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Faculty Meeting Minutes - April 2, 2020

Provost's Office
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Faculty Meeting Minutes - April 2, 2020

Abstract

Minutes of the Gettysburg College Faculty Business Meeting, April 2, 2020.

Comments

Appendix 1 : President's Letter on Response to Covid-19

Appendix 2 : Provost Zappe's Letter on Deferring Tenure and Pre-tenure Reviews

Minutes of the Gettysburg College Faculty
April 2, 2020
Remote Meeting
Business Meeting

President Robert Iuliano called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

He noted that two students were planning to be in attendance: Benjamin Pontz for the *Gettysburgian*, and Patrick McKenna, for Senate.

Dr. Remy provided an explanation of how the meeting, which was conducted as a videoconference, would proceed.

The president began his report acknowledging the extraordinary circumstances of the meeting, held during pandemic, with the campus mainly closed and members of the community having to remain largely at home. He hoped everyone was well at a disconcerting moment and stressed that health and safety should be each person's paramount consideration. He read an excerpt from a letter sent by Darryl Jones, with glowing comments about what first generation students have done to help others and to assist with efforts to assure admitted students that they will be entering an unusually supportive environment.

The president then spoke of how impressed he has been by the energy and determination that colleagues in a range of capacities and offices have shown in enabling the college to mitigate the impact of the crisis: College Life, Information Technology, and the governance structure have all responded to it intelligently and quickly. He felt that a more somber note was, however, in order. After the initial excitement some people, students in particular, may feel about the shift to remote courses, the weight of distance and the frustration of being housebound will become burdensome for many of them. He fully appreciates the demands faculty face, as they juggle responsibilities for work and to their families. He urged the faculty to be alert to signs that the patience of students is lagging. It is important to remain intensely engaged with them, both in class and one-on-one. Reaching out to all students, and not just those who seem to be having a difficult time, with consistency, energy and enthusiasm, will be pivotal to their success.

He urged people to take care themselves, to find such opportunities for joy and connection as life in a somber time can afford, and to let Provost Zappe and him know how they can be of help.

He then reviewed the essential points of a letter he had sent earlier about specific policies the college has developed to confront the emergency. See Appendix 1 for the full text of the statement. The letter speaks to the college's understanding of Governor Wolf's order that all non-essential businesses and institutions shut down. There will not, as a result of it, be the same volume of work for all employees. While he has pledged that everyone will continue to receive full pay through the end of April, and while he wants to reassure those who are vulnerable that their compensation will be protected through then, the college is not in a position to commit to sustaining the pledge into May. We have to refund room and board charges for the second half of the spring term, and while losses to the endowment—the portfolio has lost value with fluctuations in the broader market—will

not have an immediate impact, it is a factor to bear in mind. In all, in this fiscal year alone, we are still facing a shortage that could reach seven million dollars. We have admitted a superlative class, one that is academically strong, large, and rich in diversity. But we cannot predict how large it will be, or how much financial aid we will need to provide. There are too many unpredictable variables before us for the institution to be anything but cautious.

It is thus important to cap expenditures. That includes suspending pay increases scheduled to take effect on June 1, and presuming that neither new openings nor replacement positions will be filled—a presumption that does not affect people who have either accepted or are negotiating offers for next year. Most capital projects, too, are suspended. The policy does nothing drastic; it will permit us to function smoothly as variables break. The impact of the federal stimulus, the duration of the shelter-in-place order, and the size of the class cannot be predicted.

President Iuliano concluded by acknowledging that the report is not an upbeat one, especially given the spirit of the community, which he characterized as determined and optimistic. He has not received volumes of critical email; instead his correspondence has been deeply supportive as we work together to address a circumstance no one anticipated.

Provost Christopher Zappe, in beginning his report, described the community as supportive in a time of distress and students as resilient. Still, many of them do feel isolated. The merger of home life and work is a challenge everyone faces: the problems can range from technical ones—insufficient bandwidth, for example—to serious worries about the health and well-being of loved ones. Some of our students are now in quarantine, and some will face lost income and bereavement. He asked that faculty reach out to them, particularly those who seem to be under stress. Academic Advising has asked him to offer a reminder that the deadline for withdrawing from classes with a “W” is extended to April 10; some students will need candid guidance about whether they should remain in courses in which they are struggling.

He next reviewed the letter he sent on March 30, on extending the tenure clock, a policy that is consistent with the Faculty Handbook. He will be happy to speak with untenured colleagues, their chairs and their mentors about their concerns. Please see Appendix 2 for the text of the letter.

Course evaluations will occur as usual, but it will be up to faculty members to decide whether to include ones from this semester in their reviews, whether quadrennial or for pre-tenure, tenure or promotion.

The newly announced Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading option has raised various questions. Many students have indicated they are grateful for it; some, however, resist it. Letter grades, he clarified, will be available to those students who wish to have them on their transcripts, especially for applications to graduate and professional schools. The policy seeks to give students the flexibility to determine what is in their best interests. He expressed his gratitude to everyone for adapting to new circumstances, and for meeting the challenges that go into remote teaching.

President Iuliano added that the governance structure of the college has worked exceptionally well in setting these policies, each of which needed considerable work. He singled out the provost and the leadership provided by essential committees for their contributions.

The meeting continued with questions and comments from members of the community. Professor Day asked for clarification about our economic position. Have we refunded seven million dollars to students? The president explained that the figure is an estimate of net losses from refunds and other unanticipated expenditures, but it also includes some savings—we are not spending as much as was planned on dining services. The final figure for the fiscal year may be different; he has provided the best estimate now available.

The president noted that he is having remote office hours for parents, alumni and students. Members of the faculty are welcome to join in.

Professor Evrard told of an advisee who has spoken to her about an instructor's inflexibility about an assignment that is difficult to complete remotely. What process should she follow to help the student? Provost Zappe recommended having the student contact the department chair, and if doing so is not practical, with the divisional dean. He knows that there will be different interpretations of academic policy about course requirements, and that there are students who believe their needs aren't being accommodated.

The president spoke of alternative arrangements for Get Acquainted Day. The Admissions office has responded with creativity to the cancellation of an important on-campus event, and has planned a series of experiences that will introduce accepted students to the college. A significant number of students will serve on remote panels; Dean Swezey is developing strategies to involve the faculty. The major emphases will fall on the relationships that students and faculty build with one another and on the range of experiences with which the college provides our students.

Responding to a question from Professor Williams about the availability of psychological services, Vice President Ramsey said that the college is limited in its ability to offer them by prohibitions about providing mental health counseling across state lines. She added that counselors can assist students who reach out to them—through referrals, for example—and noted that they did get in touch with their clients before they left campus. There are also three active groups giving different types of support, one focused on spiritual life, another on career outreach, and a third running nightly online social activities. President Iuliano underscored the importance of those initiatives: students deserve the best experience we can offer.

The president spoke of the sense of loss that seniors are registering with the cancellation of commencement. A survey is now underway to find out what preferred alternate arrangements they favor.

Professor Sijapati asked whether faculty members can recommend that struggling students get in touch with Counseling. Vice President Ramsey answered that they may do so, that counselors are allowed to guide clients toward resources. She added that her office has also heard from students facing financial challenges.

Professor Trillo, noting initiatives that other colleges have undertaken—she offered the example of a weekly check-in—asked whether we are taking similar steps. Vice President Ramsey said that we have not adopted that particular policy. Provost Zappe urged that faculty inform Academic

Advising about students who are missing class. Professor Trillo suggested that advisors and volunteer groups can make calls to find out how students are doing, without waiting for a problem to surface. Their state of mind can change frequently; she has a list of questions that we might ask them and would be glad to forward it to either Provost Zappe or Vice President Ramsey. Acknowledging the value of her suggestion, President Iuliano added that we need the best thinking available to us as we see students through a difficult time. The provost offered to organize an initiative that would assist faculty in their efforts to help students.

To a question from Professor Hays about the number of remaining hotspots and laptops that the college has for students who need them, and whether faculty should continue to direct students toward GTech, President Iuliano affirmed that we have sufficient equipment. Vice President Tosten, in a posted message, answered that faculty should continue referring students to that office.

Professor Bowman inquired about the status of off-campus study for next year. Provost Zappe said that two hundred students have applied to go abroad, but no one yet knows how things will play out. Dean Bergren can provide specific information as it becomes available.

President Iuliano thanked people who have volunteered to participate in the college's podcast series. Professor Dailey has done a session on epidemiology and Professor Weise one on the macroeconomic impact of the pandemic. He then responded to a question from Professor Melton about employees who are worried about their economic security and who are uncertain about what will happen to them after April 30. It is, he said, too early to make an informed decision. We don't know, for instance, about resources potentially available through the stimulus package. He acknowledged the impact may be greatest on employees who cannot work remotely. Professor Hays expressed concern about departmental administrators, who will continue to work until the end of the semester.

The president then thanked the people who created a virtual college in the two weeks they had available to them. They have advanced the mission of the institution. He is optimistic about the future, and grateful for the large turnout at today's meeting, which he adjourned at 4:55 pm.

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leonard S. Goldberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Leonard S. Goldberg
Faculty Secretary

Appendix 1
President's Letter on Response to Covid-19

April 2, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

As I have often said over the past few weeks, the dedication and agility our community has shown amidst the many obstacles presented by COVID-19 has been remarkable. The ability of this College to recalibrate, to adapt, and to push forward with rigor and creativity have been inspiring, and yet very characteristic of the Gettysburg I have come to know. I hope that each one of you takes as much satisfaction in the transformation that has occurred as I take pride in what all of you—faculty and staff—have accomplished.

And that is my starting point for this letter. The strength of this institution is grounded in its people. People who have shown time and again their dedication to our mission to advance knowledge and to unlock in our students the wonder of intellectual exploration and self-discovery. In twelve short years, we will celebrate our bicentennial. To endure, indeed to flourish as we have, over such an extended period is not a result of accident, but of character—the very character we have shown in our response to the pandemic. There are challenges ahead, but none beyond the collective will of this community to surmount.

To that end, the College will further extend the pay of all full- and part-time, benefits-eligible employees through at least April 30, notwithstanding the dislocation caused by our remote working environment. I will say more about that decision in a moment.

Just as the campus has rallied to create an effective remote learning environment, we will also need to draw on the community's strength as we navigate many other issues relating to the pandemic. Simply put, all of higher education, including this College, is facing a period of substantial uncertainty—about the duration of the pandemic, the length of its economic dislocation, and how those factors may influence the way families consider their educational options.

At a time when the community has responded so magnificently to the transition to a remote campus, I necessarily pause about introducing a set of more sober considerations into our conversation. But the current and potential implications brought about by the virus are real, and we best approach them with the openness and determination that has been so vividly on display the past several months.

As I turn to the issues before us, I would like first to articulate a central organizing principle: Given all the unknowns, we must steward existing resources as carefully as possible. Having financial capacity and flexibility is likely to be essential beyond this academic year. This means that we cannot defer decisions with meaningful financial implications too long.

The need to preserve resources is a byproduct of facts we already know. Most significant are the room and board credits we have extended to students and families. For these and other reasons, the College is likely to incur more than \$7 million in unexpected costs or lost income this fiscal year. Included in these costs are the decisions we have made relating to the continuation of student wages

through the rest of the term, as well as the extension of the support provided to employees through at least the end of April.

Some of these expenses promise to be offset by the stimulus package recently enacted by the federal government. We are still working to understand the full import of the legislation. At the moment, it appears to offer some relief—roughly \$1.6 million, plus the ability to delay certain other expenditures—but it will not be sufficient to address the full economic impact occasioned by the pandemic.

As we look ahead, we must also prepare for the possibility of other forms of financial pressure on the College, whether relating to the significant endowment losses that have already occurred, a less certain philanthropic climate, or the duration of the pandemic. We have just admitted a truly phenomenal class—one that has the potential to be among the strongest and most diverse in the College's history. In this unsettled environment, however, we cannot be confident that prior yield and financial need patterns will hold, presenting the possibility—unlikely, we hope—that the class may be smaller than budgeted or need more financial aid than anticipated.

In this context, given the impact the pandemic has already had on the College and the significant challenges that may be ahead, we are taking the following steps:

- As I noted earlier, we will continue to pay benefits-eligible employees at least through April 30. While this represents a meaningful financial commitment from the College (employee salaries and benefits comprise over 60% of our operating budget), we believe it is an important and responsible step for us to take at this time. We are not in a position to make a commitment beyond April 30, and we know that will generate some understandable concern. But we will be using the coming weeks to see more clearly the full range of implications brought about by the pandemic, including aspects of the government's response, in reaching longer-term judgments.
- We are suspending most capital projects.
- We are suspending the increase in compensation for employees that was scheduled to go into effect on June 1.
- We have established a strong presumption against any new or replacement hires, whether academic, administrative, or support, other than for those searches that are effectively complete (e.g., an offer has been extended or terms negotiated). If a position is viewed as essential, the relevant department must seek approval through either the Provost or the Vice President of the respective division.
- We will continue to work from home at least until the Governor's order is lifted, requiring all non-life sustaining businesses to be closed.

These are first steps, ones that respond to existing circumstances while permitting us time to take stock of the changing landscape as we make decisions about the future.

In the meantime, please continue all you are doing to support our students. Their educational and personal well-being is our highest priority and a responsibility shared by everyone on the campus. For faculty, please continue engaging students with your characteristic energy and enthusiasm, recognizing that the remote setting heightens its importance and that our commitment to fostering an inclusive community is as important as ever. For the rest of campus, continue to do great work in service of our students and this institution's essential mission.

As I said at the outset, the College has thrived because of the commitment and determination of its people. We have seen many such examples over the past several weeks, including in the more than \$85,000 raised to support the Student Emergency Fund. As we confront a new set of challenges, ones we could not have anticipated, I am confident that we will find an effective path forward precisely because of the dedicated people who make this College what it is.

With warm regards,

Bob

Bob Iuliano
President

Appendix 2
Provost Zappe's Letter on Deferring Tenure and Pre-tenure Reviews

March 30, 2020

Dear Tenure-Track Faculty Colleagues,

In collaboration with the members of Faculty Council, I am writing to inform you that during the tenure probationary period circumstances may arise that prevent a faculty member from assuming the professional responsibilities, including teaching, advising, scholarship/creative activity, and governance, which are an integral part of this evaluation process. Thus, it may be appropriate for you to stop the tenure clock. Stopping the tenure clock means that the candidate will delay the review process for one year. If a faculty member delays the pre-tenure review one year and the outcome of the pre-tenure review is favorable, then the tenure review also occurs one year later.

If you have concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your ability to execute your professional responsibilities (teaching, advising, scholarship/creative activity, and governance) during this academic year, you may initiate a request to stop the tenure clock after consultation with your department or program chair. A department or program chair may wish to encourage such a request if circumstances have prevented the department or program from carrying out its responsibilities in the evaluation process.

All requests must be submitted in writing to the Provost. The candidate may make this request any time during the tenure probationary period but normally no later than September 1 of the semester in which the pre-tenure materials are due to the department or program and normally no later than March 1 of the calendar year in which the tenure review occurs. In light of the extraordinary circumstances we are experiencing during the Spring 2020 semester, we will extend the deadline to **May 15, 2020** for faculty scheduled to have a tenure review in Fall 2020. Tenure-track faculty members who do not have a tenure evaluation next year can request to stop the tenure clock by **September 1, 2020**. Again, stopping the tenure clock means that the candidate will delay the review process for one year.

It is essential to note that the intent of this policy is not to extend the probationary period to meet the normal standards under normal conditions, but rather to help the candidate meet the standards under extraordinary conditions.

I would be pleased to meet with you and your department/program chair if you would like to discuss the possibility of stopping your tenure clock.

Sincerely,
Chris

Christopher J. Zappe, Ph.D.
Provost
Gettysburg College