

New College of Florida Faculty Meeting
Wednesday, February 28, 2024
Sudakoff

Recorded Attendance:

Faculty: Barton, Bauer, Black, Brain, Brion, Bucklin, Carrasco, Clark, Clore, Cooper, Cottrell, Edidin, Ellis, Fennie, Flakne, Gilchrist, Gillman, Gorup, Hernandez, Hicks, Khmeraj, Klingenberg, Kottke, Loconte, Maass, McDonald, Mullins, Myhill, Nemarich, Page, Pederson, Portugal, Reid, Reilly, Rohrbacher, Ruppeiner, Rycyk, Sharifian, Serban, Skripnikov, Sutherland, Thompson, Toro-Farmer, Vesperi, Walstrom, Wells, Wyman, Yilidirim, Zambrano, Zhang

Staff and Guests: Coley, Harvey, Hausinger, Lopez-Zafra, Miller, Noss, Santoro, Tellechea, Thiessen, Velasquez, Wen, Worthly

The meeting was called to order at 12:35 PM, Alberto Portugal serving as Chair.

Introductory remarks

- Alberto Portugal: This emergency meeting of the faculty was called in response to recent announcements by the administration regarding the mission of the College and the position of provost at the College. The purpose of the meeting is to get a sense of where we stand as a faculty and where we are going. Many thanks to Jeff, Naomi and the technical staff who pulled things together on short notice to make this meeting possible.

Item 1a: The faculty response to the appointment of David Rancourt to the position of Interim Provost.

- Chris Kottke: A group of faculty members has drafted a response to the appointment of David Rancourt to the position of Interim Provost.
 - The statement was projected for all to read.
- Chris Kottke: The provost is an academic position. We do not believe that David Rancourt is qualified for the job.
- Discussion:
 - Pat McDonald: There is a serious problem that will affect not only the faculty who remain, but faculty who may be contemplating joining us. In order to recruit serious scholars, we must be able to assure them that their scholarship and teaching will be evaluated by individuals capable of making informed decisions. We are not an anomaly in this regard: every academic institution operates under the same promise. The provost evaluates teaching and scholarship. David Rancourt is qualified to do neither and we will lose faculty and not be able to attract serious scholars if he remains in the position.
 - Katie Walstrom: There is language in the faculty handbook on provost qualifications. We need such language elsewhere.

- Aron Edidin: Pat's point is very important. I add that the provost's office is essential as a communication link for the proper functioning of the college. We need to strengthen the provost's office.
- Nova Myhill: I want to second Katie's comments on norms in the field. It is essential that we address the problem if we are to draw scholars to NCF. Also, challenges with SB 266 will be difficult to address without expertise in the office of provost to address them.
- David Gillman: We have had an interim provost and the president did not let him do his job. We need to point to other places to make the case that there are key problems that cannot be addressed without a qualified academic provost.
- Maria Vesperi: I want to point out that staff from The Catalyst are here because there is no other access to information.
- Amy Clore: The administration wants to move in an unconventional direction. I second Nova's comments on the skills required.
- Vlad Serban: I second David's comments. To improve standards and enrollment we need an academic provost.
- Tarron Khmeraj: I grew up under a dictatorship. What is happening here reminds me of what happened then. There is more favoritism here than there was when I was in Guyana. We must communicate directly with the trustees.
- Alberto Portugal: We will address this later, but for now we are discussing where we stand on the issue of the provost.
- Barbara Hicks: I second David Gillman's comments. Also, Adam Levine of the BOG, in addressing our BOT, mentioned that there should be no direct involvement in hiring. Well-functioning institutions have local autonomy. We don't have that with the current hire.
- Chris Kottke: There are faculty interested in drafting a resolution.
- David Gillman: Before drafting something, we need to understand who the audience is and what is the purpose.
- Jessica Young: We need to think about the audience. We have recently been sanctioned by the AAUP – one audience might be the AAUP. There are financial and other incentives for getting off such a list.
- Maribeth Clark: We should include in our statement a statement on our capacity to lead.
- George Ruppeiner: I agree with many of the statements made. We don't want to be purely reactionary. We need to take a longer view of what we want NCF to be. I'm not sure that the motion says what we want to be.
- Aron Edidin: The main issue is not faculty governance. It is competence of the provost. The main message should be less about Rancourt and more about what we need in a provost. We need a clear articulation of what a provost is.
- David Harvey: I second George and Aron's comments. We would be better served by saying what we want. I worry that, as with past resolutions, this will prove ineffectual.
- David Rohrbacher: What form does "we cannot accept" take? The point is we need someone with certain qualifications.
- David Gillman: I concur. I remind everyone that two weeks ago we had a qualified provost.

- Sandra Gilchrist: In addition to a new provost, Brad was demoted. He has no job description. This puts lines of communication in further jeopardy.
- Tarron Khmeraj: We don't have money for new positions. All financial rules of conservative government have been violated. Hire 40 faculty? Do we have the money? There is a money issue at stake.
- Amy Clore: what is the period of the interim? What is too long?
- Maribeth Clark: I have never worked with a better provost than Brad Thiessen. He listens and he knows the data. He has skills. Can we just go back to two weeks ago? There are multiple reasons that things don't get done.
- Jessica Young: Ditto on the remarks concerning Provost Thiessen. Doing this in the middle of tenure can lead to censure by the AAUP. That would make our institution unique.
- Chris Kottke: Thanks for your remarks. We will take them under advisement and revise.

Item 1b: The faculty response to the announcement of a new mission statement

Amy Reid assumes responsibility of Chair of the Faculty during the discussion.

- Alberto Portugal: I want to understand what we share as a faculty and what we stand for. When I became Chair of the Faculty, I did so knowing many things would change. One thing that hasn't changed is our existence as a faculty. We must respond as a collective. We must propose a narrative. As important as the change in mission is the context in which this change occurs. There is a problem: we as a faculty are treated as though we do not exist. To the administration we exist only as individuals, with no collective identity. Because they do not see us collectively, there must be something we are not doing well. Is there something that we stand for as a collective? That is the purpose of this document.
- The document involving mission is projected for all to read.
- Alberto Portugal: We need a more proactive position. For this, we must know where we stand.
- Discussion:
 - Chris Kottke: The statutory mission resonates deeply with me.
 - Barbara Hicks: I second Chris' comment. The statutory mission is not political and that is important. Also, honors liberal arts is crucial to our identity.
 - Chris Pederson: Student autonomy is important. The proposed changes don't mention this.
 - Tarron Khmeraj: I am not interested in teaching at a religious institution. We are no longer an honors college. There is no evidence that we are moving in the direction of an honors college.
 - Michelle Barton: The current mission statement captures much of the statutory statement.
 - David Harvey: What is the ask? Just voting resolutions doesn't help.
 - Alberto Portugal: The intention is to determine whether we will act as a collective. Up until now, administration has established that they will do as they please. We can point out that problems have arisen because administration does

not acknowledge our existence. We must insist on our ethical role as a collective. We need to know that people will continue to stand together.

- Jennifer Wells: I like the present mission. If you study abuse, you recognize the desire to minimize yourself. That won't help. We should support the mission that drew us here.
- Barbara Hicks: There is an asymmetry of power and of process.
- David Brain: I agree with previous comments on mission. It is not accidental that the new mission and the provost announcement came at the same time. The role of the new provost is to strong arm people into mission alignment. For dialogue, we need a good faith partner.
- Katie Walstrom: I encourage everyone to send feedback by Friday.
- David Gillman: I believe in the statutory mission and its concreteness. The new stuff is so vague as to be meaningless. What Alberto said is we need to agree on a collective voice. I don't believe we are not an honors college. I believe the mission is achievable with the right governance. We need to engage all voices.
- Aron Edidin: I want to focus on our statutory mission statement and its importance to us. We have a basis for what we want to protect in the statutory statement.
- Alberto Portugal: Participating in something that undermines process is not something I would do. We have a variety of responses available.
- Maria Vesperi: If individuals do not step forward, we will be ignored. I'd be happy if we could have a statement of support for the statutory statement and a statement rejecting proposed changes.
- Sarah Hernandez: I agree on the importance of a collective identity. The current mission allows us to see the world in many ways.
- Amy Reid: Administration quotes a different mission statement.
- Sarah Hernandez: This is about shared governance.
- Barbara Hicks: Move to affirm a sense of the faculty on support of the statutory mission statement.
- On show of hands: A clear majority for, with no one voting against.

Item 2: On the need to develop a more effective communication strategy

- Chris Kottke: We are on a ship that is sinking. We can be quiet or we can address a public audience to say what is happening. We need to develop a communication process/strategy.
- Amy Reid: We need to speak as a collective.
- Alberto Portugal: we need to discuss soon how we communicate with the public.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00PM.