

GSW Faculty Senate Minutes  
02/26/2021

1. The GSW faculty senate met on Friday, February 26, 2021 at 10:00 AM via Blackboard Collaborate. Dr. Sam Peavy, Senate President, called the meeting to order. Members approved the minutes from the 01 26 January 2021 meeting.
2. Dr. Neal Weaver provided an update on vaccination access. GSW administrators are working to gain approval for campus-based vaccinations. We have faculty and staff support for this service, if approved. Gov. Kemp has excluded faculty from the next round of approved vaccination access so GSW and other campuses are still waiting for information and support from the state to move forward.
3. Dr. Jeff Waldrop, chair of Faculty Affairs, discussed a recent memo produced by that committee regarding program closures and the recent circulation of a set of questions from Republican legislator Emory Dunahoo, seeking to gain information about educational content in USG courses.

In the memo and in his remarks to the Senate, Dr. Waldrop pointed out that the policy of the USG and campus-based policy was not followed regarding the planned termination of the Geology and Dramatic Arts programs. Faculty Affairs requests that GSW administrators provide some explanation of these processes to ensure that we maintain our commitment to a system of shared governance on campus.

Additionally, Faculty Affairs believes the survey sent by Rep. Donohue was unseemly and a challenge to standards of academic freedom. Faculty Affairs seeks to provide a robust response from our campus.

Dr. Neal Weaver noted that campus administrators support academic freedom but that the USG system required a response from all campuses. USG administrators crafted a reasonable but a limited response, not engaging with two questions but providing a specific but not exhaustive explanation of courses that address issues of privilege or inequality as necessary to the course goals.

Dr. Debbie Palmer and Dr. Michael Moir emphasized the importance of academic freedom to the educational mission of the university. Dr. Weaver endorsed that view and agreed that these are issues that faculty members should be aware in broader political perspective.

Dr. Waldrop suggested that faculty must be prepared to explain how the university-level education necessarily involves investigation and critical thinking. Universities are a laboratory of ideas and political pressures limit this fundamental mission of any campus.

A discussion followed regarding continued response on issues of academic freedom and program closures from the Faculty Affairs Committee. Dr. Weaver acknowledged that he missed a response to an earlier communication from Faculty Affairs and promised to review and respond in the future. Dr. Moir also suggested that programs listed for closure had strong connections to

the larger community of Americus and those relationships should be considered more in the future.

4. The Faculty Senate voted, on motion of Dr. Kim Hasbach and seconded by Dr. Moir, a proposal to create an Associates of Nursing degree track at GSW. Dr. Sandra Daniel and Dr. Teresa Teasley provided an explanation of the proposed program to supplement the formal proposals, approved by Academic Affairs.

Dr. Daniel explained that the USG and nursing professionals in the state of Georgia are calling for more educational programs to respond to an ongoing nursing shortage exacerbated by Covid-19. Associate degree programs in nursing provide more flexibility to students who are interested in nursing careers and may be a pipeline to BSN programs at GSW. The School of Nursing is working to address the need for additional campus resources to meet the needs of these students but see such a program as particularly important to South Georgia where the lack of nursing staff is critical.

Dr. Gary Fisk noted that the USG system had restricted 4-year campuses from providing AA degrees in past years. A discussion followed about growing flexibility in regard to such programs.

On motion by Dr. Michael Moir, the Faculty Senate voted to approve the proposals for an Associate degree program in Nursing at GSW.

5. Dr. Laura Boren updated faculty on campus mental health programs. The USG encouraged all campuses to evaluate services and student access in Fall 2020. GSW has one counselor, Dr. Alma Keita, as well as two contracted services: Talk Space for virtual counseling and Protocol, an after-hours service that works with our campus-based programs. GSW will now also be developing additional programs through the Christie Campus Health program. This program provides five free counseling sessions to students, with the option on continuing on a paid basis. This is a program supported by the USG and offering psychiatric supports, not currently available in current mental health programs at GSW. In addition, students will have access to the Campus Well app that provides health-oriented articles and links to health resources.

This effort is part of a larger effort to build a 4-year strategic plan to address mental health needs at GSW. Dr. Boren and staff are submitting grant proposals to fund improved access for students and hope to hire a coordinator for such programs. Dr. Boren noted that her office is working with Chelsea Collins to publicize these resources so that students recognize and utilize these varied services through the campus counseling office.

Dr. Susan Bragg also raised a concern about campus Covid-19 protocols. As faculty are not generally eligible for vaccinations at this time, it is particularly important to maintain our focus on hygienic behaviors such as mask wearing. Many students, faculty and staff, and the broader

community have relaxed their commitment to masks. This can lead to tensions on campus. Dr. Boren noted that this was an issue in the residential halls so the campus administration is aware of these concerns. Faculty agreed that it was important to avoid blaming students but to also encourage all members of the campus community to wear a mask as a symbol of support for others in this health crisis.

Dr. Gary Fisk asked if there was any ability to revisit faculty vaccination access. Dr. Weaver responded to note that we do not have that immediate influence but that he will be seeking to distribute Covid-19 relief funding as soon as possible. Faculty and many staff will be receiving bonuses in March and GSW has access to 2.5 million dollars through the Higher Education Relief Funds Act. This aid will support purchasing PPA and other needs to maintain a health campus.

6. Dr. Sam Peavy thanked visitors to the Faculty Senate and called the meeting to a close at approximately 11:00. The next Faculty Senate meeting is scheduled for 26 March 2021 at 10 a.m.

Attendance: Sam Peavy (President), Susan Bragg (recording secretary), Carol Bishop, Queen Brown, Suzanne Connor, Gary Fisk, Chadwick Gugg, Kim Hasbach, Benjamin Meador, Michael Moir, Debbie Palmer, and John Wilson.

Dr. Neal Weaver and Dr. Laura Boren attended as GSW administrative representatives. Dr. Jeff Waldrop attended as delegate from the Faculty Affairs Committee. Dr. Sandra Daniel and Dr. Teresa Teasley attended as guests representing the School of Nursing.