

University Senate

Proposed: April 1, 2016

Adopted: April 1, 2016

MEETING OF FEBRUARY 26, 2016

In the absence of President Lee Bollinger, Executive Committee chair Sharyn O'Halloran (Ten., SIPA) called the Senate to order shortly after 1:15 pm in 104 Jerome Greene Hall. Fifty-eight of 100 senators were present during the meeting.

Minutes and agenda. The minutes of February 5 and the agenda were adopted as proposed.

Executive Committee chair's remarks. Sen. O'Halloran moved to her remarks, saying she expected the president to arrive soon.

She listed highlights for the last two plenaries of the year, on April 1 and April 29.

--Faculty quality of-life survey results. On April 1 Sen. O'Halloran will present the highlights of the survey; then on April 29, she will look more closely at the results, identifying trends and suggesting policy recommendations.

--On April 1 Safwan Masri, Executive Vice President for Global Centers and Global Development, will discuss the most recent work of the Global Centers.

--On April 29 Jeff Gordon, chair of the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing, will speak about the work of ACSRI this year.

--On both April 1 and April 29, a number of annual committee reports will be presented.

Supermajority. Sen. O'Halloran said a few more senators were needed to achieve the super-majority needed to act on a proposed Doctor of Medical Science degree in Dental Medicine that was now before the Senate for the second time. The new degree must be added to the University Statutes, and Statutory amendments require a three-fifths majority of all incumbent senators. Sen. O'Halloran decided to continue on to the next agenda item—committee reports—and hope that a few more senators would arrive.

Committee reports.

Student Affairs Committee: Final report on the 2015 student quality-of-life survey. Sen. O'Halloran praised the students' work on the report, including their interactions with administrators, student groups, and Trustees.

SAC members Marc Heinrich (CC, chair), Emily Moore (SEAS Grad, vice chair), Ramis Wadood (CC, vice chair), and Grace Kelley (Nursing) presented the report, referring closely to a [deck of slides](#).

Sen. Heinrich began with an overview of the survey.

Then Sen. Kelley spoke in some detail about disabled students. Sen. Wadood said SAC was particularly concerned about disability issues, which were extensively covered in the latest weekly print edition of Spectator.

Sen. Wadood referred to slides as he discussed the survey results for low-income students in some detail.

Sen. Daniel Savin (Research Officers) asked if SAC was calling for more opportunities for low-income students to see cultural events.

Sen. Wadood said the university had put a great deal of effort and money into Arts at Columbia, which many students find highly satisfactory. He said SAC would like to see the administration make sure that low-income students are aware of low-cost opportunities, particularly for graduation events. He said SAC would like for these costs to be subsidized by the administration.

Sen. James Applegate (Ten, A&S/NS) noted that the slope of the line between the satisfaction levels of low-income and higher-income students was remarkably flat--that is, larger amounts of money did not seem to increase satisfaction levels.

Sen. Wadood said SAC found a similar flatness across the board, with most levels of satisfaction fairly close to neutral.

Sen. Applegate said these survey data did not seem to support the conclusion that there is a big problem for students who are unable to afford various kinds of special events. He said the institution seems to be successfully providing an experience that is independent of how much money a student's family makes.

Sen. Wadood said the committee was not saying that money is the sole factor in determining social life. He said the data are corroborated by many qualitative comments on the difficulty of getting access to social life on campus.

[Inaudible comment from a senator]

Sen. Wadood said the present report includes some benchmarking on transgender and LGBTQ students, and the next one will include benchmarks for low-income and disabled students. He noted that the present survey at the university level appears to be the only one of its kind in the Ivy League, and one of the first at a major research university to be run entirely by students.

[Inaudible comment from a senator]

Sen. Wadood said that one aspect of student life that has been getting better over time has been technology, an improvement that SAC has attributed mainly to the new director of CUIT, Gaspare LoDuca. But other aspects have been getting worse. It was difficult to compare apples to apples because of changes in some of the questions, but one apparent trend was a slight decline in mental health satisfaction, particularly for disabled, transgender, and low-income students, from the 2013 survey to this one.

Sen. Emily Moore recognized Sen. Applegate's point about the lack of a sharp contrast between satisfaction levels at different income levels. But she said Zack Heinemann, the student who had helped analyze the data, pointed out significant differences among the groups despite the flat line.

And those findings back up the anecdotal evidence offered by low-income students. She agreed with Sen. Applegate that 1-to-7 satisfaction scales are problematic in surveys of this kind.

She said that in her constituency—graduate engineering students—lower-income students tend to be the most involved in the graduate student councils, and in those roles tend to receive free tickets to special events as a reward for being involved. She encouraged other deans' offices to follow this model.

Sen. Wadood described a mediation analysis run by the students' statistician that showed correlations linking lower incomes, lower perceptions of one's academic performance, and lower GPAs.

Referring to slides, Sen. Wadood then listed some policy recommendations for addressing the problems the survey had identified for low-income students.

Sen. Susan McGregor (NT, Journ.) asked how special services for low-income students could be implemented, particularly for those who might feel stigmatized by stepping forward to request services.

Sen. Heinrich said this is a challenge for all three types of students that the report highlights. Another challenge is to support as many of each of these types of students as possible. He said under ideal conditions such services could be made available not just to lower-income students but to everyone, and people who need the services could choose whether to participate. But this is a challenging issue, requiring more thought.

Sen. Wadood stressed the need for student advisors and financial aid officers to know individual students' circumstances and be prepared to refer them to services.

Transgender students. Sen. Heinrich said SAC, responding to issues raised in the 2013 quality-of-life survey, had worked to provide email aliases for these students, as well as gender-neutral bathrooms in Lerner Hall. He then discussed in some detail the slides in the report about transgender and gender/queer students.

Sen. Moore concluded the presentation with a few general points.

1. *Funding.* She said funding is more of a problem for graduate students than for undergrads, and particularly for non-doctoral students. Her sense, from the comments and from personal experience, is that the foreign student population is the most affected of all because they don't have access to the public financial aid that American students receive. She mentioned a Center for Teaching and Learning workshop on ways to secure funding for graduate education that had helped her in writing a grant proposal that helped to secure the renewal of an NIH RO1 grant for her PI's lab. She said departments that know how to guide their students to promising funding opportunities can make a vital difference. Individual student councils that make scholarships available for smaller conferences have also made a difference for students.

2. *Safety.* Sen. Moore said satisfaction ratings over safety were extremely high rating; she congratulated the security effort around the university. But the survey revealed lower satisfaction levels for females and—again—the transgender population. Females are

also less satisfied than men with the state of their mental health, and transgender students are still less satisfied.

Sen. Moore called for contacting the relevant student organizations and finding small, practical remedies that can make a difference in the lives of these students.

Sen. Moore said connecting student groups with similar interests and putting them together in one room can be extremely helpful. SAC has revived the Inter-School Governing Board, a body that represents all of the schools. Student senators have been helpful in appointing representatives from their schools to this board.

3. *Wellness*. Sen. Moore showed a graph detailing the number of times in a month that a student did not get enough sleep. The students with the biggest sleep deficit seem to be undergraduates. There doesn't seem to be an obvious solution, other than education about the importance of sleep.

Sen. Heinrich said SAC would be releasing the report in the coming days, making final revisions, and then presenting it at meetings around the university. He said the findings of the first survey led to some policy changes both in IT management and in Public Safety. The next round will include major renovations to Dodge Gym that will mean new fitness programs and facilities.

Another initiative will involve opportunities for students to interact with senior administrators.

Sen. Mary Sormanti (NT, SW) expressed concern about the number of days in a month that a student had "mental health" problems (7 of 30 for non-disabled students, even higher for disabled students). She also asked whether days without enough sleep counted as days with mental health problems. Sen. Wadood said they did not.

Sen. Heinrich said it is well known that mental health issues are significant across college campuses. SAC did not have a clear picture of how Columbia compares to peer institutions on this dimension. But that doesn't mean Columbia can't address mental health issues. He said Sens. Wadood, Sean Ryan (CC), Katharine Celentano (GS) and others have been actively involved in the SAC Mental Health Task Force.

Sen. Richard Smiley said sometimes the glass is half-full, not half-empty. He noted the difference between, say, suicidal depression and anxiety about a final the next day. Without dismissing real issues of student stress, he said it's important not to overstate any difficult day as a mental health problem.

Sen. Kelley agreed about the need to distinguish different kinds of stress. She said the big picture is that these burdens weigh differentially on different demographics.

Ashley Martin, a student affiliated with the Business School Behavior Research Lab who had helped to analyze the survey findings, asked if certain kinds of mental or physical disabilities have a higher correlation with mental health problems than others. She said the categories might be somewhat conflated--someone who says they have mental disabilities is likely to have a higher incidence of bad mental health days.

Sen. Heinrich focused in his response on what he had learned anecdotally in the first meetings of SAC's new Subcommittee on Campus Disabilities, chaired by Sen. Kelley: Disabled students have a lot of frustrations impacting mental health, even if some of the causes can be physical disabilities—for example, having to go to 120th Street to get to a classroom because the elevator beside Dodge on College Walk isn't working, and getting to class 40 minutes late.

Sen. Michael Rosen (Ten., P&S) said the population surveyed is so tightly defined by age and overall demographic that it raises the question of how this group compares with a populations with a broader range of ages or experiences. Are there trends in maturation and aging that this survey cannot account for? Some problems may reflect a universal developmental issue, and may just get better on their own. Which ones are correlated to specific characteristics of this university--or any university? Addressing these issues would require a much broader study.

Sen. Heinrich said that the final report will widen the perspective by comparing the 2015 findings with those from 2013. He said that would not be the robust study that Sen. Rosen was calling for, but over the course of several biennial surveys, some trends will emerge.

Sen. Rosen suggested applying for a grant from the National Institutes of Mental Health, conceivably from the Centers for Disease Control. Some federal agencies might be interested in looking at a larger population-based study than this. He urged students not to drop this issue.

Sen. Heinrich appreciated the suggestions, and the attention of the Senate . There was applause.

Update on the supermajority. Sen. O'Halloran announced that the Senate had not reached the 60 votes needed to achieve the three-fifths majority required to approve the Doctor of Medical Science in Dental Medicine degree, and would have to try again at the next meeting. She had also learned that the president would not be able to attend the present meeting.

Elections Commission. Commission chair Samuel Roth (Stu., Nonsen., Law) announced the start of the spring election season. He said 43 of the Senate's 108 seats become vacant in 2016; most elections to fill them take place in April. He encouraged senators whose terms were ending to run again, or, if they were leaving the Senate, to encourage friends or colleagues to replace them. He asked particularly for efforts to recruit tenure Arts and Sciences professors in the Humanities and Social Sciences--two constituencies with longstanding vacancies.

Mr. Roth said he was about to graduate, and would be recruiting a successor for his Senate role. Sen. O'Halloran thanked him for his service.

Faculty Affairs. FAC co-chair Letty Moss-Salentijn (Ten., CDM) offered an update on the committee's work on anonymous comments in course evaluations and their role in Title IX investigations. She said the committee has had valuable help from members of the law faculty in this inquiry, which has included a careful reading of the manual recently produced by the Provost's Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA), the Employee Policy and Procedures on Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking.

Sen. Moss-Salentijn said this document contains no mention of course evaluations, but there are ambiguities that FAC would like to have clarified in light of committee members' experiences. The committee hoped to discuss these with General Counsel.

Sen. Moss-Salentijn said complaints of prohibited conduct may be submitted in several ways: by phone, by email, by postal mail to the EOAA office, by hand delivery, or by an online report form. "To the extent possible," she read aloud, "the complaint should include the following information: the identity and status of the complainant and the respondent, the details concerning the incident, the conduct that gave rise to the complaint, the date, the location," etc. She said a reasonable reading suggests that the procedure requires a real, identifiable human being as the complainant. However, the very next sentence says, "Reports may be submitted anonymously by witnesses or by others who are made aware of the incident." Sen. Moss-Salentijn said this language is broad enough to appear to allow anonymous comments, leaving an ambiguity without a clear resolution.

In the discussion of privacy and confidentiality, Sen. O'Halloran said, a complainant may request that his or her identity not be revealed, and EOAA will honor that request when possible. Sen. Moss-Salentijn said this provision is consistent with the FAC position: confidentiality for the complainant is appropriate; complete anonymity is not.

Finally, Sen. Moss-Salentijn said, the policy addresses the problem of whether a complainant's identity can be kept confidential: "The Columbia personnel will reveal information about investigations and disciplinary proceedings related to sexual misconduct only to those who need to know in order to carry out their duties and responsibilities." Sen. Moss-Salentijn asked whether the Faculty Affairs Committee is one of the parties that need to know the identity of the complainant in order to carry out its responsibilities in grievance investigations.

Sen. Moss-Salentijn said the principal issue for FAC is whether comments in course can appropriately be interpreted as rising to the level of a discrimination complaint. In the opinion of FAC they cannot.

Sen. Applegate, chair of the Tenured Faculty Caucus and a member of Faculty Affairs, announced a meeting of the faculty caucuses on Friday, March 3, at 3 pm. He had two ideas in mind. The first was to present a specific resolution from Faculty Affairs about how to handle anonymous comments in course evaluations. He reiterated Sen. Moss-Salentijn's last statement: complaints made about faculty that are confidential should be investigated; those that are anonymous should not. That's a clean line, he said, which should be agreeable to anyone familiar with course evaluations and academic discourse overall.

The other idea involves a more general statement about freedom of expression in universities that was written at the University of Chicago recently. A number of faculty senators think Columbia should endorse that statement.

There being no other business, Sen. O'Halloran adjourned the meeting at about 2:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Mathewson, Senate staff