the Western community in 2022. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative research tool that can be used for coding and analyzing transcripts & field notes, building literature reviews, creating network diagrams, and data visualization.

The Senate Outreach and Continuing Education Committee (SOEC), chaired by Jennifer Seltz, has worked on the College in the High School program, and issues around the non-credit certificate partnerships programs offered through OCE. They also revised their bylaws as part of our broader work to update the Faculty Handbook. Their full year-end report to the Faculty Senate is available online.

The Senate Library Committee (SLC), chaired by Blanca Aranda and then by Eva Gil, worked on a faculty survey focused on three thematic areas:

   (1) Support Resources: Research & Writing Studio/Tutoring Center; AI Issues/Concerns; Copyright; Faculty Retreat/Programming; Budget
   (2) Collections: Access; Awareness; Budget
   (3) Communications: Targeted outreach to departments; General information sharing

The final year-end report of the SLC was delayed due to the WAWU strike.

***

Finally, the Senate has had several discussions about the WAWU strike and the protest/encampment. The difficult issues around the encampment have highlighted for me and many of my colleagues the work we have before us to build a vibrant university community that welcomes diverse perspectives and teaches our students to do so rather than trying to isolate from those with whom they disagree. I hope that we can embrace the foundational values of viewpoint diversity and respectful disagreement as we move into the next academic year and beyond. I also hope we can recommit to the values of academic freedom, which is a core responsibility of the university.

***

I end my final report as Faculty Senate president by thanking you for the work you do on behalf of the university and for your attention to the issues that come before the Faculty Senate. Dr. Michael Slouber will begin his term after the June commencement and will be meeting with you
on behalf of the Senate throughout the 2024-25 academic year. The Faculty Senate will certainly be in good hands as Dr. Slouber has already proven to be a thoughtful leader of the Senate throughout this year as Vice President.

Sincerely,

Brandon Dupont
Faculty Senate President