

COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE & ACADEMIC FREEDOM (FWAF)

Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 5, 2024
1:00pm – 2:30pm
Zoom

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom met at 1:00pm on December 5, 2024. Chair Beaster-Jones presiding.

I. Consent Calendar – Chair Beaster-Jones

- A. Approval of Today's Agenda
- B. Approval of the [November 7 Draft Meeting Minutes](#)

Action:

- The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

II. Chair's Report – Chair Beaster-Jones**A. UCFW Meeting (November 8)**

- There are various searches underway for leadership positions, including Chancellors at UCSB and UCR, a Vice Provost for Education Abroad, and the UCOP President. Committees for these searches are already formed and progressing.
- There is an ongoing concern about UC's default pension plan, particularly for employees under the 2013 and 2017 plans. The default options may not be the most beneficial for staff and faculty, who would benefit more from the 403b savings plan. There is growing frustration over UC's lack of communication and advertising.
- Many campuses are struggling to recruit faculty for Senate service, as it lacks tangible benefits. There are discussions about formalizing recognition of Senate service in tenure and promotion packages to make it more appealing. A memo is forthcoming.
- The cost of healthcare has significantly increased, and the UCFW Healthcare Task Force is investigating this. One specific issue raised is the shortage of Tier 1 providers in Merced. The leader of the task force recommended that UC Merced address this issue through the UCFW Healthcare Task Force and coordinate with other campuses facing similar challenges.
- California legislative bills, AB 810 and SB 791, are focused on requiring background checks for hires to ensure they have no history of sexual harassment or violence. However, there are complications with international faculty whose institutions may not provide a response or the necessary information. UC may need to demonstrate due diligence to move forward.
- UC's policy on expressive activities was briefly discussed, with different campuses taking varied approaches. UC Merced's policy appears to be more comprehensive and restrictive compared to other campuses. A FWAF member reported that he serves on the UC Merced Faculty Association and that the group drafted a memo to the

administrators, available [here](#).

B. Divisional Council Meetings (November 18 and December 2)

- DivCo members discussed a potential 5% budget cut to the UC system. Efforts are underway at various levels, including Senate committees, to assess and plan for its effects. Most departments report being understaffed and lacking sufficient faculty. There are financial constraints preventing the university from funding existing and promised tenure lines, which means the faculty levels are expected to remain static in the near future along with the budget cut.
- DivCo endorsed the SSHA Restructure Proposal. The new SSHA Bylaws were approved but not fully endorsed. The reorganization is moving forward, though the timeline for implementation is unclear.
- Senate representatives and members of the Extended Cabinet met to discuss potential administrative process that could be submitted for PROC review: post-award administration, advising (specifically the switch from first year advising to the advising that is conducted within the Schools), transfer course articulation, and lab renovations for faculty. Only one of these areas will be selected as a pilot for PROC review. There was much support for post-award processes and advising to be chosen for PROC review.
- The Committee for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) selected a consultant to lead an anti-racism assessment of the Academic Senate, which will involve interviews with DivCo members and past committee Chairs.

C. Reminder: December 16 Meeting of the Division

Chair Beaster-Jones reminded members that the Fall 2024 Meeting of the Division of the Academic Senate will take place on Monday, December 16, 2024, from 3:30pm – 5:00pm.

D. Update on November 22 Meeting re: SPO Issues

Background:

- [FWAF's May 20, 2024 memo to CoR re: Grant Proposal Submissions](#)
- [FWAF's July 19, 2024 memo to CoR re: Grant Proposal Submissions](#)

Chair Beaster-Jones reported on the several meetings he had with the SPO, particularly concerning issues with their pre-award services. Many faculty members, including those who served on FWAF last year, have shared complaints about how SPO's pre-award procedures. The memos linked above highlight SPO's increasing request for more lead time before submitting grant materials. While the need for more lead time is understandable, it is causing a range of problems for faculty. One major issue is that SPO is threatening to withhold the submission of grants if certain information does not meet their internal criteria. These criteria often conflict with those set by the granting agencies, such as NSF, thus leading to faculty being given what they perceive as misinformation about what is required for grant submissions. Additionally, in some cases, SPO is requesting more detailed information than the granting agencies ask for. For example, SPO may ask for a very detailed budget, even when agencies like the NSF do not require it.

Chair Beaster-Jones invited members to share their personal experience with similar issues or of those they have heard from other faculty. A member pointed out that SPO is asking for very detailed budgets, such as breaking down travel expenses into specific categories like airfare and

food, even though the funding agency might not require such detailed information. Another member mentioned that one of their colleagues received a large grant but that the process to deposit the funds into their account took months despite only requiring one form.

Chair Beaster-Jones anticipates multiple meetings with representatives from the Committee on Research (CoR) and other groups, as frustration around issues with SPO continues to rise. FWAF transmitted a letter to SPO two months ago, requesting a response and an acknowledgment that the issues were being addressed, but no response has been received yet.

Action:

- Chair Beaster-Jones asked members to reach out to the faculty in their respective departments to inquire about the financial issues they have encountered, specifically with SPO.

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

ECEC Director Danielle Waite joined the meeting today 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.

FWAF members were asked during the November 7 FWAF meeting to come prepared with specific questions they would like Director Waite to address. The list of members' questions is available [here](#).

ECEC Director Waite shared a PowerPoint presentation, noting that three out of the six classrooms are currently in use at the ECEC, and there is a long waitlist, with some people even getting on the list for as far as Fall 2025. She added that in Fall 2024, the infant room was not fully filled despite having a waitlist. Even though there were calls made to everyone on the list, only one part-time space was filled. The waitlist is long in some areas, such as for infants, with about 20 infants on the list, but it is a bit more nuanced when looking at the overall demand and availability. The UC Merced waitlist is also much smaller compared to other UC campuses.

Chair Beaster-Jones mentioned that there is frustration from a faculty member who has been waiting for over two years to get their child into the ECEC, and others further down the waitlist are getting accepted. Director Waite explained that the ECEC has had some constraints on its infant room due to giving sibling priority, which has led to some delays as families with multiple children were prioritized. However, the waitlist is regularly "purged" to ensure it remains current. An email is sent to everyone on the list asking if they still wish to remain, and those who do not respond may be moved to a secondary list. However, if someone later reaches out, explaining they missed the email, they are typically reintegrated into the waitlist, retaining their original priority ranking based on their original date and time of entry. This process helps maintain fairness for those who may have inadvertently fallen off the list.

A key issue contributing to the waitlist challenges is that infants stay in the infant room for up to 15 months, from as young as 3 months old until they are 18 months old. This extended stay reduces turnover, meaning that even if someone joins the waiting list a month or two before they want to start, their chances of getting a spot quickly are slim. This is because there are likely other

babies who joined the waiting list earlier and are already occupying the available spots. The limited capacity and long duration of stays make it harder for newer applicants to secure a spot. Currently, there are 54 children on the waiting list, which includes infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, as well as some who have joined the list for 2026. For January, the facility plans to enroll 23 children, including 3-4 infants, as some may opt for part-time, shared spaces. Additionally, a few toddlers who are potty trained will move up to the preschool room, and the facility is opening an additional preschool room to accommodate them. As a result, the waitlist will drop significantly, with only about 31 children remaining on the active list after January enrollment. Chair Bester-Jones inquired about the timeline to fill all 31 spots on the waiting list, to which Director Waite responded that it varies depending on sibling requests. There are times, like this year, when the facility calls every infant on the waiting list, but no one wants to enroll at that moment. While they still wish to remain on the waiting list, several reasons cause them to defer entry, such as a relative stepping in to care for the baby. These factors contribute to people postponing their child's entry, even though they still want to keep their spot on the list for the future.

Director Waite further explained the financial aspect of the ECEC. The ECEC is essentially an employer-sponsored program, with the campus providing significant subsidies. These subsidies cover not only the facility itself but also the salaries and benefits for staff. While the data that Director Waite shared is not up to date, it helps illustrate the per capita support the campus provides for each child enrolled. The campus has been providing significant financial support, averaging between \$700,000 and \$2.5 million per year for the ECEC since its opening. With a shortage of teachers, the ECEC will rely more heavily on campus support this year. Within the UC system, there are concerns about salary compression, as teachers with degrees are being paid lower than minimum wage increases, creating challenges in attracting and retaining staff. To address this, the ECEC has made adjustments by reclassifying teachers and increasing their salaries, and the ECEC hired five new teachers this year.

Director Waite also explained the growing popularity of Transitional Kindergarten (TK), which allows all 4-year-olds to attend free early education in elementary schools. This results in fewer children aged 4 enrolling at the ECEC. To keep up, the ECEC had planned to open a second preschool room in the fall, but due to staffing shortages, this is now expected to happen in January, 2025.

Director Waite reported on the general costs of the ECEC. For families affiliated (staff and faculty) with the university, infants cost \$1,587/month, toddlers \$1,358/month, and preschoolers \$1,002/month. For those not affiliated with the university, infants cost \$1,952/month, toddlers \$1,598/month, and preschoolers \$1,154/month. The ECEC is considered one of the more expensive childcare programs in the area; however, many families, particularly students, are well-supported through various financial aid programs. Additionally, the Chancellor froze tuition rates for students in 2019, so no tuition increases have occurred since then. As a result, students, even those married to faculty members, pay about 45% less than staff and faculty for childcare, ensuring that they have access to affordable care.

A member inquired about the capacity of each classroom. Director Waite responded that the ECEC has varying capacities depending on the age group. The infant room capacity is 8 FTE spots, the toddler rooms can accommodate up to 12 FTE spots, and the preschool room capacity is

20 FTE spots.

Director Waite concluded her presentation by explaining the actual financials versus the projections for this year. On average, the ECEC had been running between \$700,000 and \$2.5 million in campus subsidies. During the pandemic, faculty strongly advocated for the program's continuation. The need to implement pods and reduce the number of children being served during the pandemic increased costs. By 2022, the focus was on reducing expenses, but the ECEC remained small, with some staff leaving and positions taking time to fill. A key factor in the financial situation for the previous year was a federal grant, which had been difficult to fully utilize until the final year of the grant. The program was able to draw down a significant amount of funding in that last year, which is why the financials for that year looked favorable. The grant played a crucial role in helping to cover some of the ECEC's costs during that time.

Overall, despite all challenges, the goal has been to serve as many families as possible, recognizing that faculty and staff often have flexible schedules. For example, faculty may not need full-time childcare due to their unique work patterns, like teaching on certain days or having research commitments. The ECEC works to match these varying needs with available spots, considering each department's schedule and the specific needs of the faculty and staff. The aim is to accommodate as many families as possible.

Action:

- Director Waite will check to see if she can share her PowerPoint slides with FWAF members.

IV. October 30 Governance Retreat Priorities – All

At the conclusion of the October 30 session, participants shared their top priorities and key takeaways, highlighting areas of focus for future action. In alignment with the request from Senate leadership, Senate Committees are encouraged to review these priorities and identify those they wish to address this academic year.

Chair Beaster-Jones recommends FWAF prioritize issues related to Sponsored Projects (SPO) and post-award management.

Action:

- This item will be handled via email or discussed at an early spring FWAF meeting.

V. Consultation with VPAP Tom Hansford

A. Establishing Guidance for Faculty Retirement and Emeritus Status

VPAP Hansford pointed out that one retiree serves on FWAF. The pace at which faculty are retiring appears to be increasing and this trend is expected to continue. However, there is a lack of clear guidance about what it means to be an emeritus faculty. Each time someone retires, the process of determining their emeritus status is somewhat improvised, which can be inefficient and potentially inequitable. VPAP Hansford has been working on developing general guidelines for emeritus status, outlining rights, privileges, and expectations.

After reviewing practices at other UC campuses, VPAP Hansford has compiled a list of things to offer to emeritus faculty.

Some of the confirmed benefits for the emeritus faculty include:

- Eligibility to compete for Senate grants (confirmed with the Senate).
- Continued membership and voting rights in the Academic Senate.
- Eligibility to apply for the Dixon award, a small annual award for retired faculty.
- Eligibility to serve as a PI on grants (confirmed with ORED).
- Full access to Library resources (confirmed with the Library).
- Ongoing access to email, though confirmation from IT is still pending.
- Retaining UCM Net ID.

VPAP Hansford is also checking with IT to determine if emeritus faculty will have continued access to software. He is also checking with the Graduate Division to determine if they can serve on graduate degree committees, as well as with Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) to determine if they can still purchase parking permits.

VPAP Hansford also outlined some potential (not guaranteed) privileges, which include departmental voting rights, access to research funds, and recall appointments. Recall appointments would allow them to return to campus to contribute, such as serving on a Senate committee or performing other work.

Members also suggested including building/key card access, free parking, retaining office space, access to lab space, faculty rates at the Pavillion, pool access, Recreation Center access, etc.

VI. Upcoming Business

A. Systemwide Review Item - [Presidential Policy on the Use of Animals in Research, Teaching, and Testing](#)

The proposed revised policy would update and replace UC's current policy "[Use of Animals in Research and Teaching](#)".

Lead Reviewer: Kinjal Dasbiswas

The lead reviewer will send their comments to the FWAF Analyst by January 8, 2025. The policy and lead reviewer's comments will be discussed at the first Spring 2025 FWAF meeting. **Comments are due to the Senate Chair by January 31, 2025.**

VII. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

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

Attest: Jayson Beaster-Jones, FWAF Chair