

*Minutes
Faculty Senate Meeting
March 6, 2024*

The complete Recording for this meeting can be found at:

<https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/fs/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

Present: Professors: Thomas Merrill, Jennifer Axe, Lilian Baeza-Mendoza, Ximena Varela, Mauro Tiso, Dan Abraham, Kristina Crona, Yijiang Zhao, Beverly Peters, Emily Peterson, Randall Blair, Mirjana Morosini, Alan Levine, Clarissa Ihssen, Ken Anderson, Jim Quirk, Katie Holton, Bryan Fantie, Chris Tudge, Paula Weissman, Justin Jacobs, Dario Bernardini, Joseph Graf, Jason Mollica, Jason Snyder, William Brent, Maria Gomez, Jennifer Steele, Acting Provost Vicky Wilkins, and Dean of Faculty, Monica Jackson

Chair's Report – Thomas Merrill

The chair of the Faculty Senate, Thomas Merrill, opened the meeting promptly. He made several announcements:

- In response to faculty requests, Acting Provost Wilkins released the bios of the Huron team working at AU
 - A request was also made for the release of the scope of their work. Acting Provost Wilkins clarified that the scope was described in the original email announcing the staff survey and had been shared with the Senate leadership and the Senate Executive Committee.
- The Working Group on Freedom of Expression has begun their work. Co-chairs Thomas Merrill and Regina Curran have been invited by several campus groups, units, and schools interested in the progress of the group. They have accepted all requests and have met with the School of Education, the Student Government Association, as well as others. The group intends to produce a report by the end of the semester as a way for the AU community to engage with the issues surrounding the President's email from January 25th.
- We are looking for and accepting nominations to serve as the next Vice Chair of the Faculty Senate. It is a three-year commitment, first serving as Vice Chair, then Chair, then Past Chair. This cycle, we are looking for a tenured or tenure-track member of the faculty as the position alternates between tenured/tenure-track faculty and term faculty.
- The Senate will be returning to the concerns surrounding faculty representation during the presidential search, as well as the selection method used both for the Presidential Search Committee itself and the Presidential Search Faculty Advisory Committee. We will be meeting with committee members to determine their satisfaction with the level of input they had during the search process as well as the general effectiveness of the Advisory Committee. This discussion is expected to occur at the May Senate meeting. Having this information in an official written record is important to provide historic context for future searches.

- Alison Thomas has been collecting feedback on the new Academic Integrity Code and the form it should take. There has been quite a bit of discussion between her office and the Dean of Faculty and Provost's offices. A new policy will be brought to the Senate for discussion and faculty input, and a new statement of values will be discussed and voted on by the Senate, most likely at the May Senate meeting.
- Ramadan is starting on March 10th, please have some considerations for students during this time. An email regarding ways to help accommodate students will be coming out shortly.
- An email was sent out regarding a Benefits Survey. Please complete this survey. It is the first time in several years this survey has been distributed. It helps the University make informed decisions regarding what benefits to offer employees.
- The minutes from the March 6, 2024, meeting were **VOTED** on 21-0-2 in favor.

Provost's Report – Vicky Wilkins

Acting Provost Vicky Wilkins made several announcements and provided updates regarding important matters:

- The Board of Trustees met at the end of February/start of March to discuss many important issues including:
 - How to think strategically about Academic Affairs going forward. These discussions were not limited to budget mitigation, but also included areas where we can grow and innovate, as well as the need to strengthen Academic Affairs.
 - The presidential search process was also reviewed and found that faculty participation both on the main Search Committee and the Advisory Committee was important for the outcome of the search.
 - There will be a tuition increase for next year, which was announced by the Board via a community email. There was also an increased commitment to financial aid. Financial aid includes discounts, aid that does not need to be repaid, as well as loans.
 - There have been discussions regarding a residency requirement for new students. We are one of the only schools in the area that does not currently have a residency requirement.
- FAFSA has been delayed for all families, but we are committed to getting financial aid information out to our students in a timely manner.
- We are currently on track to meet our Fall graduate enrollment targets. We are watching and following up to ensure that potential students who inquire about programs ultimately apply.
- Twenty-five faculty members volunteered to be a part of the Working Group on Shared Governance and a strategy has been devised so all those who volunteered can participate. We are excited to get started and have plans to target the hiring of administrators, the evaluation procedures for administrators, and expansion/reorganization of administrative roles for the first two meetings.
- The change in the overload payment policy was made before we had a complete picture of summer enrollments. Some summer sections will likely be cut or merged, but these cuts would

have occurred with or without the payrate change. The effects of the overload payment change will be tracked and analyzed to understand the full impact of its implementation.

- The Provost's annual address will be held on April 3rd. Rather than a traditional "address," this event will take the form of a town hall or open conversation. There will likely be budget updates and discussions regarding the future of the University (like R1 vs. R2 status).
- A question was made regarding AU's stance on SAT/ACT scores. We are test optional and have been for fifteen years. Our decision to go test optional predates the pandemic. Many schools that went test optional during the pandemic are now starting to return to a test score requirement.

Welcome and Introduction: Evelyn Thimba – Thomas Merrill

Evelyn Thimba is our new Vice President of Undergraduate Enrollment Management and has been at AU for eight months. This position in the past was primarily to recruit and enroll an incoming class. Now the position is working in close collaboration with the Provost, Student Life, and the AVP for Student Success to focus on the full student life cycle including recruitment, retention, support, persistence, and graduation.

She shared some updates regarding our current recruitment efforts. Decision letters are being sent out on March 15th and we have an aggressive target enrollment of 2,005. The FAFSA delay will likely change student acceptance behavior. AU is committing to financial aid packages earlier than many of our competitors and the financial aid offers are being sent to potential students at the same time as the decision letters. Many competitors will be holding off on financial aid decisions while they wait for FAFSA information. This will cause students to delay their decision and may result in a higher melt as students double deposit at multiple institutions while waiting on final offers. We will be seeing a higher admit rate, likely above 50%. We are seeing a higher persistence rate (students who continue from the Fall to the Spring semester), 97%. We are still working towards a target retention rate of above 90%. There is a large collective effort to prevent transfers. As soon as a student requests a transcript from the registrar's office, staff should be reaching out to that student.

Welcome and Introduction: Raymond Ou – Thomas Merrill

Raymond Ou is our new Vice President of Student Affairs and has been at AU for eight months. Prior to joining the AU team, he held similar positions at Yale College, Simmons University, Tufts University, and Brandeis University. Student Affairs is aiming to complement everything going on within the University and do their part to support high retention rates. One of their recent initiatives is the introduction of the two-year residency requirement, which will have an exemption process. Care will also be taken to consider space needs for upper classmen who wish to remain on campus. Another initiative is the focus on student mental and physical health, as well as their sense of belonging. Student Affairs is committed to data-informed decision making and is working with OIRA for data collection. There is also a lot of excitement regarding the upcoming Student Thriving Complex and a lot of work is going into Freedom of Expression policies, procedures, and conduct concerns.

Raymond Ou is happy to visit schools, units, and departments, if interested please send him an invitation.

Definition of Service Faculty Manual Change – Monica Jackson & Thomas Merrill

These proposed changes are the result of the Service Task Force report. The reasoning behind most of the proposed changes is to ensure service is being distributed equitably within schools, units, and/or departments as well as to ensure service expectations differ based on rank, but not based on appointment type. This section of the Faculty Manual would apply to expectations regarding merit review, promotion, Continuing Appointment review, etc. The descriptions here were intentionally kept vague/general to allow individual teaching units to set their own expectations.

Another proposed change was related to how mentoring was defined (teaching rather than service). There was a discussion regarding the differences between mentoring and advising. The terminology of “advising” was specifically added to preserve the service roles some units have in which faculty are directly involved in academic advising and help students select courses. A request was made to clarify the differences between mentoring and advising within the document. Another question that was raised was regarding how compensated vs. uncompensated service is counted towards service requirements.

Several friendly amendments were offered and accepted. The proposal was **VOTED** on 19-2-0 in favor.

CFG Continuing Appointment Faculty Manual Changes – Monica Jackson & Priya Doshi

This proposed change is being made at the request of the Term Faculty Affairs Committee. The full rollout of Continuing Appointment has completed its first cycle (Fall 2023 applications). To ensure peer representation, it has been requested that term faculty members are added to the Committee on Faculty Grievances. Three Continuing Appointment at-large seats are being added to the Committee on Faculty Grievances, which currently has eight members who are either tenured or on a library Continuing Appointment. Faculty who vote on tenure decisions that come before the CFG must be tenured.

Several friendly amendments were offered and accepted. The proposal was **VOTED** on 24-0-0 in favor.

SET Pilot – Karen Froslid Jones

Currently, only the historic results regarding two questions from the SETs are provided by OIRA for promotion, reappointment, Continuing Appointment, etc. files. Individuals reviewing these files do not have enough information to properly evaluate the student-assessed teaching aspect of an applicant’s package. OIRA is running a SET summary report pilot with CAS. The pilot report contains information on all SET questions and is automatically generated in the SET portal. So far, it

has been quite successful. However, one major drawback is that it is not as concise and only includes a single course for a single semester. Thus, including all pertinent classes could make the file unnecessarily long and cumbersome. Other concerns that were expressed were general concerns regarding the flaws of SETs as well as the need for comparison data for certain classes such as those that are unpopular but required. For these classes students often do not want to be there and tend to give lower SET scores. It is unfair to compare SET scores for instructors teaching these types of courses to the scores of instructors teaching small graduate-level courses and/or elective courses.

The Committee on Learning Assessment and the Committee on Faculty Actions will further review the SET pilot information and ultimately the Senate will vote on plans to expand the pilot to the rest of the schools/units.

Faculty Senate Reform – Thomas Merrill & Jennifer Axe

There was a discussion regarding simple changes that can be made now to help the Senate run more efficiently. Suggestions included:

- Have the Vice Chair serve as parliamentarian. They should complete a training course over the summer before the start of their term. This will keep meetings running smoothly and ensure someone knows the proper procedures.
- Have more onboarding for incoming senators, so they understand their role as a liaison and the voice of their academic unit and/or Senate committee. Onboarding could also include descriptions and examples of different proposals that may come before the Senate, for example explaining the difference between a change to the Faculty Manual and a change to the Academic Regulations.
- Remind senators of their obligations to their constituency and remind them to report back and update that constituency.

Other more complicated suggestions can be addressed next academic year. For example, the number and distribution of senators, who comprises the Executive Committee, the number of Committees, etc. By revisiting the organization of the Senate, we are not committing to any changes, merely investigating possibilities.