

## Meeting Minutes

April 10, 2024 @ 3:30pm

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### I. Call to Order & Welcome

The Senate was called to order at 3:30 p.m.

**Senators Present:** Matthew Gowans (Pres.), Sandra Cox (VP), Karen Carter, Alan Christensen, Trent Fawcett, Steve Hart, Wes Jamison, Rachel Keller, Adam Larsen, Dennis Schugk

**Senators Absent:** Hilary Withers, Anita Slusser

**Guests:** Jacob Thomas (Parliamentarian), Mike Austin (Provost), Mike Brenchley (Deans), Tony Smith (Senator-Elect)

### II. Meeting Minutes

Review of minutes from the March 27 meeting.

**Motion to Approve:** T. Fawcett; **2nd:** W. Jamison

**Approval:** unanimous of all senators present with one abstention (S. Cox)

### III. Informational Items

#### A. Updates from the Faculty Senate President

**1. Academic Calendar for Spring 2025.** M. Gowans clarified that ultimate calendaring decisions lie with David Allred, the Associate Provost, not the

Registrar, Alex Snyder. The Senate decided that A. Larsen would lead the engagement with D. Allred to advocate for increased faculty input in the calendaring process, supported by W. Jamison and S. Hart. Specific scheduling concerns brought up in previous meetings will also be topics of discussion. Senators also highlighted the importance of recognizing efforts already made to include faculty input in creating the academic calendar. M. Gowans emphasized the need for a collaborative approach.

**2. Deans Council Updates.** M. Gowans provided an update from the recent Deans Council, focusing on the discussions around Assessment Day. He highlighted the Provost's belief that current assessment practices do not effectively measure student learning outcomes as intended. The consensus among the Deans was that Assessment Day had become a procedural formality rather than a tool for genuine evaluation of student learning. Provost Austin's vision is to realign Assessment Day towards assessing specific student learning outcomes in both general education and major programs. Additionally, not all learning outcomes are currently measurable or equipped with robust evaluation systems. For the immediate future, the focus will be on ensuring learning outcomes are measurable and developing an assessment plan to be refined and implemented in subsequent years. Each program is encouraged to use Assessment Day to reflect on and plan the assessment of at least one learning outcome annually.

Various departments have adopted this approach to different extents, with some, like the Business Department, already conducting such assessments due to accreditation requirements. The conversation suggested a disparity in how Assessment Day is utilized across departments, with some ahead in aligning their practices with the proposed focus on measurable learning outcomes and longitudinal assessment from program start to end.

Provost Austin proposed a more structured approach, suggesting that Assessment Day discussions should consider the entire span of a program, from orientation to capstone projects, to gauge student growth. The conversation extended to defining what constitutes a "program" and how to assess learning outcomes meaningfully across diverse academic offerings, including meta-majors. The core conclusion was that the essential unit of assessment should be the program itself, ensuring that graduates have achieved the necessary learning outcomes. This approach aligns with expectations from accreditation bodies

and educational oversight organizations, setting the stage for a comprehensive discussion on optimizing Assessment Day for a more meaningful assessment campuswide.

**3. Peer Institutions.** Provost Austin informed the Senate about a request from the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) to review and update Snow College's list of peer institutions, which serve as benchmarks for various metrics including salary, graduation rates, and enrollment. The current list, about a decade old, no longer reflects Snow College accurately due to its increased enrollment, potentially affecting salary benchmarks and skewing data comparisons. Provost Austin proposed selecting a new set of peer institutions based on criteria, e.g. institutions which are primarily two-year colleges or four-year colleges with a majority of associate degree offerings, located rurally, and having an enrollment between 3,000 to 8,000 students. After analyzing data and consulting with Brent Baxter, HR Director, a recommended list of schools was presented, ensuring a broad geographic distribution and adherence to reporting standards by the College and University Professional Association (CUPA) for meaningful salary comparisons.

The discussion also covered the implications of the new peer group on salary tracking and the potential for creating an equity pay model to compare Snow College faculty salaries against those of similar institutions, considering factors like rank and tenure. Senators raised concerns about salaries in relation to the cost of living in different regions—particularly in regards to the high housing prices in Utah. Provost Austin suggested the use of a cost-of-living multiplier to adjust salaries accordingly. A preliminary list of potential peer institutions was shared with the Senate for feedback. The proactive steps towards updating this list reflect Snow College's commitment to maintaining relevant and fair benchmarks for institutional performance and faculty compensation.

## **IV. Senate Orientation**

**A. Division Changes Affecting the Senate.** M. Gowans disclosed that discussions are ongoing about the Communications Department's potential transition from the Fine Arts to the Humanities Division, a move that would not be finalized before the end of the current semester but is being considered for the following year. This

transition could necessitate a reshuffle of Senate representatives due to S. Cox—a Division Representative for Fine Arts and Communications and the incoming Senate President—being directly affected. The shift aims to better align departmental focuses, acknowledging the evolving nature of communication studies towards media rather than performance. Concerns were voiced over the impact on the Fine Arts Division, including workload and committee service implications.

Senators raised questions about division size and Senate representation. It was mentioned that similar transitions in the past were motivated by interpersonal conflicts rather than institutional strategy, a practice generally viewed as problematic. Despite some reservations and the need for final agreements between divisions, the move enjoys administrative support, highlighted by agreement among the Deans and the Communications faculty.

The Senate deliberated on the implications for Senate representation, considering whether Sandy could become an "eleventh" member without a vote or if an additional Fine Arts senator should be appointed. Concerns about administrative oversight and the smooth transition of courses between departments were also discussed, alongside the immediate need to address Senate representation and leadership training for the upcoming transition.

**B. Future Vision for the Senate.** M. Gowans initiated a conversation about the future vision of the Faculty Senate, emphasizing its crucial roles in (1) policy review and creation, (2) shared governance, and (3) protecting academic freedom, which stems from the first two. These roles underscore the significance of Senate committees in fulfilling this role. The Senate identified key areas such as curriculum design, research, tenure, academic standards, pedagogy, teaching, faculty development, and other items as central to its mission.

MG raised concerns about committees, like the Online Excellence Committee, operating without Senate connections, despite being established for valid reasons. This lack of connection raises issues about the committees' continuity and their alignment with the Senate's protective status under Board of Regents law. The discussion opened up the possibility of integrating such committees into the Senate to ensure they contribute to the Senate's primary goals. However, with eleven already existing committees, considerations about the capacity and resource allocation were raised, especially regarding the roles of the adjunct representative and the Senate President.

The conversation reflected a consensus on the value of being proactive about the Senate's role and the role of its committees, acknowledging that while not all committees might directly contribute to the identified key areas, they still play important roles within the faculty governance structure. The discussion also touched upon the potential for increased resources from administration to support Senate activities, including IRB training, with a proposed budget that exceeded past allocations (which have been zero). The idea of including the Faculty Senate President in the Presidential Cabinet was mentioned as a potential way to enhance shared governance.

Looking ahead, M. Gowans proposed to continue the discussion in the next meeting, focusing on evaluating the Senate's structure, the relevance of current committees, and exploring opportunities for meaningful change and increased influence in shared governance. The Senate agreed on the importance of ongoing discussions to improve relationships and reduce reactionary tensions, emphasizing the need to continually assess and adapt the Senate's role and structure to meet evolving needs and opportunities.

## **V. Senate Initiatives**

### **A. Supporting Adjunct Faculty Subcommittee**

H. Withers (chair), A. Slusser, and W. Jamison

Nothing to report at this time.

### **B. Academic Integrity Policy—Artificial Intelligence Subcommittee**

Chair: R. Keller (chair), A. Christensen, and S. Cox

R. Keller updated the Senate on recent communications with Dr. Austin which focused on the five proposed changes discussed in the previous meeting. Dr. Austin plans to organize a meeting involving the subcommittee, which appears promising for achieving some progress or having measures in place by early to mid-summer.

### **C. Institutional Review Board Development Subcommittee**

W. Jamison (interim chair)

The discussion focused on selecting a community member for the committee, with candidates Cless and Sue Young, Paul Gardner, and Shannon Miller being considered. Each candidate brings a unique background and expertise: Paul Gardner is noted for his extensive teaching experience in biology and his multidisciplinary collaboration; Cless and Sue Young are recognized for their scholarly contributions and impact on students; and Shannon Miller stands out for her non-academic background, having worked in the pharmaceutical industry and being involved in community support and planning.

W. Jamison proposed a ranked-choice vote to make a final decision on whom to extend an invitation to first. If that person declines, then the next-highest vote-getter would be invited, etc.

John Tyler from Math and Science and Travis Schiffman from Humanities have been elected to the board from their divisions; updates are pending for representatives from Fine Arts and Business & Tech. Discussions also touched on IRB training and the establishment of the committee, highlighting the availability of resources and training materials from the University of Utah. T. Smith, Humanities senator-elect, who has significant experience with IRBs, volunteered to get the committee operational. W. Jamison volunteered to lead the initiative with the possibility of reassigning roles in the fall.

## **VI. Academic Freedom Discussions**

**A. *Understanding Academic Freedom, Chapter 7: “Students.”*** Senators explored the intricate balance between faculty academic freedom and student freedom of speech. Participants debated the extent of students' rights to free speech, especially in academic settings, highlighting Supreme Court perspectives on broad student free speech rights and their expectations from education. Concerns were raised about how to manage controversial statements within the classroom, recognizing the faculty's responsibility to navigate these situations without infringing on student speech yet maintaining a safe educational environment. Senators shared examples of such challenges, illustrating the complex interplay of free speech rights when controversial views are expressed.

The conversation also delved into Snow College's free speech policies, scrutinizing the procedures for students to exercise their free speech rights on campus, including the restrictive nature of having to apply for space and time. The policy's implementation, perceived as potentially limiting certain content, prompted suggestions for more transparent and less restrictive practices. Previous efforts in the Senate by W. Jamison to update the free speech policy were terminated on the strong insistence of the college's legal counsel. Senators made suggestions aiming for a framework that facilitates free speech without it being overly restrictive or subject to misuse. The dialogue underscored the need for a transparent, equitable approach to managing free speech on campus, ensuring that it neither impedes academic freedom nor compromises the educational or safety interests of the college community.

## **VII. Adjournment**

**Motion to Adjourn:** W. Jamison; **2nd:** A. Christensen

**Approval:** unanimous of all senators present.

The Senate adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

The final Senate meeting for the school year will be held on **April 24, 2024** from 3:30-5:00 p.m. in the Academy Room, Noyes Building.

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**Minutes by Jacob L. Thomas**

**Approved:** April 24, 2024