Minutes of the Ninth Meeting 3 April 2008

The ninth meeting of the Faculty Senate was held at 3:10 p.m., 3 April 2008, in the Board of Trustees Conference Room. Senators present: Marc Brettler (Chair), William Flesch, Seth Fraden, David Jacobson, Harry Mairson, Catherine Mann, Robert Moody, Leonard Muellner, Richard Parmentier, Govind Sreenivasan, Malcolm Watson. Senators absent: Ira Gessel, Jody Gittell, Eric Hill, David Rakowski, Ilan Troen. Guest: Lorna Miles.

University Web Site
Lorna Miles, Senior Vice President for Communications, was invited to the Senate meeting to discuss the University web site and to address ongoing concerns about the lack of faculty involvement in the construction of the web site. Ms. Miles made a presentation to the Senate, which delineated the goals of the new home page, the benefits of the redesign, and the process that is being used to design individual sites for departments, institutes, etc. Ms. Miles said that the Department of Communications had partnered with Library and Technology Services in the project. The University’s home page, she said, is her department’s best tool to promote the University to the public; 75% of external hits to the site are from perspective students and parents. A “now page” for more internal use is currently being designed for faculty and staff. It will be updated daily, and should be up by June. Ms. Miles said she welcomes input from faculty on this project.

Senators asked who decided to redesign the web site. Ms. Miles said that the Communications Department is charged with designing the web site. She has been involved in two other home page redesigns in her five years at Brandeis and believes that the web is the most efficient way of telling Brandeis’s story to the public.

When questioned about the University’s brand and identity, Ms. Miles answered that the logo is the University’s brand identity. Brandeis is a research university with a long tradition of intellect and social justice, represented by historical icons such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Leonard Bernstein, and Albert Einstein.

One Senator remarked that Albert Einstein would object to the marketing of his image. Ms. Miles said that Brandeis had a real connection with Albert Einstein. She added that there is great competition in the market place, and that we have to use the tools at hand.

Recently, the four pillar section of the revised home page gave a new prominence to Brandeis as a Jewish institution. There had been no faculty consultation in defining the branding standards, and, in this case, faculty objected. As a result, the site was changed. Ms. Miles said that there has been faculty input in the implementation of the new site, and that a beta version of the site was shared with some faculty. In addition, there were weekly meetings with Dean of Arts and Sciences Adam Jaffe and Associate Dean Elaine Wong.

When asked how the faculty can play a role at a higher level to define branding, Ms. Miles responded that branding comes from her office with authority from President Reinharz. She is a professional, she said, and this is her job. She is open, she said, to a format in which faculty can contribute and participate.

In answering a question suggesting that it would have been constructive for faculty to preview
the web site before it becomes public, Ms. Miles said there were numerous focus groups, which previewed the site during the course of its development.

Ms. Miles was asked to give the Senate a list of people who had previewed the site. Ms. Miles said she would like to have better communication with the faculty, and that she is open to working with faculty and senior administration to build a better relationship.

Senators agreed that there should be a structure in place to allow the faculty to be a strong component in how it is represented on the University web site. This is especially so since the president has often said that the faculty are the core of the University.

Committee to Revise Human Resources Policy
The Chair reported that he has asked Senators Jody Gittell and Govind Sreenivasan to participate on a committee to help clarify the relationship between the new Human Resources Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy and the Faculty Handbook, and how harassment in the classroom differs from harassment in other areas. The Chair said he will also ask Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Peter French to name two additional members. The committee will work over the summer.

Handbook Amendment on Tenured/Untenured Senate Membership
There is currently an amendment before the Faculty Meeting that no more than half the membership of the Senate can be untenured. The question was asked, “What mechanism is in place if there is a tie?” It was decided that random selection would be used to break a tie.

Council Meeting with President Reinharz
The Chair reported that the council met with President Reinharz to express the faculty’s concern about issues of governance.

Council Meeting with Provost Krauss
The Provost informed the council that Board of Trustees is in the final stages of renewing President Reinharz’s five-year contract. If faculty have any concerns, now is the time to voice them, before the Board formally votes on this contract at its next meeting, before commencement.

The firm Isacson Miller has been employed to begin the search process for a deputy Executive Vice President to replace Peter French, who will retire in summer 2009. The search committee will be composed primarily of trustees. President Reinharz has cited two critical areas of expertise – finance and construction. The Senate Council stressed that the candidate must also have academic experience. The Chair said he will meet with Stephen Kay, former Chair of the Board of Trustees, and chair of the search committee for this position, to advocate for faculty participation on the committee.

In the fall the Committee on Faculty Rights and Responsibilities will propose guidelines for faculty outside the tenure structure. There needs to be clarification with the legal department on the force of these guidelines.

The council discussed with the Provost plans for a campus-wide event on free speech and the classroom, which it had proposed to her in a December 2007 meeting.

The Provost reported that the lunch meetings she had with the school councils on this issue were honest and candid.

May 1 Event on Free Speech and the Classroom
The Chair outlined to Senators a campus-wide event on May 1, planned for students, faculty, and
administration. The event will be co-sponsored with the administration and the Student Senate. There will be two speakers: one, a legal expert, from outside the University, who will discuss legal issues and how they relate to discrimination and harassment in the classroom. A second speaker will discuss non-legal issues and how they relate to provocative speech and a positive classroom environment. The Chair will inform the Senate of the names of the speakers as soon as he has received confirmation.

Proposed Resolutions Regarding the Committee on Faculty Rights and Responsibilities
The following statement was made by the Senate at today’s meeting: The Faculty Senate is interested in the Provost’s response to the resolutions that were unanimously passed at the 13 March 2008 Faculty Senate meeting.

Arts and Sciences Reinvigoration Plan
The Senate’s decision whether or not to support the Arts and Sciences Reinvigoration Plan was postponed until today’s meeting. The following discussion reflects the sense of the Senate.

The Senate commends Dean Jaffe for his spirit of openmindedness by presenting his plan to the Senate. He indicated then that he would not pursue the plan if there was strong Senate opposition. The Senate is unanimously opposed to this plan, in its current form, for a number of reasons.

• Empowering the Councils to a greater extent is very good, but not in the manner suggested in the Dean’s proposal. Giving the Chairs of the School Councils the kind of influence and discretionary power contemplated by the new plan will tend to stifle rather than promote creativity and innovation at Brandeis.

• The plan has the unintended consequence of making interdisciplinary work less likely because it weakens Departments and rigidifies boundaries between Schools, rather than supporting interdisciplinary work from a solid departmental and School foundation.

• The plan adds a layer of ‘middle management,’ moving opposite to the trend in other organizations, such as business and non-profits, where ‘middle management’ has virtually disappeared. Such middle management positions tend to weaken and blur communication both downward and upward in an organization, and tend to curb innovation, while also being costly. Similarly in our own organization, there are concerns that this added layer will mean that the Dean of Arts and Sciences will be less accessible to faculty members.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.