Meeting of the 2014-15 Faculty Senate

This meeting was held November 21st, 2014 from 10:00 – 11:00 in Shapiro Campus Center, Room 313.

Present: Ulka Anjaria, Daniel Bergstresser, Jens Hilscher, Eli Hirsch, Sarah Mead, Thomas Pochapsky, Ellen Schattschneider

Absent: Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Sarita Bhalotra, Joe Cunningham, William Flesch, Matthew Headrick, Susan Parish, Jeffrey Prottas, Liuba Shrira, Laurence Simon, Joseph Wardwell

Approval of Minutes
Determined via email. See addendum.

Chair’s Report
The Provost will be asking the Senate for help with Brandeis’ reaccreditation, which is coming up. This should focus the university, make sure the institution is guided in the right direction, and provide an opportunity to focus on what we need to do to keep up with and improve upon our peer institutions.

IBS has formed an 11 person committee to determine a new internal structure. They will keep the Senate informed, especially regarding the positions of Deans, with periodic updates to the Chair and the Senate.

The Council will be meeting with Gina Gkoulgkountina, Jim Gray, and John Storti to discuss purchasing practices on campus and how to move forward with the proposal outlined in the last Senate meeting by STAND to have Brandeis become a CFI (conflict free institution).

Subcommittee Reports

Tenure Standing Committee
The Tenure Standing Committee is looking into creating a standing rather than ad hoc committee to confer tenure, at the request of Susan J. Birren, Dean of Arts and Sciences. Their proposal has been given to the Dean. The committee is looking to address concerns of tenure being given as favors and of a standing committee concentrating too much power in too few people. One possibility is rotating membership. Whatever their proposal is, it will have to be a handbook revision, which will require ratification by the full faculty.

It was questioned whether a change to a standing committee would include the promotion system for non-tenured faculty. It is believed that it would, but this is key to keep in mind, as non-tenured faculty are particularly vulnerable.
Faculty Meetings/Block Schedule Conflict
The number of faculty that cannot attend faculty meetings because of conflicts with the new class block schedule was brought up last year, with no change. This situation needs to be revisited, as the current system leaves segments of the faculty unable to attend, and therefore disenfranchised. The Senate Council will address this issue with the Provost next time they meet with her.

Retirement Funds Committee
Ellen has agreed to chair the Retirement Funds Committee. The committee is beginning to work with the Provost’s office to obtain information as to what happened with retirement funds during the 2008-2009 crisis. Along with building a chronology of the crisis, and documenting any (mis)information reported at the time, the committee will determine whose retirement accounts were affected, including and staffy or faculty no longer at Brandeis. The committee is also to respond to the Executive Compensation report and make sure the information is accurate, once the report is released.

Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid
While Andrew Flagel (Senior Vice President for Students and Enrollment) should be on this committee, he seems to currently be the sole member of the committee. Questions that have come up in faculty meetings would fall under the purview of this committee, and rather than create a new mechanism, a revitalization of the existing committee structure is suggested.

At the previous faculty meeting, Flagel gave a presentation regarding the makeup of the incoming class. There is concern that more emphasis is being placed on what a student can pay than on how they contribute to the academic direction of the University. If students are being chosen by a standard other than the future of the academy, departments are concerned as to what this means for their own future standing in the University. It was noted, however, that we must be careful not to turn to rhetoric of “lowering standards” or of “yellow peril”; a questioning of the University’s acceptance practices cannot include racist or stereotyping language or sentiments.

The Senate at this time is primarily concerned with where the determination of what the “ideal class” consists of comes from.

Academic Freedom and Civility Faculty Meeting
There will be a discussion at the upcoming faculty meeting about academic freedom and free speech. Originally an executive meeting was considered, but after some dissent, it was decided that this discussion would take place at an open meeting, which means the inclusion of student press. Since many faculty and the President cannot attend the December meeting, it will be announced at that meeting that the discussion will continue into the next January meeting as well.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00.
Addendum

The minutes of 10.29.2014 were approved by the Senate via email.