Committee: Strategic Planning and Academic Freedom

Co-Chairs: Saralyn Williams and Celia Applegate

Members: James Booth, Lutz Koepnick, David Lewis, Paul Miller, Josh Murray, Courtney Pitts

EC Liaison: Ryan Middagh

Committee Description: To be concerned with the long-term planning of governance issues of the university. To be concerned regarding professional ethics, conscience, and academic freedom under Article II, Section 3e of the Senate constitution

Committee Charges

Charge 1
- Background: Communication barriers may exist between the Faculty and Senate
- Goals: Generate creative solutions to improve communication to the faculty about the senate
- Actions: The slide deck from 2019-2020 academic year needed extensive updating. Discussion included that a powerpoint was not an effective means of communication versus use of digital media.
- Outcomes and/or recommendations: Focus on keeping the Faculty Senate website up to date with a historical accounting of the Faculty Senate activities. Include content on what has been accomplished as well as the current direction/focus of the Senate. Consider design of information on website into searchable, focused content for easy accessibility. Consider methods of how to “pushing” information rather than “pulling” the reader to the website. Consider how to bridge the communication between the Vanderbilt University (VU) and Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) faculty as to the role of the Faculty Senate for their School.

Charge 2
- Background: Faculty have undergone significant changes in the transition to digital teaching.
- Goals: What are the lessons learned from the past year? Identify whether faculty use of resources was equitable and whether additional resources should be recommended.
Actions: VU Center for Teaching (CFT) was invited to provide a report. Dr. Derek Bruff provided a powerpoint presentation to the committee on Dec 1, 2020. This included an overview of the programming and resources of CFT to all faculty at VU and VUMC. The report provided data on the impact of CFT for the preparation of virtual teaching by the faculty.

Outcomes and/or recommendations: SPAF recommended that Dr. Bruff provide an abbreviated informational session to the general Faculty Senate to ensure broad dissemination of information. This was included in the agenda of the April 8th, 2021 Faculty Senate meeting.

Charge 3

Background: Vanderbilt University contracted to use the program Academic Analytics, but there is concern by faculty about its application.

Goals: Promote transparency about the Academic Analytics program and the intended impact on VU strategic planning and departmental faculty evaluations.

Actions: SPAF contacted Dr. Wente who noted that subscription has been in place for a few years and the deans determine how it is used. The program has not been extensively used and the contract is due to expire in December 2021. SPAF invited Tracey George to address these concerns of how Academic Analytics is currently being used and she attended the April 12, 2021 meeting. Part of the initial intent was to have a tool that could identify faculty who deserved recognition. Some other institutions use this tool for discerning impact and to promote rankings. Program is not designable to capture information for a particular field, particularly the professional schools.

Outcomes and/or recommendations: Need to determine how best to capture scholarly productivity by faculty to ensure appropriate recognition of the faculty and the institution.

Charge 4

Background: Given the political climate, the committee was asked to consider the National Securities Policies and Attitudes impact on Higher Education at Elite Research Institutions.

Goals: Consider a forum to explore the impact of current policies.

Actions: SPAF considered options of connecting with the Division of Government and Community Relations. After much brainstorming, the committee decided that the sponsorship of a forum of this magnitude would need to sponsored at the level of the Chancellor.

Outcomes and/or recommendations: SPAF put forward the idea of forum on these national issues to the Faculty Executive Committee.

Charge 5
• Background: SPAF committee can operate in a vacuum from other faculty concerns.
• Goals: Assess structural ways that concerns can be communicated between faculty and the Senate.
• Actions: None
• Outcomes and/or recommendations: Consider this as a component of the overall communication strategy for Charge 1

Charge 6
• Background: VU moved swiftly to the academic challenges posed by Covid 19. Are there opportunities to learn from the experience at VU and other institutions?
• Goals: Consider our faculty readiness and compare to other peer institutions.
• Actions: SPAF contacted Tracey George by email who advised that VU monitored and communicated with peer institutions but there was not a systematic analysis. In addition, there is no database that is inclusive of VU and VUMC data.
• Outcomes and/or recommendations: Given the different databases and tools for teaching, research, and wellness, measurement of the impact and response is challenging.

Charge 7
• Background: Faculty leadership transitions annually and there are challenges with the continuity of work
• Goals: Consider some best practices for Faculty Senate leadership
• Actions: Senate Affairs was the lead committee. SPAF had the VU/VUMC Co-Chairs model with 2nd and 3rd year senators
• Outcomes and/or recommendations: Agree with the model of shared leadership model between VU/VUMC Co-Chairs with staggering of the Co-Chairs between the 2nd and 3rd year senators.

Charge 8
• Background: Online programming has expanded. Covid 19 forced many classes to move to a virtual format which accelerated the use of digital
• Goals: Guidelines for school based online degree programs
• Actions: APS was the lead on this charge. Dr. Bruff from the CTF presented data at the December 2021 SPAF meeting that the enrollment in classes actually increased with virtual learning. VU has historically been a residential college.
• Outcomes and/or recommendations: With APS, this may be an area of strategic planning for VU to promote its national and international impact.
Suggestions for Future Charges/Actions

Suggestion 1
- Once a systematic process has been identified to collate information and place on the Faculty Senate website, each committee provides periodic updates on its progress.

Suggestion 2
- SPAF would be the primary committee to assess programs being considered by VU for measuring and monitoring faculty productivity and metrics.

Suggestion 3
- Consider including SPAF in discussion with APS in regards to the future of online or hybrid learning at Vanderbilt once the standard returns to in person classroom learning.