

Minutes

*Faculty Senate Meeting
September 11, 2024*

The complete Recording for this meeting can be found at:

<https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/fs/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

Present: Professors: Jennifer Axe, Stephen Silvia, Thomas Merrill, Alison Chrisler, Benjamin Djain, Nathan Harshman, Laura Beers, Sheila Bedford, Jeff Sosland, Corbin Cambell, Kurt Braddock, Douaa Sheet, Alan Levine, Clarissa Ihssen, Benjamin Leff, Tricia Bacon, Jim quirk, John Bracht, Mary Switalski, Chris Tudge, Tracy Spesia, Justin Jacobs, Dario Bernardini, Beverly Peters, Susan George, Jason Snyder, William Brent, Terry Bryant, Rachel Borchardt, Acting Provost Vicky Wilkins, Dean of Faculty Monica Jackson.

Chair's Report – Jenny Axe

The Faculty Senate Chair, Jenny Axe, called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm

Faculty Senate Chair, Jenny Axe, gave the Chair's report:

- Updates on the work of existing working groups and task forces:
 - The *Service Task Force* submitted its report at the May 1, 2024 senate meeting. There has been some progress on the recommendations. Work is ongoing to create a service dashboard. Individual faculty members will be able to make entries to the dashboard in order to ensure accuracy.
 - *Freedom of Expression Working Group*: Faculty Senate Past Chair Tom Merrill told the senate the working group completed its report and met with President Alger. The report proposes creating a permanent Freedom of Expression Committee. Things are still in discussion but they are moving toward the creation of such a University committee. In addition, the University has been holding a series of fora on freedom of expression.
 - *Faculty Senate Reform*: Senate Chair Jenny Axe is working on a document spelling out the charge and committee structure. She will distribute it shortly. The aim is to have on the task force a mixture of senators, past senate Chairs, and colleagues who have never served on the senate. The senate will ask colleagues interested in serving on the task force to submit a brief interest statement.
- Update on Title IX Revisions:
 - American University is still under a multi-university injunction regarding the implementation of the Biden Administration rules regarding Title IX. This gives the University more time to work through considerations as the Title IX office writes a draft. Provost Wilkins reported that there will be a minimum ten-day comment period before the implementation of a final draft, but hopes that there will be a forum for discussion beforehand. Senator Jason Snyder asked if there will be a Title IX working group and Dean of Faculty Jackson replied that this was the plan. Senate Past Chair

Tom Merrill added that the Senate needed to address the relationship between Title IX and current language in the faculty manual regarding the senate hearing committee because it is not always clear.

- American University is forming a new working group on the University's visual identification headed by University Vice President and Chief Communications Officer Matthew Bennett. Vice President Bennett consulted with the Faculty Senate leadership to help identify faculty members to serve on this university working group.
- President Alger will speak at the Faculty Senate on October 2.

ACTION ITEM: The minutes from the May 1, 2024, meeting were **VOTED** on 21-0-2 in favor

Provost's Report – Vicky Wilkins

Acting Provost Vicky Wilkins made several announcements and provided updates regarding important matters:

- The enrollment shortfall for the first-year class of approximately 400 has held steady, as has the additional revenue shortfall of \$23 million. The share of additional cuts that academic affairs is making for this academic year is \$3.5 million. Provost Wilkins stated that the sources of the deficit are demographic. The university must make additional changes to bring revenue in line with expenses. The university administration is now working on guidelines to focus the process of identifying where to make changes. The provost's office worked with the deans this summer on the budget. Community budget fora will be a part of this process.
- The University expanded summer orientation for new students to a full week. Reports have been positive about the experience.
- The provost has been following up on the resolution that the faculty senate passed in the 2017-18 academic year calling for the addition of an ombudsperson. She has spoken to the President about it and will speak to the senate about how to make it a reality while keeping the cost manageable.
- The provost will work with the faculty senate to develop a more detailed policy regarding sexual misconduct involving faculty, students, and staff (a.k.a., fraternization) where there are often asymmetrical power dynamics. The provost's office has received numerous complaints about incidents. Formulating effective and fair policy in this area is complicated. The senate will have an important role in developing this new policy.
- We have welcomed 35 new full-time faculty this fall.
- The Provost asked Past Chair Tom Merrill to speak briefly about the new civic life and engagement initiative, which he co-chairs and President Alger has fostered. The objective of the initiative is to promote respectful discourse in instances of "deep pluralism," where there is often disagreement. The steering committee will meet on September 13 and the first event features Eboo Patel, Founder and President of Interfaith America. The initiative also includes a civic fellows program that will pair undergraduates with faculty. The definition of civics is broad. Provost Wilkins added that the initiative will include STEM fields and wellness.

- The provost informed the senate that there will be a series of discussions regarding the issue of whether American University police officers should carry arms. She underscored that University leaders have not made a decision about this. The discussions will have an impact on the decision.
- The provost then took questions from Senators:
 - Senator Chris Tudge asked if AU's enrollment challenge was part of a national trend. The Provost replied that there is a structural part; we are beginning to see a demographic transition. There is also a shift from private universities to public universities. She added that the provost's office is looking at this with the Vice President for Enrollments.
 - Senator Laura Beers asked what the University's thinking about faculty compensation in light of the budget was. The Provost replied that we will understand it once the market study of faculty salaries is completed.
 - Vice Chair Steve Silvia if the Provost would make that study available. The Provost said yes.

The New Vision for CTRL – Dean of Faculty Monica Jackson and Assistant Vice Provost Anna Olsson

The mission of the Center for Teaching, Research and Learning has changed considerably over its existence. The CTRL is conducting a survey and listening sessions to learn what faculty think are the essential activities of CTRL, what activities are less in demand, and what new activities faculty would like CTRL to undertake.

Discussion: Continuing Appointment Update – Dean of Faculty Monica Jackson and Associate Dean for Faculty and Inclusive Excellence Priya Doshi

Term faculty who have ten or more years of service or who have six to nine years of service and are at the end of their contract are eligible to submit a file for action to be converted to a continuing appointment contract. Teaching units developed guidelines for the process. There were 135 applicants in the first cycle. Most were approved. In May 2024, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment held focus groups with faculty reviewers to identify ways to improve the process. The focus group participants pointed out that there was substantial variation in the guidelines that resulted in significant differences in the size of files. Colleagues from several teaching units have shared best practices.

A Senator asked if a denial resulted in immediate termination of the applicant's contract. The dean of faculty replied that if an applicant is denied, the applicant's contract concludes at the end of the academic year. The applicant may apply for a final single-semester or single-year term contract at the discretion of the dean and the Dean of Faculty.

A Senator expressed appreciation regarding broad flexibility about the range of things that an applicant can submit for the currency section of a file for action.

A Senator voiced concerns expressed in the Literature Department that student feedback now includes more than numerical results because comments from the Student Evaluation of Teaching may not be representative. Dean of Faculty Jackson replied that the Senate report “Beyond the SETs” specified that weight of SET materials cannot exceed fifty percent; this included student comments. Associate Dean Priya Doshi added that the teaching portfolio serves to broad input for the evaluation of teaching.

Senator Alan Levine asked if the Dean of Faculty could be more precise regarding the number of faculty who were approved with a continuing appoint. Dean of Faculty Jackson replied that almost everyone was approved. Vice Chair Steve Silvia asked if everyone was approved and Dean of Faculty Jackson replied that they did not say that everyone was approved.

Past Chair Tom Merrill made the Senate aware of current difficulties filling the two non-tenured seats on the Committee for Faculty Action. One seat was vacant. Only term associate and full professors are eligible to serve and there are not very many. He stated that he was working on a proposal to solve this problem by expanding those eligible to serve to colleagues with continuing appointments.

Discussion: Implementing Parliamentary Rules – Chair Jenny Axe and Vice Chair Steve Silvia

Chair Jenny Axe explained that the Senate Chair and Past Chair have instituted a new practice. The Vice Chair will serve as a parliamentarian for the Senate. She said they thought this necessary because they had noticed drift and inconsistencies when it came to rules of order and a lack of clarity about who would determine the rules of order if a disagreement arose among Senators. Vice Chair Steve Silvia took an on-line course in parliamentary rules over the summer and has served as SIS parliamentarian for several years. The Faculty Senate bylaws explicitly state that no rules of order implicitly restrict Senate actions. The senate can however approve binding rules of order. Vice Chair Steve Silvia said that he had prepared a one-page table that was largely based on Robert’s Rules of Order but made departures in instances when long-standing Senate practice differed from Robert’s Rules. These were: (1) a vote at the start of the meeting to approve the agenda (senate practice is not to hold such a vote), (2) the percentage needed to amend the agenda (senate practice is $\frac{2}{3}$ of those present), and (3) vote to extend discussion (senate practice is a simple majority). Senator Alan Levine motioned to approve the rules but Vice Chair Steve Silvia suggested that the senate wait to do so because he needed to submit a revised version that clarified the process for amending proposed action items.

Action Item: Provost Search Document – Chair Jenny Axe

Senate Chair Jenny Axe introduced the Provost Search Document as an action item. The Working Group on Shared Governance produced a draft of this document over the summer and the Senate officers met with President Alger to discuss it. President Alger suggested that the document only cover the procedure for provost searches because the provost search this academic year would be the first time that the university would use this process and there may be adjustments needed based on

experience. The Senate leadership and the President also had exchanges regarding the language governing the process for students and staff to choose representatives for the search committee until agreement on it was reached that ensured that all staff regardless of whether they were covered under a collective bargaining agreement would participate in choosing committee members and that the process staff and students would use would be democratically accountable within their respective constituencies. Senate Chair Axe characterized the exchanges with President Alger as positive and constructive, and pointed out that if the senate amended the common draft, the president could decline to accept it, which would mean that the provost search may proceed under the current provost policy governing provost searches.

Senator John Bracht proposed an amendment to expand the coverage of the Search document to include searches for additional Vice Presidents, specifically: Chief Financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, General Counsel, Vice President for Inclusive Excellence, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Enrollment Management, and Vice President of Student Affairs. He argued that these positions directly affect faculty and the success of the University. Faculty participation in searches for these positions should be the same as that for the provost. He also argued that the Senate may not get another chance to set the procedure for conducting searches for these additional positions. The senate should therefore expand the coverage of the draft document now.

Several Senators argued that the president had shown considerable good will in his discussions with the faculty leadership and that it would be beneficial to building a constructive and positive relationship to honor his request and not amend the draft document. Senator Bracht contended that Senators would be taking a risk postponing the inclusion of the additional vice presidents because there may never be a chance to do so in the future. Vice Chair Silvia conceded that there was a risk but maintained that in his view it was a risk worth taking because it facilitated establishing a positive and constructive working relationship with President Alger.

The Senate **VOTED** on the amendment 5-17-1 not in favor

A brief discussion of the proposed document as originally submitted followed. Senators expressed satisfaction that the document was a step forward in restoring the faculty's role in shared governance.

The Senate **VOTED** on the proposal 23-0-0 in favor

Vice Chair Steve Silvia thanked colleagues for passing the document. He then pointed out that once the president begins the provost search process that it is important that faculty complete the process for choosing faculty members to serve on the committee within 21 days, as specified in the document, if we are to retain this new process that gives the faculty more say. Specifically, this means that all academic units must complete elections of the committee-member pool, the Senate Executive Committee needs to choose committee members from that pool, and the Senate needs to ratify the slate of choices. This will likely mean the Senate Executive Committee acting in addition to its scheduled monthly meeting, and a Senate vote outside of a senate meeting.

For the good of the order – Senate Chair Jenny Axe

Senator Laura Beers suggested that the Senate put on the agenda a discussion of the policies of the Academic Support and Accommodation Center's policies regarding recording in the classroom. Senator Beers found these policies particularly problematic when it comes to seminar discussions

because they greatly restrict the discretion of faculty voice regarding the efficacy of allowing them. She expressed concerns that other students receive no warning that a recording is taking place, that students could potentially misuse these recordings to dox or in other ways cause difficulties for other students, and that recording could chill discussion, which would diminish the educational value of the exercise. Most Senators agreed with Senator Beers's concerns and that the Senate should discuss this. Several senators thought that a policy that distinguished between lectures, which could be recorded as a norm, and discussions, which would require more nuanced treatment would be most appropriate. Several Senators agreed that the first course of action should be to take up the matter with the Dean of Faculty and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies because they were responsible for ASAC.

The University Club is now open. It is open table but time reservations are required because of the limited space. You must bring your ID to verify that you are the person who made a reservation.