Newark Faculty Council minutes

November 23, 2023

Present: Nermin Allam, Ed Bonder, Sherri-Ann Butterfield, Nany Cantor, John Gunkel, John Kettle, Barry Komisaruk, Sean Mitchell, Mariya Naumova, Stephanie Newbold, Brandon Paradise, Anna Rivas, Jeffrey Robinson, Sergei Schreider, Pallavi Shukla, Elizabeth Surles, Tracy Tran, Miklos Vasarhelyi, Bonita Veysey

* Chancellor’s report, Nancy Cantor
  + Faculty, staff, students are having significant issues in connection with Israel’s war against Hamas. The community is feeling a lot of grief, and there’s a need for empathy. Formal and informal support is available, and the student affairs office is working to help as much as possible. If students are noticeably suffering, they should talk to the CARE team in student affairs and use the resources at the counseling center. It’s important to show that RU-N is a caring community, much more important than the politics. RU-N wants to support fully those students, faculty, and staff who are feeling the pain of the situation, which doesn’t seem like it’s going away any time soon.
    - Question: Should announcements be made about support resources in classes—that counseling services are available and there is support if students need it.

Answer: It’s not necessary to make formal announcements but would be fine to do so, but student requests for help, support, and/or understanding should be taken seriously and acted upon by offering needed support and helping them with what they need. A direct and personal approach has been the primary direction taken by RU-N, but faculty are welcome to make an announcement if they would like. Awareness that this is a time of stress and pain is really important for RU-N community overall.

* + One Stop project is moving forward in Conklin.
  + Progress is being made on redesigning parts of Life Science II. The parts that haven’t been fitted out are being developed with State capital funding
    - Question: What exactly is happening with Life Sciences II?   
      Answer: RU-N has been waiting for the State to give the go-ahead on capital projects, which has been a request made for several years, which was finally successful only recently. RU-N is just beginning the design process and will reach out to faculty for input. The first meeting was held only a week ago, and so far the only step has been to assign a project manager. The funding was just received, and it’s still the earliest phase of the project. Piotr Piotrowiak can provide additional information.
* Executive Vice Chancellor report, Sherri-Ann Butterfield
  + Admissions process update: there will be training for people from counsel in response to legal changes surrounding admissions:
    - As you may be aware, recently, significant changes have occurred in the legal landscape surrounding admissions. Rutgers’ Office of General Counsel will be conducting Admissions Training sessions regarding these recent legal updates for all individuals involved in admissions processes across the University.
    - OGC will be conducting a one-hour training on November 30th 10-11am. Those with a role in the admissions process in any department should contact EVC Butterfield by email for more information.
      * Question: Does this apply to HLLC?  
        Answer: This applies to all graduate, undergraduate, and professional schools, including HLLC.
    - The Diversity Plan Summit was held last Wednesday and was well-attended by RU-N representatives. RU-N is doing a lot of work with procurement and other areas to make improvements and changes. There is a lot of support for faculty who want to make programmatic changes and look at curricular changes in relationship to diversity.
      * Question: Will the summit talk be shared?  
        Answer: Yes, we will share it, and it’s being posted on website. [https://diversity.rutgers.edu/inclusive-academy-symposium]
  + Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor report, Jeffrey Robinson
    - Two graduate programs are on their way to approval at Board of Governors: A Graduate Certificate in Disability Studies, offered through the Urban Education department. It will be a standalone credential and available to any student, even those who are non-matriculating. There will also be a Master’s of Accountancy program in Accounting Analytics, which used to be a concentration but will become its own graduate degree program. These go through all levels at RU-N: VPAA Committee on Academic and Student Affairs and then the Board of Governors to ensure there is no conflict with other programs. In this case, RU-N was able to work with the Provost of Rutgers-Camden so there were no issues.
    - The EVPAA Roadmaps Initiative is a central effort to create new academic programs, which will include faculty recruitment that will be across campus, including all six of the schools at Rutgers-Newark. A proposal based on data science, innovation, technology, and justice was put together in collaboration with SASN and significant input from other schools. The proposal will be layered with other initiatives coming out of the President’s office, including faculty diversity cluster hires. It will let RU-N further develop its emphasis on fintech, data science and AI. A cross-campus faculty committee is being established to help with the efforts and have governance for the program. They are looking at how to bring a community-engaged focus to the program.
      * Question: what kind of topic would be covered in this sort of operation?   
        Answer: It might looking at all the financial technologies surrounding mortgages. There are lots of companies using AI to screen who gets a mortgage and who doesn’t. This new program could look at putting together a collaborative grant to study this kind of issue and create research opportunities for students—grad and undergrad—who would not be based in one school.
  + Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs and Strategic Partnerships report, John Gunkel
    - RU-N is working on a national two-year project with AASCU that looks at academic advising and registration based on student satisfaction with advising, which can be overly complicated for students. They are establishing a survey to set a baseline for new models of advising. The project is in preliminary stages and will be followed-up with more information and the survey distribution.
    - A call for applications to participate in a student belonging institute was just distributed. The Institute is an instructional program that uses materials that have been vetted and are based on reliable research by nationally-known social psychologists. They have created materials that faculty can use step-by-step to improve their syllabi, improve student feedback, and improve their teaching. Fifty applications have been received (after anticipating only 12). Most of the people who have applied have been able to participate with funding from Jeffrey Robinson, especially important for adjuncts who wanted to participate. Chancellor Cantor emphasized the value of the program and its demonstrated positive results with grades and student retention.
* Guest speaker Paul Boxer, RU-N University Senate Representative, University Senate report
  + The Senate is developing policy and pressing on OIT to work on communication channels. The Senate wants to help individual senators to communicate with their constituencies and to speak more broadly about what the senate does/is doing.
  + Paul is the co-chair of the Faculty and Personnel affairs Senate committee and serves on the Executive Committee.
  + The Senate reviews university policy, the student experience, academic procedures, and essentially anything that impacts the university community.
  + Friday was the most recent Senate meeting. Paul Strohm spoke about the merger of the two medical schools and what Rutgers Health will look like. This merger was not fully vetted by the Senate—a point of contention.
  + President Holloway is no longer addressing or entertaining questions from the Senate. EVPAA Prabhas Moghe serves as the President’s Office liaison. Shared governance is a big issue, and the relationship between the Senate and President is strained at best.
  + The Senate’s website, senate.rutgers.edu, includes meeting agendas and minutes.
    - Question: What is the Senate’s response to President Holloway’s decision not to address or take questions from Senate?   
      Answer: There is only so much the Senate can do. EVPAA Moghe still speaks with the Senate and Executive Committee. The Senate Chair serves on a university-wide committee with President Holloway, so she has some exchange with him. The communication issues are the fallout from the contract negotiation process and the strike. The Senate has made clear that they would like to hear from President, but he has the support of the Board of Governors and has been firm in his silence.

The Senate’s power is advisory, but there is the longstanding expectation that the President will approach Senate on important issues. In some cases, the Senate has a regulatory role, including in negotiating relationships between academic units. The Senate could have regulated the medical school merger by offering advice prior to any merger being made. The President and Chancellor of RBHS went to the Board of Governors to merge the two units without consulting the Senate.

The Senate filed a request with the New Jersey Comptroller’s Office to investigate University Policy violations, but they refused. Without a change in legislation, the Board of Governors is the controlling body.

It’s clear that Senate’s role is advisory, and there is representation from faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The Senate really wants to get communications out about everything but has difficulty accessing Rutgers Today and the RU-all email list. They are focused on increasing communications and trying to make a dent in sharing what they want to do for the University.

* + - Question: Has there been any consequence for the Senate’s vote of no confidence against the President?   
      Answer: The Senate’s sincere hope was that it would begin a conversation instead of being the end of one. The vote laid out a number of clear, objective, and factual concerns: the President threatening to have faculty arrested, the decision not to renew the RU-N Chancellor’s contract, and the medical school merger. The Senate is extremely concerned because of the lack of response despite their requests for more productive communications and constructive solutions. The tools at the Senate’s disposal are persistence, outreach to media, and a need for Senate leadership that isn’t in a vulnerable appointment. There is also the understanding that this is not a situation that’s unique to Rutgers. Discussion about shared governance continued. The NFC has offered two resolutions in support of Senate resolutions and hopes to continue this sort of productive relationship.
* New NFC member welcome: Mariya Naumova, Sergei Schreider, and Bonnie Veysey, and Brandon Paradise.
* Subcommittee reports and planning:
  + Bylaws and governance
    - Barry Komisaruk moved to accept the bylaws as distributed, Sean Mitchell seconded.
    - Discussion: John Kettle recommended revising Section VII dealing with amendments and changing “2/3 of people who cast a ballot” to “2/3 vote of the members.” He recommended looking at the process for making changes, especially overly complicated processes with secret ballots. It should be simplified  
      There was a new member request for updated information on the subcommittees and bylaws.
    - Sean Mitchell suggested that taking the next period through the next meeting for new members to review and so that we can put it on google docs vs. sending attached Word doc so that we can put comments/discussion in the shared doc.
    - Sean Mitchell moved to move to put the bylaws in Google Docs for easier review.
    - Second motion to put current bylaws in Google Docs, Mikos Vasarhelyi seconded the motion. The motion passed.
    - Elizabeth Surles would post the bylaws in Google Docs. (https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1AdVhLY5GdErEpoxhmt5iqV8Eu8DlcjZm?usp=sharing)
* New business
  + A request was made for the next meeting on December 18th to be hybrid—in person and on Zoom option. This would be facilitated. The in-person meeting would be held in the Chancellor’s meeting room.
* Barry adjourned the meeting

Submitted by Elizabeth Surles, NFC Secretary, December 14, 2023