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Meeting Minutes
Executive Committee of the AFSE
December 4, 2020
12 NOON via Zoom

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Present: Rosa Krajmalnik-Brown, Marcus Herrmann, Dianne Hansford, Jitendran Muthuswamy, Chris Buneo, Tony Lamanna, Doug Montgomery, George Pan, Sefaattin Tongay, Samantha Brunhaver, Yalin Wang, Andreas Spanias

Absent: Rod Roscoe

Guest: Kyle Squires

1. **Approval of the November 2020 Minutes**. The November Minutes were unanimously approved by the Executive Committee.

2. **Impact of COVID-19**. We're deeply in the throes of COVID and final exams all wedged into one. One thing that always happens for faculty -- you get students who contact you on final exams and final grade. What's different this year is a lot more of those come to me and a lot more of the moms and dads come to me. Some of those documents are 3-4,000 words. A lot of it is anxiety that people are feeling and stressing. There have been a couple of instances where it was not a good look for us. Faculty are typically super responsive and a lot of times it's just a misunderstanding and the good is that people move in pretty quick. Maybe some technology issues. I'm not bringing anything up that any of you haven't already experienced yourselves. We know that as we move into the Spring semester we'll have the same arrangement that hasn't changed. Everybody can refresh the internet, you can see the COVID numbers. It's not great. We've talked about student engagement, spring registrations. Just know it's still a concern which means we have fewer kids registering for spring 2021 than we had for spring 2020. It's not just Engineering – Business, Liberal Arts are in the same boat. Advisors are handling outreach and communicating with students. We're doing all that we can. Just know that this will be having a real impact on us. If things stayed the way they are today there would be some financial echoes and we would have to deal with those.

   One thing I want to come back to is the Provost's conversation and the lecturer items. That topic always gets attention. I'm slightly more optimistic that this year there might be a couple of things in the works that would lead to not just more than a year-by-year arrangement for lecturers but even the beginning the architecture of different career ladders. It's complicated; there's a lot going on. There are a couple of things in the offering that could begin to trigger that. Having said all that and I think that we agreed that we want to make sure that they do a great job of teaching that we recognize, reward and promote them to get them in the most stable position. Now we're entering this uncertain fiscal time and it could be challenging. In Fulton we have not had to make any personnel change in terms of reducing workforce because of COVID – zero. There are definitely more requirements in the system where we have to seek more approvals as we're filling positions and doing all the stuff but we've managed our circumstance really well. It's getting hard. As we come into Spring semester we'll give full attention to that. It goes back to the usual thing for faculty – teach well, keep your students

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engaged, encourage your colleagues and try to make it as engaging as possible. That remains our principal challenge.

Engineering will distribute a video message to any student who hasn't registered for spring. The tenor of the message is that you're on this journey to make a difference. It's not about starting salaries, it was about do you want to make a difference or not? You chose this major for very good and specific reasons. Why would you want to opt out? The other thing that is important, faculty have a powerful voice into their classes to reinforce the value of the class, the topic, the major and to set the context. Students lack context – they're young and inexperienced. We need to do a better job filling the void. Faculty messaging that context into their spring semester classes is important.

The conversations have been how do we make the program better? If it turns out that if in the process of making the program better, the conclusion is we don't end up spinning something out online that would be OK. If you're leveraging technology, it almost stands to reason that in the natural evolution that the program would have an online component. It's not starting your iphone and recording your lecture and letting the student have at it. In preparing online content you need to have it professionally prepared -- a new way to introduce things.

Marcus -- When we started doing ME online we were looking at ways to reorganize the ME program as a whole and integrate it better. The one drawback right now is that the online version and in-person version are completely separate. That might be a downside that would be nice to make more flexible. Students could take the actual asynchronous online version and then switch directly to in-person and vice versa. It would be helpful to have that.

Kyle -- There is a membrane that isn't very porous between the two. The cohort of students that pursue online programs are about 10 years older than the cohort of students who come to campus. Most on the online programs are transferring. You have different populations with different needs. Right now there isn't that much pressure owing to the different cohorts pursuing the different programs. They want different things. The 32 year old Army veteran enrolled in the online program probably has a family, a whole life going on and they're not going to come to campus that often. It's more about sharing the content and there are some issues there.

Marcus -- My experience has been in sharing the content. I haven't seen any obstacles to do that. It was more people that don't want to re-register for the in-person ME degree so they don't have an easy way to switch to the online degree. If a student was online and then decided to come back to campus it would be nice to have that easier path between them.

Kyle – The University does discourage that. It's complicated. It's because students who come to campus -- the 18-22 year-olds – the idea is to keep them in the campus environment where it's a lot easier to keep track of things like enrollments, classes, sections, residence hall, etc.

Tony – how do the ABET accredited programs with this online version and in-person version handle the equivalency if students aren't allowed to go back and forth between the two? You're almost saying they aren't equivalent. How does that play out with accreditation?

Kyle – It's a single degree. Whether it's taught on campus or online the students have to have the same outcomes, otherwise you have issues.

Tony -- If it's equivalent it's hard to make the case why you shouldn't be able to switch back and forth.

Kyle – I think you can make the case. We charge kids sitting in the same class on campus really different rates, whether they're resident or out-of-state. So, there's a basis for that and that's a whole other conversation. It's complicated and we're learning. Back to ASU Sync. One of the reasons it's been difficult to stimulate engagement is because it's very easy to never come to campus at this point, take all your classes, do all your things. Are we happy for that environment we've created for ourselves? I'm not. We're on a bit of a high wire right now.

Marcus -- For the spring semester, could it be a plan to announce as early as possible if there are any changes to the finals? Not like this time around. Something that's not going to be changed?

Kyle – Sure. I was going to ask for pain points and clearly that's one of them. I get it.

Sefaattin – Just like we have switched to online education in March when COVID first hit our community. Let's say, In the middle of the spring semester everything is going well. Vaccine is out, everybody is getting vaccinated. I wonder if an early announcement to our students would be appropriate to say tentatively after the spring break we are planning to open our classes to meet in person only for in-state students. I understand the challenges for the students from Maryland who can't come here. Would it be helpful to at least give our students some degree of incentive to re-register for spring semester or future semesters?

Kyle – that circumstance is possible. If vaccines become available ASU would do it. But we couldn't put that messaging into the system now. Back in July/August we were basically open and teaching kids on campus. The impression we created was an open environment in the classroom. There's a lot of faculty who have not come to campus since March 16, not one time. These are difficult circumstances. You need to make sure you're thinking about others when you're making these decisions. If it went that fast, by March we would have clarity and could unplug the Zoom cord. It's interesting when you talk to first time students a handful of them are saying make us come to class. They want to come to class but they want other students there too. If you're coming to a class and there are only 9 kids in class of 50 that are coming pretty soon you lose your interest right. That's been a big challenge. We did it out of a caution to keep kids safe.

Tony -- That's the dynamic we're seeing in most of our upper division courses. They're saying why are we coming? We'd rather instead of us being here with everybody with their masks on we'd rather just see you in a Zoom. That's the mechanic we're seeing. If most kids aren't going to be here we don't want to be here either.

Kyle – It's understandable. Everybody does find their minimum energy state. We all seek/find it. That's been a natural outcome. So what do we have more control over? What can we do as faculty? Try to keep people in a safe health space where they can be more engaged. But I can almost hear faculty saying, wait, if I've got my door closed then nobody knows I'm here so what's the deal?

Kyle – The hope is by certainly next Fall that we can be normal. I think it's a long shot that it could happen during spring semester. Would the university be so nimble – while keeping people safe – would we do it? Absolutely. But it's a long shot.

Sam – Students are making decision about whether they're instate/out of state, on/off campus based on what they think is going to happen. How do we deal with that?

Kyle – When you think back to last March there was a week to get things set then spring break and then we came back to a new circumstance. It took a week or two to get everything in place. When you do something like that it is a major change and so there is going to be some disruption not unlike the finals week challenge. It was well intentioned, but it created a lot of collateral problems.

Sef – Summer will be interesting. What can we learn during summer so we can transition to fall successfully?

Tony – would we be able to use the zoom infrastructure if we had a good reason? We have required summer internships and we've traditionally not had summer classes but with COVID we've been very successful with summer classes. Would we be able to continue that?

Kyle – yes. We'll see what happens over the next 4-6 months. We need to be really clear with the students this is how the class is going to be delivered. We're running that ASU class as ASU Sync only. Now that we've discovered that we can do it in a productive, reasonable way, how do we exploit this in a way that enables students?

Tony – It helps with recruiting if we can tell students they can be out in 3 instead of 4 years.

Marcus – Is the plan for classes that have over 100 students to be online only in the spring?

Kyle – the number is about 115. The reason is because of what happened in the fall with parallel sections of the same class, some over some under 100. It got very confusing. Programs wanted the classes to be consistent. But we had programs that got stuck. Now you're only 87 students, but we're still Sync only because of the other section and that doesn't go over very well. We are trying to be super clear about which sections in which programs of which courses are in person, meaning humans in the room. If you want the classroom experience, we're trying to shuttle those students into that particular section.

Marcus – That info isn't necessarily in the class search, right?

Kyle – I don't know how it's all been implemented. Go back to the threshold about 115. The way you can ensure the in-person component is to take one of those sections, set the classroom size to be 75 and that way by default it will have an in-person component and if the other sections are over 115 or by ASU Sync then it's clear to students.

Marcus – It might be good to have that in the class search especially if instructors have accommodations. Otherwise, it looks like the instructor is in the classroom which is not necessarily the case.

Kyle -- I will follow-up on that. It is true some faculty will have accommodations. We will prioritize those classes to make sure we have instructional assistants who can be in the classroom. There is still a reason to come for the students.

3. **Invited Speakers in Zoom Environment – Testing Plan and Speaker Suggestions.** A Dean's Lecture speaker should be identified as soon as possible. Dianne will distribute the spreadsheet containing the names of potential speakers to the EC. The goal is still to have an on-line version of the lecture in the Spring. We were discussing the question of how we do this in the zoom environment; how we set that up. At last month's meeting the discussion included examples of what some members of the committee have already done. Rosy suggested the need to do something different. If we just have a lecture, we won't be able to attract a very large audience. She had a prestigious lecturer come a few weeks ago who presented to about 50 people, followed by a meeting with the speaker and 4-5 SSEBE members. Sefaattin talked about a cross-continental Materials colloquium series using movie DVD's that include special sections (editor's cut, etc.). Tape the presentation from two angles. Lab tours could be included. Ultimately the colloquium speakers are broadcasting at the same time to all the universities. This method increased participation. People are tired of zoom. Tell the audience that there is additional information.   If we want to increase attendance we need to offer more. Doug talked about his Fireside chat idea. It's a live event, held once per month and involved over 8,000 people. He has a prominent guest who speaks on something timely. The presentations are posted on a server. Over the weeks a fairly sizeable number of people watch them. Dean Squires commented that we are talking about how to increase engagement. The same fundamental challenge. Before our next meeting members need to look at the list of speakers and come to some conclusion of what our ranking could be. Bearing in mind that we need somebody who would be open to more novel ways of presenting. Determine how to do this; fireside chat or some interview kind of set up. Dianne sent the list to the EC.

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Action Items:
Review list of speakers to determine ranking
Determine method for event

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4. **Other Items from EC Members**. Dean Squires requested feedback on the Town Hall that was held on November 20th -- what was the impression and what could be done better.

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Next Zoom Scheduled January 8, 2021; 12 Noon via Zoom

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