

COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE & ACADEMIC FREEDOM (FWAF)

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, November 7, 2024
1:00pm – 2:30pm
Zoom

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom met at 1:00pm on November 7, 2024. Chair Beaster-Jones presiding.

I. Welcome New Members – Chair Beaster-Jones

Chair Beaster-Jones welcomed new members Jack Vevea and Kit Myers, and each member introduced themselves. New member Amelia Farid will join FWAF in the spring.

II. Consent Calendar – Chair Beaster-Jones

- A. Today's Agenda
- B. [October 10 Draft Meeting Minutes](#)

Action:

- The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

III. Chair's Report – Chair Beaster-Jones

A. UCFW Meeting (October 11)

- Members discussed the possibility of up to three strikes this year, affecting graduate students and Unit 18 employees (such as lecturers and other academic employees).
- A major topic of conversation was the potential transition of UC campuses from the quarter system to the semester system. This shift could be particularly disruptive for the eight campuses currently are on the quarter system.
- Members discussed the fallout from the protests earlier in the spring, particularly how some campuses are seeing disciplinary measures that some believe are excessive or being weaponized inappropriately.
- There was concern raised over the suspension of the UC Mortgage Origination Program (MOP), which helps employees obtain low-cost mortgages. This suspension, particularly in high-cost-of-living areas, has sparked anxiety over how faculty and staff will navigate housing challenges.
- The issue of UC campuses purchasing military-grade weapons for the University of California Police Department (UCPD) was revisited. UCPD explained that the purchases were for less-lethal options, intended for specific circumstances, and that the budget request for these items had been made prior to the spring protests. This timing seemed to raise concerns but was described as coincidental.
- Members discussed rising healthcare premiums, which will be further discussed at future meetings, as the increased costs are affecting UC employees and their families.

B. Divisional Council Meetings (October 21 and November 4)

- UC Merced will begin a budget exercise next month to determine where the campus can reduce costs in anticipation of next year's budget cut.
- Senate Chair Mitchell provided an update on capital projects and space noting that the Medical Education building is proceeding.
- Vice Provost for Academic Personnel (VPAP) Hansford attended the meeting and reported on the implementation of SB 791 and AB 810, which are designed to prevent individuals with prior misconduct violations from being hired at UC campuses. Applicants will be required to sign a consent and attestation form authorizing background checks and disclosing past misconduct violations.
- DivCo discussed a proposal from EDI related to issues around hate speech and bias in student evaluations. This will be further discussed during today's meeting. Additionally, there was mention of a rollback in the Faculty Equity Advisor (FEA) Program, which was designed to ensure diversity in hiring practices across schools. The program will be replaced by "Strength Through Equity & Diversity" (STEAD).
- CAPRA Vice Chair Mike Beman provided an update on the Temporary Academic Staffing (TAS) Working Group noting that members are discussing how to implement principles and reviewing past processes at other UC campuses. The TAS budget is based on student credit hours, and the working group is weighing different factors such as lecture courses, writing courses, large vs. small courses, and resource-intensive laboratory courses.
- DivCo members discussed a potential three-day strike involving unionized workers in custodial and dining services.
- DivCo members discussed the Periodic Review Oversight Committee (PROC) and its duties. PROC conducts program reviews across campus. The review process might be undergoing changes or updates.
- CAP Chair Barlow summarized the Senate and Administrative comments on the MAPP revisions. The proposed revisions aim to align teaching faculty with research faculty standards, enhance equity and diversity, and review requirements like Quinquennial and Equity reviews.

C. Shared Governance Retreat (October 29 and 30)

This item was tabled for the December 5 FWAF meeting to provide members with the opportunity to review the priorities that were discussed during the retreat.

Action:

- The notes from the Governance Retreat will be shared with FWAF members.
- FWAF members will determine a couple of priorities to address. If none are relevant to FWAF, the FWAF Analyst will notify Fatima via email.

IV. Campus Review Item– All

A. [UC Merced Interim Policy on Expressive Activities and Assembly: Protests, Demonstrations, Non-University Speakers and Signage on Campus and in University Facilities](#)

Lead Reviewers: Yanbao Ma and Jennifer Lu.

The lead reviewers' draft memo is available [here](#).

Chair Beaster-Jones summarized the draft memo and pointed out the following additional

concerns that he would like to include in the memo:

- Approved signage on faculty doors could lead to an erosion of free speech because signage is not protected speech in the context of this policy. This could be easily abused by individuals who are attempting to silence a point of opposition and could be perceived as offensive.
- The prohibition of any expressive activity within 30 feet of dormitories or university residences is problematic because at the south side of UC Merced, 30 feet excludes the entirety of Scholars Walk because of the living learning spaces that were developed. The classroom spaces on the ground floors and the dormitories on the upper floors basically remove that entire location as a public space for free speech activities.
- The discussion of banning masks or face coverings for the purpose of anonymity is unenforceable because it is difficult to gauge the intent for or why someone is wearing a mask.
- Requiring submission of a proposal in writing 48 hours before a protest is unreasonable because protests can happen quickly, and one should not need to get permission to express their perspective when something is happening within the moment.

A member pointed out that the current policy provides police with too much discretion and that giving them an integral role in protest response may cause more harm than good. Often times, police involvement in protests is unwarranted, and they tend to create an environment of hostility when the environment was not hostile to begin with. It was recommended that different entities within the Protest Oversight Group (POG) be developed that are part of the tiered response, as well as including other mediators and neutral observers who are responsible for communicating with individuals in non-violent protest.

A member also noted several ambiguities and inconsistencies throughout the interim policy regarding what a protest should be, what is allowed in a protest, and what constitutes a substantial disruption. The member added that the language in the policy is very broad and vague, so anything can be misconstrued as a major disruption. It was recommended to include in FWAF's memo a recommendation to establish clear boundaries about what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a protest, as well as what constitutes as a substantial disruption that requires mediation.

Action:

- The FWAF Analyst and Fatima revised the draft memo accordingly.
- Members were invited to review the draft memo prior to transmittal to the Senate Chair.
- The final memo was transmitted to the Senate Chair on November 18, 2024.

V. [**Memo from the Committee for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\): Hate Speech and Bias in Student Evaluations**](#) – All

The recommendations outlined in the linked memo aim to address concerns surrounding hate speech and bias in student evaluations. They were discussed at the October 21 DivCo meeting and shared with FWAF and UGC for input.

Chair Beaster-Jones summarized EDI's memo noting that hate speech has been found in student

evaluations, including racist and/or misogynistic statements, and many faculty have felt threatened. The Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) invited FWAF and UGC to consider three possible changes in order to address the concerns of hate speech and bias in student evaluations, which are summarized below.

1. Including a preamble to the evaluation form

Chair Beaster-Jones agreed that a preamble in the evaluation form that outlines appropriate and inappropriate comments would be beneficial, as it could direct students to focus on course content, teaching methods, and their overall learning experience rather than personal attacks or comments unrelated to the course itself. Providing a preamble might also be helpful to clarify that any comments related to harassment or discrimination will not be tolerated and there will be consequences.

2. Adding a section on campus climate

EDI also recommended adding an open-ended section pertaining to campus climate to provide students with the option to comment on how the classroom climate could be improved. This could aid as a reminder to students what should be included in their evaluation.

3. A mechanism to gauge how extensive the problem is

Chair Beaster-Jones explained that a mechanism would be used to screen for inappropriate and threatening comments before including them in the evaluations, as well as provide data on how often these comments occur. EDI recommended making student evaluations anonymous to professors but available to university administration; the administration would screen the evaluations and directly address any issues with the student. Chair Beaster-Jones reported that Divisional Council also discussed the option of using AI to screen the evaluations for hate speech or threatening language. Chair Beaster-Jones asked FWAF members for their feedback on providing the faculty with the opportunity to see the comments if they wish. Members were generally in agreement that faculty should have the right to know if there is harmful language included in their evaluations and to choose whether to view them. Members emphasized the importance of repercussions for students who engage in hate speech or threatening language.

Action:

- The FWAF Analyst drafted a memo and circulated it to members for review.
- The FWAF Analyst transmitted the final memo to the Senate Chair on November 18, 2024.

VI. Discussion: Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) Access

ECEC Director Danielle Waite will join the December 5 FWAF meeting to discuss issues related to ECEC access, particularly faculty who have been placed on the waitlist for several years, as well as utilization of ECEC classrooms, etc.

Action:

- Members were asked to send questions for ECEC Director Waite to Melanie, Petra, Fatima, and Chair Beaster-Jones by **Friday, November 22, 2024**.

VII. Other Business

Members discussed concerns with healthcare access and increasing costs. Members shared their concerns regarding the lack of Tier 1 providers in the Merced area, and how finding healthcare options that are within the network is challenging. Members are also concerned about the increasing costs of healthcare premiums, which is a great burden for the faculty. Chair Beaster-Jones confirmed that he will raise FWAF's concerns at the November 8, 2024 UCFW meeting.

Action:

- Chair Beaster-Jones will check in with the UCFW Healthcare Task Force regarding progress on the number of health care providers and how providers are chosen.
- Chair Beaster-Jones will invite the UCOP UC Health EVP to a future FWAF meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm.

Attest: Jayson Beaster-Jones, FWAF Chair