

AAAC Meeting Minutes for April 17, 2020

AAAC members present: Ketra Armstrong, Lola Eniola-Adefeso, Elena Gallo (SACUA liaison), Michael Hess, Michael Mendez (graduate student representative), Rebekah Modrak, Elissa Patterson, Priti Shah, Kanakadurga Singer, Hsiao Hsin Sung Hsieh, Kentaro Toyama (chair).

Absent: Enrico Landi, Chris Liu, Chitra Subramanian, Sergio Villalobos Ruminott, Adam Zhu (CSG undergraduate representative).

Guests: Provost Susan Collins, Special Counsel Christine Gerdes.

This meeting was held entirely online on BlueJeans, due to COVID-19-related social distancing policies.

Provost Collins and Special Counsel Gerdes were present from 8-9am. Provost Collins presented her priorities as Interim Provost and answered questions from AAAC members. From 9-10am, the committee discussed a number of issues that were raised during the discussion with the Provost.

The discussion with Provost Collins covered a range of topics: Provost Collins's priorities; status of Regents Bylaws 5.09 changes; status of potential policy around recommendation letters; a potential faculty salary study; COVID-19-related policies at the university.

- Provost Collins began with a self-introduction.
 - Beyond facts available in her professional biography (e.g., <https://president.umich.edu/leadership-team/executive-officers/susan-m-collins/>), she noted that she has a bicultural background (Jamaica and the United States), and is passionate about improving diversity.
 - She expects to serve as Interim Provost for about 1.5 years. President Schlissel is working on starting the search for the next Provost, but no formal announcement has yet been made.
 - Current top priorities are...
 - Managing the unprecedented situation with COVID-19 and ensuring the health and safety of the university community while also enabling its mission.
 - Ensuring a smooth promotion and tenure process for faculty. Currently, 267 casebooks need to be reviewed under a very “robust process.”
 - Furthering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals of the university.
 - Provost Collins mentioned that she believes faculty are the bedrock of the university and that she believes their input is critical for university administration.
- Status of policy around recommendation letters.
 - Provost Collins noted that she was on the [Blue Ribbon Panel](#) that made formal recommendations about this issue in AY 2018-19, and acknowledged that the issue was intensely debated within the panel.
 - There are no plans to adopt a formal policy, such as an SPG.
 - Most AAAC members agreed that the status quo – in which there are no formal sanctions associated with letter-writing – was good, but some expressed concerns that the ambiguity left matters up to subjective interpretation by the administration.
 - The expectation of university leadership was that the contents of the [report by the Blue Ribbon Panel](#) of faculty that made recommendations about the issue would be reviewed

- and discussed within each unit. The report's main recommendation is that faculty members should write letters "based solely on educational and professional reasons."
- AAAC members noted that discussion of the report varied across units, and that few faculty understood that an endpoint to the discussion had been reached.
 - Status of revisions to Regents' Bylaws 5.09/5.10.
 - Prof. Sharon Glotzer (chair of the 5.09 Working Group), and Prof. David Potter (Working Group member and SACUA Secretary) had discussed the report with the Regents at their February meeting. There was further discussion at their March meeting.
 - A proposed revision to Bylaws 5.09/5.10 has been circulated for comment: <https://record.umich.edu/articles/u-m-proposes-changes-to-dismissal-policies-for-tenured-faculty/>.
 - Proposed revisions mostly track with Working Group's recommendations, with a couple of differences: (1) the timeline has been further condensed; (2) a pay suspension provision has been added for faculty charged with or convicted of violent crimes or who have abandoned their job.
 - Open feedback closes May 4.
 - Faculty salary study, i.e., to identify/measure potential disparities by gender, race, etc.
 - The Provost acknowledged that several such studies have been conducted in the past but had no update at this stage for a future one.
 - Is there any discussion within the administration with respect to policies around who leads or is on Executive Officer search committees?
 - Provost: Executive officer searches are handled by the Office of the President who welcomes faculty input.
 - Updates about coronavirus at U-M.
 - Provost Collins is experiencing Covid-related changes in her own teaching, and sought additional faculty view of Covid-related issues at U-M.
 - University is facing huge amount of uncertainty.
 - Economics forecast and implications are huge and keep changing. This has huge implications for students, for financial aid, other uncertainties.
 - Spring/Summer term instruction is all remote.
 - Fall planning is *scenario-based* – planning for a range of scenarios – because of uncertainty and situation can change considerably between now and then.
 - Desire for early decisions is understandable, but early decisions can also close off good alternatives.
 - Leadership considering options for various routes to ramping back up under changing coronavirus circumstances.
 - Scenario-based actions may be announced, even if specific decisions are postponed.
 - Many decisions are in process. Trying to stagger them, since they can't all be examined carefully simultaneously.
 - Questions for faculty:
 - "Emergency remote" instruction seems to have gone well given its suddenness. But, what do we need to attend to, if we need to continue doing this? What works? Where do we need more resources?
 - Partial refunds for housing and dining were provided to affected students.
 - Tenure clock extension for junior faculty under Covid: U-M has a policy on the books to allow petitions for tenure-clock extensions. Current plan is to remain with this policy.

Provost Collins worked closely with the deans to reiterate that while we will take a case-by-case approach in accordance with our existing policies, she encourages them to apply these policies liberally to legitimate requests, and to ensure that the process for making a request is simple and straightforward.

- AAAC members raised the potential for a default blanket extension policy that applies to all affected faculty.

After the Provost left, the AAAC discussed the following issues:

- Minutes of the March 20, 2020 meeting were approved with a minor revision. (8 members voted to approve; 2 members abstained, citing absence.)
- Discussion continued on a blanket extension policy for the tenure clock:
 - Pros (for blanket extension): relieves additional effort for already time-stressed faculty; alleviates issue for women, who studies show do more household work, including childcare; minimal concerns for occasional person of privilege getting an additional year;
 - Cons:
 - Other: What if P&T committees were instructed to take COVID stresses into account? How about asking deans/chairs to individually encourage junior faculty to petition for extension? U-M Dearborn automatically extends tenure clock.
 - On the whole, the AAAC feels that blanket policy, with possible petition to undo extension, is best. And if not blanket extension, then better messaging.
- Future issues:
 - Will there be changes in budgetary priorities? How will pet projects of administrators be addressed?
 - Could we have another meeting with the Provost in May? Issues to raise: More details about salary review; budgetary changes due to COVID; status of Prof. John Cheney-Lippold; further COVID decisions; committee input into teaching-related issues for Fall.
 - This is Prof. Toyama final year as chair of the AAAC. SACUA will select a new chair soon.

Prof. Toyama will follow up as follows:

- Request May meeting with Provost Collins.
- Draft tenure clock blanket extension recommendation.
- Seek input from AAAC members on COVID-related teaching issues, especially with respect to concerns about Fall and how administration could help.

[Post-meeting update: No May meeting was scheduled with Provost Collins. Tenure clock policy will remain as is. Provost Collins has initiated six committees to consider issues related to teaching and research under COVID.]