Minutes for the Faculty Senate Meeting

12:30 - Brief comments, updates, Faculty meeting agenda
- Welcome, Greetings, and a brief Check in with Senators
- Two broad categories of discussion: How the response to the Covid-19 crisis has been so far and what the Senate can do in the near future.
- Vote to approve previous meeting minutes
  - Approved
- We are going to try to run the next Faculty Meeting fully digitally with one half of the meeting will be a Question and Answer session with Lisa and Ron.

12:45 - Discussion on COVID-19 Response and Future issues
- Discussion of financial future
- Any questions or comments on the university’s response so far
  Question: Regarding the emails from HR and the President, I don’t know if there can be some clarity?

  Answer: I understood the first email HR sent out a week and a half ago but I can reach out to get additional clarification on other emails.

  Question: Can you share some of the confidential information that you’ve heard? As people are scared about losing their jobs.

  Answer: I can ask.

  Question: We need to re-evaluate our time off, our passover break has been chopped up and people need time to organize their lives right now.

  Answer: We have been sort of blindly focused on getting students off campus and re-organizing, but now that that is done I can talk to Dorothy about this.

  Comment: People in the next week or two will start to hit breaking points so talking about this now will be good but Brandeis has been doing better than other universities, so there is something to be said even though there is more work to be done.
Comment: In general, there have been some more confusing emails but overall Brandeis has seemed to be more humane in how it’s addressed this crisis. They’ve updated things in a reasonable way. It’s been a bit of an onslaught of information but it’s been measured and thought out at least. In general, it’s been pretty positive.

Comment: They’ve been revising pass/fail and credit/no-credit options and extended tenure calendar without us having to argue so that has been good.

Comment: I’ve felt Lisa has handled this really well. The CTL has been working around the clock and they’ve gotten so many resources out, they’ve been very responsive.

Comment: I think Lisa has done a great job, the administration has done a great job. The things I'm most concerned about are the deadline of April 17th that I read about in the memo for the emergency paid time off. I just hope there is flexibility there. They also aren’t saying much about non-benefits eligible staff which is concerning. I also see that the burden of keeping the university going is falling on the faculty and there should be some consideration on this.

Comment: Let’s not forget about the administrators, librarians, and IT staff that are also keeping the university going.

Comment: The university has to react to outside actions, they’ve been very transparent. In addition to giving credit to Lisa and the administration, we should also recognize the deans and staff of the individual colleges/programs. We should acknowledge the fact they are working 24/7 and we should acknowledge their contribution. If this goes into the summer, systems will start breaking.

Comment: Regarding people who are anxious about their jobs, among the folks who are on long term contracts there is a lot of wondering about their job security. This is clearly for those in the tenure structure more so than for those of us outside of it.

Comment: There is definitely a hole here and Dorothy has said she is not writing new contracts. We are in unknown territory. Perhaps we can transition into the workers and labor conversation.

- There is a plan for the Brandeis/Sodexo workers to deliver food to the field hospitals. We are equipped to provide 5,000 meals a day to these hospitals.
- Discussion of Food Services Contract.
• Brandeis Labor Coalition - it is a student led group and we can support it as a senate or disagree.
  Question: Can someone clarify what the petition is saying? I know the intent, which I agree with, and if we were to support this we would write a response in our own language and style.
  Answer: I think it is a good-hearted attempt to support workers on campus but it doesn’t really seem to take into consideration the economic and legal context around employment and labor. I wouldn’t support as is.
  Comment: I do not see how this can be made actionable. I support the intent and would be happy to draft language that would do so. It’s not completely clear if that would be needed.
  Comment: We should not be supporting or endorsing this until we know the legal and economic consequences and context of this.
  Comment: In 2008, the lowest paid people paid the most. Now we are using an expensive search firm to find a new provost. We don’t need an expensive search firm. It’s a waste of money that we could use to support other workers.
  Comment: On the provost search, Lisa has not been asked to stay. I reached out to Ron about his plans and he said he is still going ahead with the search firm and the search. I completely agree with the opinion on the search firm.
  Comment: Since we are cancelling pretty much everything, it should not be a problem to cancel the search firm as well.
  Comment: I think the faculty and the staff are still very much traumatized by the financial management of 2008. The high level administrators who are working very hard and are very well paid, while many of the other faculty are underpaid.
  Question: Do we want to make a hard inquiry into the cost of this?
  Comment: I think the faculty would like to see Lisa stay.

During next week's Faculty Meeting, which will be on zoom and recorded, I feel we should ask these questions.

  Comment: I agree with everything everyone’s said but I feel that we should give them a heads up about these questions that we might throw at them (about the search firm and the financial situation and Lisa staying on). I think it would be a mistake to put them between a rock
and a hard place especially considering all the uncertainty.

My concern, going back to the BLC statement and one these issues, is that it is too combative. I worry that our expectations for one single university might be too high.

Comment: There is a complicated dynamic here. I feel that Ron and Lisa should be given a heads up but it should be separate notes. We should let Lisa give us a “yay” or “nay” regarding staying on and we don’t want to put them in a position where Ron might pressure her.

Comment: Lisa may only stay for an extra month or two, we don’t want to see her burn out.

Comment: Now is not a good time to switch high level leadership and another issue is the cost of the headhunter.

We’ve seen Lisa on the front lines and as a public face but Ron has been in the war-room everyday working very hard.

Any other statements on the BLC?
Comment: I’d be willing to figure out if there is something we can do as a Senate to state that we want the university to act with their social justice values and not act like they did in 2008.

Comment: Would some of you be willing to write upon our institutional history and articulate our values in relationship to this?
    Joel G, Sue, and Sabine can work on this.

- All the governance stuff will move to next year, Dignity at Work as well. It is not ideal but it is what it is. Next week there will be a symbolic vote to take WGS from a program to a department. The handbook does not require a vote on this but I think we should propose that we change the handbook so that the promotion or demotion of a program to a department would require the same handbook voting regulations as the creation of a major or a minor.
- Discussion of the creation/demotion/merger of new departments/programs/etc.
    Comment: Figuring out the definition of a program and department will be necessary. Some programs need the flexibility but the American Studies and WGS examples are much more structural than some of the examples in Heller.

    Comment: Putting some of these discussions to a general vote sounds great in principal but this can also stall things out.
Comment: Programs have historically not been allowed to have tenure lines. This is not a rule. Programs have to go through reviews every 3-4 years and have to go through the UCC. I’ve both been reviewed and been a reviewer. There is a process, then it goes to the UCC who then passes it along to the Provost/President. If the faculty were to have a vote to demote American Studies they would not have done that. And the faculty would probably promote Education to a department while the administration wouldn’t but there is a lot more here, it’s complicated.

Comment: The faculty should have some role in this. Some programs and departments are going to be abolished, cut, or demoted. Asking colleagues to vote on their departments and programs is potentially very divisive. Something short of a vote might seem like a wiser thing. How else can we suggest faculty oversight and involvement?

Comment: The key principle here is that or procedural justice. Not every decision will be one that is embraced. But we want a fair and thoughtful process.

Comment: I think a procedure without a full faculty vote is the way to go. We cannot use the full faculty vote as a firewall. I think a procedure of participation and review is needed and the procedure needs to be fair.

I’ll bring this up again after things calm down elsewhere.

- Moving on, briefly, are there any other concerns or thoughts about next year or the year after regarding the coronavirus?
  Comment: This will definitely be a longer shut down and the larger impact will be long term. We need to think both short term and longer term about this crisis.

Question: Are there things the senate should be doing or discussing?

Comment: When we met with Michael and Marya and they talked about the Senate, it made clear that one of the things we have to face is the perception of the Senate. There is work to be done here. There is a perception that the Senate is not as important as it actually is.

Comment: On the postponement of Dignity at Work, if things begin to settle down on this crisis in the summer, I’d like to see us reschedule the meeting with senior administration while Lisa is still with us. If she leaves I’d hate to see this whole thing
unravel. If things settle down then I’d love to see this meeting happen.

1:30 - New Senators, elections and nominations

- We have all our meetings scheduled for the rest of the semester and we have eight positions open for next year. We have some nominations, if you could send in more that would be great. New faculty and underrepresented faculty would be great nominations. We have two meetings scheduled in May, maybe three, and we can talk about the senate council and chair then. WE didn’t have time for the by-laws today but take a look at it in your free time. I really want you to feel free to send questions to me and the senate council.

1:45 - By-laws edits, comments

Attendance: Joel Christensen, Pu Wang, Grace Zimmerman, Sue Lanser, Sabine von Mering, Joel Gershenfeld, Rajesh Sampath, Danielle Igra, Jane Ebert, A.K. Nandakumar, Jennifer Cleary, Sarah Mead, Susan Dibble, Dmitry Kleinbock, Laurence Simon