Northwestern University

Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences
Minutes of the October 30, 2018 faculty meeting

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. in Harris Hall by Dean Adrian Randolph.

I. The minutes of the faculty meeting on May 1, 2018 were approved as submitted.

II. Associate Dean for Academic Initiatives Ann Bradlow provided an update on the actions of the Committee on Degree Requirements. Bradlow informed the faculty that a formal proposal has been drafted, which grew out of the recommendations from the report by the Committee on Degree Requirements and was developed through input by members of the Dean’s Office including Dean Adrian Randolph and Associate Dean Mary Finn, as well as from input collected at the Foundational Disciplines Convention held last academic year. The proposal has been posted on the CDR webpage. The Curricular Policy Committee has reviewed the proposal for next steps, which will ultimately be decided by a vote by the faculty.

III. Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs Mary Finn delivered the Report on the Committee on Academic Excellence. Finn explained that the Committee reviews department and program recommendations for honors for students writing undergraduate theses, and that this year 187 recommendations were approved, with five receiving interdisciplinary awards. The committee also administers the Corbin prize, which is awarded to undergraduate students who were eligible for financial aid and who are going to graduate school the following year. Three students received the prize this year, each in the amount of $4,000 to $6,000.

Dean Finn concluded by noting that there are openings on the Committee on Academic Excellence should any faculty be interested in participating.

IV. Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Assessment Laura Panko gave the first reading of the Proposal for an Art Theory and Practice Minor. The department determined to develop a proposal for a minor to provide an academic structure for students wishing to pursue a course of study in Art Theory and Practice who cannot commit to a major. Assistant Professor of Instruction and College Adviser Michael Maltenfort asked whether the department intended to offer pre-registration to students enrolled as minors in Art Theory and Practice. Professor and Chair Lane Relyea responded that the department had not considered that, but that they probably would. Associate Dean Kelly Mayo asked what the department’s estimate of potential enrollments would be. Relyea responded that the department anticipated a maximum of 20 students in the first year available. Maltenfort asked when the minor would be available. Panko replied that the soonest a student could claim the minor would be academic year 2020, assuming the vote by the faculty is positive.

V. Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs Mary Finn delivered the Report on Undergraduate Initiatives. Finn provided several highlights of the past year. Within the Arch Scholars program, a Humanities Track was piloted in summer 2017 that doubled in size in summer 2018. Professors Jules Law and Gerry Cadava ran the successful program. Weinberg College hired a new Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity after the retirement of Mark Sheldon. Ricardo Court joined the College from the University of Wisconsin and is appointed in the Department of Political Science. The College advising office added two new advisers, Rosemary
Bush, appointed in the Department of Earth and Planetary sciences and Marcelo Vinces, appointed in the Program of Biological Sciences. AccessibleNU is working to address accommodations for students, including time-and-a-half for exams and flexibility accommodations for attendance and deadlines. The Dean of Students, Todd Adams, has secured more space to proctor exams and the accommodation for flexibility has been curtailed. The Academic Resource Center, a collaboration between Weinberg College, the Library, the Searle Center, and the Provost’s Office will be in 2N in the Library offering a number of resources for students.

VI. Both the College and the provost’s office continue to work on initiatives that reduce the cost of courses for all students, but especially low income students. Course enhancement grants and Undergraduate Research Grant funding has been cut this year. Weinberg College is piloting a Career Readiness Initiative to work with departments to articulate ways the curriculum offers translatable skills for students to take to the workplace. Weinberg College is collaborating with the Office of Institutional Research to investigate student persistence and success, particularly in STEM fields, so that the right interventions can be designed to help students succeed.

VII. Associate Dean for Finance and Business Operations Danny Fisher provided an update on College finances. Fisher explained that he had completed meetings with all the Weinberg College chairs and program directors to discuss changes to the budget process. The University timeline for financial year activities ended in September, and an audit of the university fiscal year performance will be delivered to the Board of Trustees in November. The University’s deficit of $62MM from last fiscal year is now projected be in excess of $100MM and Northwestern is taking steps to bring its spending in line with its revenue in order to get to a $50MM deficit next year and back to positive operating in the year after.

The College will be implementing a digital vita supplement system which will pull data automatically from enterprise systems so that faculty will eventually have less work to do in order to update activity reporting. This system will also provide data for analysis for use in different ways so that the College can make more equitable decisions. Fisher provided the example of a recent study completed by senior women faculty that, among other things, indicated women’s service was not adequately documented and referenced when merit decisions are made. Fisher expressed his hope that a system such as this one would capture these data for meaningful analysis. Professor Ezra Getzler asked how the publication information would be pulled into the system. Fisher replied that through multiple online sources, a relatively accurate pre-populated list of publications should be available for faculty to review and adjust as necessary. Professor Teri Odom asked whether the long-form portions of the vita supplement would still be required. Fisher responded that the system would collect all data and that there would be some free text boxes to enter longer descriptions of faculty activity in the system.

Professor Baron Reed asked if the change to the international travel fund policy would be permanent and what the prognosis for research funds for the next few years is. Fisher responded that the College’s intent is to keep faculty resourced, but that for faculty in departments that carry forward larger pockets of funds, the Dean’s Office requests that faculty turn to departments first for resources. Randolph agreed with this and further stated that the budget received by the College this year was such that without more departmental support, business could not go on as usual. He continued that the problem is compounded by not only a lowered budget, but also an expense cap. He appealed to the faculty to consider whether expenses are mission-critical, and if so, to communicate where exemptions might need to be requested from the expense cap set by the Central administration.
Professor Reed asked whether there would be a change in policy for funding beyond the fifth year for graduate students. Randolph responded that in the transition of responsibility from the Graduate School to the College for allocation of funding, the College was not budgeted for “banked” quarters. Rather, the rate of use of “banked” quarters from FY17 was used as a projection of needs for this budget item. Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies Kelly Mayo agreed that the College would try to get away from the concept of departmental “banking” of quarters. Rather, he would prefer to find ways to resource advanced students more equitably and based on need. Mayo noted the system has flaws, including that there is unevenness in where “banked” quarters have built up. He said that focus groups will be gathered later in the year to understand how to make improvements in the system for supporting advanced students.

Professor Jeffrey Winters asked if faculty could communicate a commitment to anxious advanced graduate students. Randolph replied that while he wants to be reassuring to the entire community, graduate students included, he does not want to send a message that he has to walk back later, and so he wants to understand more about this transition before communicating broadly. Randolph expressed his hope that faculty would signal to students that continuity of support is a primary goal in the College.

VIII. The Dean thanked the faculty in attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Francesca Petty.