

5-21-2020

Faculty Meeting Minutes - May 21, 2020

Provost's Office
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/facultyminutes1920>

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Provost's Office, "Faculty Meeting Minutes - May 21, 2020" (2020). *2019-2020 Meeting Agendas & Minutes*. 14.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/facultyminutes1920/14>

This open access minutes is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Faculty Meeting Minutes - May 21, 2020

Abstract

Minutes of the Gettysburg College Faculty Business Meeting, May 21, 2020.

Minutes of the Gettysburg College Faculty
May 21, 2020
Remote Meeting
Special Meeting

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

He began his remarks by expressing his hope that everyone was well and by congratulating people on completing of what may be the most unusual semester any of us has experienced. Students have made considerable academic progress despite having to learn through venues neither they nor we would prefer, given the choice. From numerous conversations he has had with them, he knows how appreciative they are of the work the faculty has done to make the best of a difficult situation; Provost Zappe joins him in extending thanks for that work.

He thanked the communications team of the college in particular for the way they enabled the highly successful celebration of our seniors this past weekend: from departmental receptions to the congratulatory video, we were able to acknowledge their achievements and our hopes for them.

With the academic year drawing to a close, he can reflect on the start to his presidency: he has come to know the college well, and does not want to lose sight, in the midst of the current turbulence, of planning for our future, and on how to meet our needs and realize our aspirations. The challenges we have known about—those related to the demographic shift that is underway—are complicated by the coronavirus. We thus need to remain flexible and adaptable. Confident of our vitality, he believes now is the right time to map our future, even as much of our institutional energy has to go into figuring out how to meet the contingencies in store for the fall. The working group on what is distinctive about the college, led by Professor Carmichael and Ms. Yates, is starting to lay a foundation for a strategic plan. While it is too early for an earnest conversation about what that plan will entail, he does want to underscore his sense that the college should not behave reactively, and instead intentionally, even as we respond thoughtfully to events we cannot control. There will be time, over the summer, to make sketches for our future, and time during the fall to talk collectively about our direction.

Our focus for today is, however, on the preparations we must make to meet immediate needs. The working groups that he convened in late April are evaluating a range of options about how to do so; they are looking at academic, administrative, and co-curricular activities. Most of today's conversation will be on the work of the Academic Planning group, which is proceeding in the hope that we can resume residential learning in September, but which is addressing the prospect that we may not be able to return to it. He identified two remits with which he has charged that group. The first is to consider and assess changes to how we teach, to the calendar, and to the curriculum, that would advance our return to residential education. The second involves planning around the recognition that for some or part of the semester we may not be able to have classes on campus, and that, even if most students can return, some will not be able to do so. The other groups—on business continuity, residential life, international travel, and human resources, as well as a student advisory one—are also busy; any judgments they make will be guided by medical and public health expertise.

Toward that end, the college has retained a consultancy that specializes in health issues related to higher education. He offered his thanks to people who, working on Zoom, have gotten us as far as we have. He recognized the enormous time that faculty and staff members and others have contributed, while also mastering a medium new to most of them late in the semester.

Today's conversation is meant to identify the principles the academic planning group has been guided by, and to explain the structure it has used in doing its work. It is meant to continue discussions that have been going on in departments for the past few weeks. A follow-up meeting, which Faculty Council has planned for next week, will allow for a rich and informed response to the issues that emerge this afternoon.

Provost Christopher Zappe announced that five members of the faculty have received promotions to full professor: Professors Akbaba (Political Science), Andresen (Physics), Kennedy (Mathematics), Meyer (English) and Richard Russell (Psychology). All received virtual applause, with numerous congratulatory messages extended through the chat bar on Zoom.

Vice President Rod Tosten, co-chair with Provost Zappe of the Academic Planning working group, provided an overview of its agenda and of the principles by which it is being guided. Of principles, foremost is the health and well being of the community. It recognizes the importance of maintaining the integrity of the academic program, of safe on campus instruction, of the need to plan for the entire academic year, and not just for the fall term, and of our being positioned to pivot to online instruction, even should we start meeting on campus. Some courses may be offered online, possibly for shortened time spans.

The working group considers responses about what approaches are and are not working to be essential, and solicits them from across the campus; it has developed a systematic approach to hear from departments and programs about what they have encountered. Important to its efforts is the survey administered by the Johnson Center on faculty experiences of teaching remotely: it received two hundred responses and is providing helpful guidance as to the kind of workshops and the various forms of support that are needed for the faculty to succeed. He and Provost Zappe have met twice with members of the advisory group convened by Student Life: the committee has found the perspectives students on it shared to be highly valuable.

The planning group has explored possible changes to the academic calendar; owing to federal regulations, it has discarded some of the ideas that it had entertained. All remaining options should fit in with our customary semester framework. Also serving as important focal points are the health and safety of the campus; a consultancy, Keeling & Associates, is providing guidance. We have sought advice on classroom capacity; the registrar's office is working with the information that it has so far received. Regarding professional development, the Johnson Center has begun planning for a June workshop on strategies for remote teaching. The working group envisions the possibility that some of our fall courses will be offered exclusively online, while others, assuming it to be feasible, are likely to be intended to be taught just on campus. Some schedules may have to change, depending on the availability of safe classrooms.

The discussion of the report began with Professor Weise observing that much lies beyond our control; the medical and legal environments will determine whether we can reopen. He expects that

what we can do will be influenced by what other colleges do: if several schools decide to move in a direction, it will be hard for us to resist that movement, a herding effect. We are unlikely to choose be an outlier once we know what, for example, the other consortium colleges have decided on. He wondered whether it is possible to circumvent that effect by working cooperatively with other regional schools or bodies. Perhaps there is a way of making the decision cooperatively, without leaving individual institutions to go it alone. Are these consultations going on, or, if not, can they be started? President Iuliano responded that he agrees emphatically with the point that the decision may ultimately be beyond our control, which is why the planning groups are all looking at multiple possibilities, all of which meet our standards of excellence. He has, moreover, been in contact with the other presidents of the Centennial Conference colleges. Everybody is about where we are: studying things internally, looking at distinctive strengths, and at what is appropriate, given their locations. In New York and Connecticut, governors have commissioned white papers that have provided highly specific guidance for higher education. Governor Wolf has started a similar process; ideally it will lead to a report that will clearly indicate the criteria we should be assessing. Provost Zappe added that the Northeast Deans are articulating possible scenarios, but no one has laid out a clear path. People are looking to one another, trying to figure out a predominant response, or at least if there is one. Nobody seems eager to get in front of others. President Iuliano pointed out that there is a benefit to letting other institutions get ahead of us. We will then have the advantage of knowing their reasoning, and can determine whether it would be appropriate for us to draw on it. Our circumstances are not the same as and our resources are not matched to those of the wealthiest research universities, so we certainly cannot automatically follow their leads. We should be attentive to them, not to follow a path, but to find added perspective on our position.

Professor Suzanne Smith requested information about the time frame for a decision. The provost noted that the role of the working group is not to settle on a plan, but to make a recommendation to the president and trustees. He hopes it will be ready in about ten days. Professor Rickert asked whether the working group has explored offering partial credit courses. The provost replied that the issue has not yet come up; it is hard to divide a course unit. While the broad premise is that classes will continue to have the equivalent of four contact hours per week over fourteen weeks, there may be a few courses that will not be able to meet that standard, in which case the college will have to decide how to weigh them.

Noting questions from Professors Udden and Kittelberger about possible revisions to the calendar and the format for the semester, including the possibility of shifting to a trimester model, Provost Zappe answered that while the discussion has been wide ranging—it has included consideration of shifting to a trimester—we have to be mindful of both the Middle States Commission and the federal Department of Education. The parameters they have set presuppose our current system, and it will be hard to choose a different option. A liaison from the Middle States with whom he spoke when we made adjustments during the winter can provide guidance, and is someone whom we will consult about any changes we contemplate.

Professor Forbes had heard that students who do not feel safe returning to campus will not be required to do so. She asked about whether the policy would then require all courses to be taught, or at least positioned to be taught, remotely as well as on campus. Provost Zappe responded that we must be mindful about the needs of students with conditions that might keep them from campus and have to think about ways to accommodate them. The survey by the Johnson Center indicates that

several faculty members are also apprehensive about returning to classrooms; perhaps those who cannot teach safely on campus can offer their courses remotely, and can prepare, over the summer, to do so effectively. Vice President Tosten added that efforts are underway to meet such needs, that the supporting technology will be in place for those in quarantine. President Iuliano observed that we cannot plausibly assume there is a single path we will be able to stay on. We must be able to move to and between different formats. The Academic Planning group is figuring out ways to use the time available to us to best address the various scenarios we can foresee.

Provost Zappe, replying to a question from Professor Suzanne Smith, advised that he is in touch with other provosts and academic deans at peer and aspirant institutions. Some are forthcoming about their plans, while others are reticent. To a pair of questions about faculty and employees who might not be able to return to campus—Mr. Bruce wondered specifically whether there are criteria to help define that set—Vice President Tosten responded that a different working group is addressing that issue. The president briefly described the role of the Scenario Planning group, which includes making sure that the various groups are aware of what the others are doing; the conveners are also meeting with one another periodically.

Noting a question from Professor Sobelle about meeting the needs of faculty unable to return to campus, Vice President Tosten acknowledged the importance of the concern, and of finding ways to allow them to participate on committees and to have access to various activities.

The provost amplified his remarks about the possibility of using a trimester calendar. While the planning group gave the model serious consideration, it will be difficult to implement. We cannot operate solely at our own discretion. We must accept the constraints of both federal regulations and of the standards we have agreed upon with the Middle States Commission.

Professor Rickert asked for information about the new first year class, about the number of deposits we have received, and about requests for deferrals. President Iuliano advised that we do not yet have a clear picture. He commended the exceptional work done by the Admissions office—and by a number of faculty members—to recruit the class. The numbers are changing, but we are doing as well as we can under the circumstances. The class is larger than he expected; it is strong and diverse.

Vice President Tosten noted a question from Professor Odle-Dusseau about the difficulty, once we settle on an option for the fall, of making adjustments to teaching schedules and of having students re-register for courses. She advised keeping to our original schedule and making revisions around it. He replied that the working groups are aware of the challenge; they are identifying problems that will arise and thinking about solutions.

Professor Nicholas Miller inquired about restrictions that might be faced by faculty who live out of state. The provost acknowledged the importance of the question, but said that a definitive answer would require research into policies set by state government.

To Professor Shannon's question about starting classes early enough to allow the term to end by Thanksgiving break, Vice President Tosten responded that the working groups are aware of the risks posed by having students return to campus once they leave, and are discussing how to address the

problem. President Iuliano, picking up on Professor Alan Perry's suggestion that we cancel reading days, added that the college wishes to minimize the amount of travel by students once they return. The working group led by Vice President Ramsey, on residential life and co-curricular activities, is also paying close attention to this issue.

Professor Hays wondered whether the calendar could be reversed to keep students off campus during the winter, when the return of influenza could coincide with a rise in the number of Covid cases. Provost Zappe observed that her concern figures seriously in the analysis of the working groups; the decisions will be guided by judgments of people with expertise in the field. He replied to Mr. Bernard's question about the status of off campus study for the fall by noting that while the number of students planning to go abroad has dropped, it is still about one hundred ten. Some programs may, however, be canceled or postponed. Spring enrollments, at two hundred fifty students, are robust, a number of them having shifted their plans from one term to the next.

President Iuliano spoke of how encouraging it is to see that people are posing the right questions, ones the committee needs to hear. He urged continued engagement with these problems. It would be helpful if people, as they come up with ideas and questions, would reach out to members of the planning committee, which wants the benefit of wide ranging perspectives. Provost Zappe reviewed its membership: in addition to him and to Vice President Tosten, it includes Vice Provost Bloomquist, Professors Akbaba, Bowman, Brandauer, Day, Delesalle, Evrard, Shelli Frey, Glass, and Wrage, Ms. Odess Harnish, Dr. Remy, and Mr. Reese. He told of the strong rapport among its members, who have been exceptionally generous with their time, and in frequent conversation with the members of their divisions.

Vice President Tosten, responding to Dr. Heim, advised everyone to have backup plans, should we have to switch from in person to remote instruction unexpectedly. The president spoke of the importance of thinking comprehensively about the distinction between the improvised classes many of us have just completed and those designed to be taught digitally. The vice president added that the library, the Johnson Center, and Educational Technology are working together to promote effective online teaching.

President Iuliano, observing a number of questions not directly related to the work of the Academic Planning group, suggested that they be referred to the appropriate committees. The principle scenarios, the vice president noted, largely fit in with our semester framework.

Professor Monani requested an answer to an earlier question posed by Professor Odle-Dusseau, on the time and effort that will be required in order for departments to reschedule classes and for students to reregister. The process may have unintended consequences—students and families, for instance, feeling unfairly treated when they do not believe they have gotten what they need or deserve—while there are others that we can at least prepare for. Major changes will require enormous effort on the part of the faculty and of staff, many members of which are working on reduced schedules. Has the working group considered retaining the original schedule and making modifications around it? Provost Zappe answered that the working group will try to prescribe solutions that are mindful of the additional work any changes will entail. But these considerations may need to be balanced against others, and some alterations to schedules may be unavoidable.

In response to a question from Professor Lowy, Vice President Tosten answered that keeping the semester as designed is still under consideration. He noted a question from Professor Cadigan about the capacity to test students and faculty for exposure to Covid-19 when we reopen; Vice President Ramsey's working group is looking into what is available. The health and safety consultants are providing advice on our options. Another group is looking at personal protective equipment. President Iuliano observed that the questions reflect the breadth of the considerations that will go into any judgment about how to proceed, and reflect why it is that so many people are involved in the various working groups.

Replying to a question from Professor Crawford about the potential of even a handful of infections to shut down the campus, Vice President Tosten noted that Instructional Technology is working to be sure that quarantined students will be able to participate in their classes; one of the working groups is considering the best way of housing them.

The president reiterated how appreciative he is of the people who have worked hard to respond to the crisis. He urged faculty members with concerns and ideas to get in touch with members of the Academic Planning group. He looked forward to continuing the conversation next week.

Provost Zappe, replying to Professor Valmisa Oviedo's question about whether the faculty would take a vote on which of two or three various scenarios it would prefer, indicated that the working group will use a different process. It will make its recommendations to the leadership by drawing on its perceptions that it gathers from all constituencies. It wants and needs to be informed by the best thinking available to it, and he hopes that the faculty will share insights and concerns with representatives serving on the committee.

President Iuliano, in response to a question from Professor Brawley Newlin, advised that an architect and a health and safety consultant are providing guidance on the most sophisticated use of classroom and residential spaces.

In closing, the president urged people to be in touch with members of the working groups. Vice President Tosten and Provost Zappe thanked everyone involved in engaging with the challenge before us, and for the time so many people have invested in making sure we can arrive at the best possible decision.

President Iuliano thanked the two of them for their leadership, and the faculty for its work in bringing the semester to a successful conclusion.

He noted that the conversation is to resume next Thursday, observed that additional meetings, if not high on the list of things people are eager for, are essential to shared governance, and adjourned the meeting at 5 pm.

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leonard S. Goldberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

Leonard S. Goldberg
Faculty Secretary