Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

12:30 - Assemble, Approve Minutes
   • Motion to approve the minutes
     o Approved

12:35 - Introduce Senators Elect, Other Updates
   • Introductions of new Senators:
     o Arthur Holmberg, Elanah Uretsky, Monika Mitra, Ilana Szobel, Davide Pettenuzzo, and the returning senators Sue Lanser, Susan Dibble, and Joel Christensen. We had over 30 nominations for candidates but many felt they didn’t have the time/bandwidth to join in. We will have to review this next year.
     o Acknowledgements for the Senators stepping down: Danielle Igra, Jane Ebert, Larry Simon, Jennifer Cleary, Sarah Mead.
   • New Coronavirus task force which Joel Christensen will be sitting on starts this week.
   • Upcoming town hall meeting with President, May 7th at 10 AM.
   • An update on the most recent Board of Trustees.
   • Any concerns or questions with these updates or other items?

Question - What’s the latest plan for the Fall semester?

Answer - There is no specific plan selected at the moment but right now we have at least five plans that we are considering. Most likely most students will have a hybrid learning experience. Regardless we will have to quarantine some students as they return to campus. This is the best-case scenario. Worst case, the entire semester will be online. They want to make the decision by June 15th.

Comment: They recently were discussing pushing the decision deadline back to July.

Discussion on new task force and working groups to deal with coronavirus

Question - I have concerns about our amazing academic services staff. We only have a few staff in this department and they are drowning. They lost one advisor to another job and they are taking on more work. I’ll know more from the Committee on Academic Standing meeting but I wanted to put this out there because I don’t know who is advocating for them.
Discussion about reaching out to BUSAC and figuring out what Academic Service team needs

Comment - Regarding the timing of deciding next semester, there are at least a few that need to know soon in order to make important decisions and plans.

Response - Ron and Lisa are waiting for a variety of things, such as state guidelines and the governor’s plans. We have to ask, are the state regulations going to be our basement or our ceiling? We can’t let the state regulations be our ceiling and there is a lot that is unknown right now. I’m a little surprised they’re pushing back the decision deadline.

Comment - The Strategic Planning Committee has also discussed this. Many of the important decisions are beyond the grasp of Brandeis. I think that the State’s decision makers will want a say before all the universities welcome back their students.

Comment - Our modelling is based off incredible unknowns and our best-case scenario is modelled off often hopeful assumptions. But we are considering many options.

Comment - The Covid situation is just starting to evolve in Africa. It started in China, then moved into Europe and the US and now it is going into Africa. I was privy to a State Department memo about re-opening the embassies in Africa. It will take about 3-4 months before embassy services are up and running. This will delay our students from Africa getting visas. Any decisions we take will have major implications on international students - such as eligibility for F1 Visa and there are serious implications of OPTs.

Comment - I know the Provost has brought both of these up and I will also bring them up.

Comment - Any nation considered a national security issue, the consulates don’t make the decisions themselves, they have to submit the applications and normally it can take a month to schedule interviews and now with the backup, international students will have trouble getting to campus.

Comment - With the upcoming President’s meeting, we should plan out questions the Senate wants to ask.
Comment - There is a tremendous amount of insecurity in the Boston area. This area is #3 in deaths/number of cases and the area houses the greatest number of students per capita. Given the acute nature of where we live and our situation, I don’t think the voices of the most vulnerable (contract faculty, international students, etc.) are being represented in the communications we are receiving. This is the time to align with the social values of the institution.

Response - You are touching upon a number of things we have had the chance to discuss as a community. The areas being most affected are predominantly minority populations and this is a byproduct of our systemic problems with racism. We are a product of this system and it’s something we should discuss.

Discussion on some of the different models for courses next fall such as online for all courses over 50 and models for housing students such as reaching out to local hotels.

ACTION ITEM - Bring forward questions about voicing the concerns of the most vulnerable of our community and those who might not be able to work.

Comment - It is not about the post-pandemic response. People are legitimately concerned about how such a small but dense state is going to be hit hard and we aren’t talking about this.

Response - We have just been trying to get by and we have the chance this summer to be better. I want the Senate to get together to try to address some of these issues and fill in the gaps that the President and Provost have not addressed yet.

Comment - So far most of our teaching has been an “emergency” switch over to online formats but if we are going to teach fully online in the Fall we will have to make adjustments. A full semester online is a totally different structure.

Response - They have brought in consultants and are working to adjust the CTL so they can better help address this.

Comment - The design challenge of this summer is in part down to the number of students and housing, a second design challenge is how to imbue what we do with what makes Brandeis unique, the third part is the reinventing of our educational model. In a concentrated period of a month or a month and half we need to crystalize what we have to say about these things to incoming students. This is a very intensive and concentrated process split across the CTL, the Senate, and other forums. We need to have these groups connecting to each other so we can have a shared vision.
Comment - I see the role of the faculty senate as twofold. We support the faculty in regards to the administration and we act as a liaison both ways. We need to create a teaching environment where students can learn and thrive. Some students can't do online learning. If we are going to retool our educational model then we will have to lessen the research requirements for faculty.

12:45 - COVID-19: Tuning Conversation (Current Questions/Gaps)

1:00 - Board of Trustees Meeting Overview, Jytte Klausen and Joel Christensen
- I was a former senator in the faculty senate and now I’m a representative to the board of trustees. There are some decision making that we are not involved in. Our influence is limited to expressing the thoughts and perspective of the faculty body to the Board of Trustees and informing them of what we actually do as professors. There was a survey of parents and students in early April from Inside Higher Ed about their perspectives on having online learning for returning in the fall. Most of you have probably seen Ron’s letter and the reimbursement of room and board and the other costs with getting students home. We are in a crisis situation right now and we have to be careful to not destroy the Brandeis brand. Decisions will be made over the summer and we are operating with a great deal of uncertainty. This puts an immediate stress on our operating budgets and we can see our responses to this such as Ron and his staff taking a pay cut, the salary freezes, and halting of pension contributions. I think we have a very compassionate and fair leadership as opposed to the financial crisis of 2008. It is very important that we try to persevere a voice for the faculty in this very complicated situation.

Comment - In the senate discussion beforehand, our sentiment was that we didn’t want to cut and so far the administration has the same perspective but we have models for a number of financial situations. We don’t want to put ourselves in a position where we are playing a zero-sum game.

• Any questions:

Question - Do we know the number of deposits for incoming students with the deadline coming up?

Answer - The deposit deadline was pushed back.

Comment - undergraduate deposits are ok considering but graduate programs are down some much more than others.

Conversation about tuition increase and implications for Brandeis values.

Question - A lot of students buy books from the bookstore. What will happen for the fall semester?
Answer - We are moving to try to use open access works as much as possible and there are grants to help with lowering the costs of materials for your syllabus.

Comment - The library is working on having pickups and drop-offs. There is also the Hathi Trust for online books. One way or another we are expecting to have students on campus although it might be staggered and there will have to be a lot of protocols set up. It is important that this does not become the permanent situation. We won’t be an online university but there is no doubt that we will go forward with a mix of online and in person learning.

Comment - The open access movement has long preceded this crisis and it will be accelerated. Some practices will persist and become institutionalized and some publishers might collapse as they can’t keep up with the changes.

Comment - Ultimately it falls on the individual faculty members to move to open access course materials but we need to provide the resources for faculty to embrace open access materials. Going open access is more difficult for some fields, such as the sciences.

Question - Could you describe a little more what you saw as the major concerns and thoughts of the Board of Trustees?

Answer - There isn’t a singular perspective but they are unified in their commitment to Brandeis. There were no slash and burn solutions that were genuinely brought up. It is hard to generalize the thinking but most people there wanted to know what to think. This will continue to affect our business modelling moving forward.

Comment - The Board is supportive and waiting to learn more. They are discussing how we want to approach our long-term financial options. My understanding is that all of our borrowing options come with fairly heavy short-term repayment obligations. There are a lot of issues that will come up and the Board is being rational and patient in waiting for things to change and arise.

- The university can’t make all these decisions by themselves in a vacuum. We have to consider what our peer institutions are doing and the governor’s orders, such as this stay at home order. And all out of state incoming students will have to be quarantined for 2 weeks right now. We don’t know what the governor will order. There is a debate around setting up testing as well.

1:30 - Continued Discussion of Institutional Responses

1:50 - Outline of Election for Chair, Council 2020-21 (to be conducted at May 13th Senate Meeting)
Outline of next week’s meeting and the plans for the summer.

What are the issues we need to address over the summer? We will have multiple Board meetings over the summer and this is our opportunity to show what the Senate does and prove why it is critical. This crisis has combined the existential crises to higher education and the changes to our educational system that we expected to see in a generation has been accelerated and condensed.

Our Senate leadership elections will be next week and anyone who will be in the senate next year will be eligible to vote. Offline, I’d like you to have conversations about Senate leadership. We have several spots in the Senate Counsel and the Senate Chair to decide.

Discussion on eligibility to vote in the Senate.

Discussion on the role of the Faculty Senate and upcoming discussions around the budget and advocating for the future. Are we as a senate going to oppose cuts or are we going to support specific cuts?

Question - As I understand it, some staff salaries are very high. Are we going to re-evaluate these salaries?

Answer - many salaries are based on “market rates.” I hope that we as a Senate are not naive about the market forces that guide salaries.

Comment - My understanding is that our current executive administrators are clearly against the idea of “market rates” for paying upper level admins as opposed to the previous administration which was paid exorbitantly.

Comment - I think it behooves us to invest the thinking minds on our campus to think beyond these emergency measures and think about long term solutions to building a resilient community and educational system.

Comment - This could be one of the sub-working groups and as a Senate we can launch our own working groups.

Question on the role and goals of the President’s Strategic Planning Committee and if there would be a separate group that might make important decisions along these lines.

Answer - Recently the Strategic Planning Committee meetings have been overwhelmed with discussing how to respond to Covid. Everything was up in the air and they are doing a lot of modelling and thinking through different financial models that utilize a variety of different scenarios. They want the best information before making
a decision. I have not heard of a separate group that might try to make any of these decisions.

Comment - We need a group that is visionary and looking forward to what our institution should be and could be. We need some standards to measure our movements and evolutions against. Some type of “Vision Committee” for guiding the redevelopment of Brandeis.

Comment - That was the original goal of the Strategic Planning Committee but current affairs took over.

- Next week, I’d like for us to get nominations for senate counsel and chair as well as potential agendas for next year.

Attendance:
Susan Dibble, Sue Lanser, Ilana Szobel, Joel Christensen, Gordon Fellman, Grace Zimmerman, Elanah Uretsky, A.K. Nandakumar, Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld, Dmitry Kleinbock, Jennifer Cleary, Danielle agar, carol Osler, Rajesh Sampath, Davide Pettenuzzo, Sarah Meade, Monika Mitra, Jane Ebert, William Flesch, Arthur Holmberg, Jytte Klausen