

Minutes for the Meeting of the Committee of Nine—July 15, 2020

Submitted by Marco Valtorta

Mark Cooper, Chair of the Faculty Senate, chaired the meeting. The meeting started at approximately 1430, as scheduled. All members were present.

The membership consists of nine regular members:

[Prof. Mark Cooper, Chair, Faculty Senate, CAS](#)

[Prof. Derek Black, School of Law](#)

[Prof. Gloria Boutte, Instruction and Teacher Education, COE](#)

Prof. Tena Crews, Sport and Entertainment Management, HRSM

Dr. Heather Heckman, Associate Dean for Technology, University Libraries

[Prof. Coretta Jenerette, Associate Dean for Diversity Equity and Inclusivity, Nursing](#)

[Prof. Marco Valtorta, Computer Science and Engineering, CEC](#)

[Prof. Tom Vogt, Chemistry and Biochemistry, CAS](#)

[Prof. Patrick Wright, Management, DMSB](#)

and five additional, non-voting, members:

[Prof. Alex Beecroft, Language, Literatures, and Cultures, CAS](#)

[Prof. Shirley Staples Carter, School of Journalism and Mass Communications, CIC](#)

[Prof. Susan Cutter, Geography, CAS](#)

[Prof. Carol Harrison, History, CAS](#)

[Prof. Scott Weiss, Director of Orchestras, School of Music](#)

In addition to the committee members, the following were present:

Robert Caslen, University President (joining during the meeting)

Dennis Pruitt, Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost for Academic Support

William Tate, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost (joining during the meeting)

Ed Walton, Senior Vice President for Administration

Julian Williams, Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Professor Cooper announced that President Robert Caslen would join the meeting late and provide the committee with its charge.

Professor Cooper asked committee members and other participants to introduce themselves by recounting a transformative experience in their academic career as student or faculty member.

Professor Cooper asked Vice-Presidents Walton and Pruitt to give overviews.

VP Walton gave an overview of the financial and budgetary situation. He emphasized the difference between the budgetary reductions that took place at the beginning of the Pastides presidency, when increase in student enrollment could be used, and the current situation.

VP Pruitt gave an overview of the enrollment situation. He noted that a major decline in the number of high-school graduates due to demographic trends is expected for 2025, that students are less likely to

travel out of state to attend universities, and that a decline in the number of international students is also possible.

President Calsen joined the meeting and read the charge to the committee, as follows:

Thank you for agreeing to serve on this vitally important “Committee of 9.” Like most other institutions of higher education, the University of South Carolina faces the challenge of matching its academic strengths and ambitions to changes in the student body resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting demographics. Your committee will play a decisive role in helping the University meet those challenges.

The Faculty Manual specifies that this committee “must participate in the formulation of criteria for determining termination” of tenured faculty members for reasons of “financial exigency” and that the “decision to discontinue or reduce a program or instructional unit must be arrived at jointly by the President” and this committee. At present, a condition of financial exigency does not exist. Medium-term budget projections, however, do make it advisable to consider a reorganization of academic programs that may entail reductions. I am charging you to begin an exploration of options that may result in such a reorganization.

The University will retain an external consultant to assess cost-savings and revenue-generating opportunities through academic program realignments. Your first task as a committee will be to review the draft scope of work for this consultant and recommend any changes you feel necessary. You will also meet with the consultant as part of the engagement to inform the production of their report.

The committee will review the external consultant’s report and recommendations generated by the internal Future Opportunities Committee. Upon review, the committee will provide a written evaluation. It is not expected that the committee perform an independent audit of the quantitative or qualitative measures employed by the consultant or Future Opportunities Committee as a basis for their recommendations.

Rather, the committee is asked to assess the reasonableness of the process followed and the feasibility of the recommendations generated, as well as to weigh comparatively any specific options proposed. The committee is further directed to balance any proposed restructuring against the priorities expressed in the University’s Strategic Plan.

The committee’s written report, along with the consultant’s report and recommendations of the Future Opportunities Committee will be submitted for review by a committee comprising the Chief Financial Officer, Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, Vice President for Diversity Equity and Inclusion, a representative of the Council of Academic Deans and the Chair of the Faculty Senate; this group of six will make final recommendations to me, the President of the University.

I hope that it will not be necessary to discontinue or reduce academic programs, but should that be among the recommendations, I will meet jointly with you to review any such decision and to confirm that the provisions of the Faculty Manual have been met.

You are charged, finally, to bring to this task your experience, reason, compassion and commitment to the common good. To serve with distinction as the state's flagship, the University of South Carolina must unflinchingly confront the challenges ahead. We must remain committed not only to the integrity of our University community but also to the long-term social and economic welfare of our state, nation, and world.

President Caslen invited questions.

Professor Vogt asked for the name of the external advisory group. President Caslen answered: EAB. VP Walton noted that EAB had access to university data for several years under contract. Professor Cooper described EAB as an educational information analytics firm.

Professor Black asked about timelines for producing a report and for possible implementation of accepted recommendations. President Caslen answered that a report from the consultant and our report may be expected for the end of the fall semester, and that some action plan may be ready by the end of the academic year. He noted that some changes may need to be done quickly to have impact on the fiscal situation, but that changes reached through our process would only affect the next fiscal year.

Professor Vogt raised the use of confidentiality and the possibility of an NDA in order to access protected information. President Caslen stated that he intends for us to have all the data we need and that he would do whatever is needed for that purpose.

Professor Valtorta emphasized the need for the process to be open and transparent. President Caslen answered by expressing the expectation that, while many will express opinions, our recommendation will be the best input for him.

Professor Cooper reminded us that all members of the committee are full professors nominated by more than one colleague, vetted by chair, past chair, and chair elect, and that the faculty advisory committee concurred, as required by the Faculty Manual. He noted that there are also five additional, non-voting members. He urged members to be attentive to the interest of colleagues who are not immediate neighbors, since not all colleges can be represented directly.

Professor Cooper outlined the next steps:

1. A meeting with the EAB representative. A call will probably take place late in July or early August. He suggested notifying Stacey Davenport in VP Ed Walton's of scheduling conflicts. Ms. Davenport will provide administrative support to the committee.
2. Another presentation about the budget picture, probably soon after the meeting with EAB.

VP Walton notes that data are now much more readily available than they used to be. He also emphasized the priority given by the President to the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Professor Crews highlighted the need to have involvement from the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Academic Programs as an interface with the state CHE. Professor Cooper stated that those offices will be involved as needed.

Professor Vogt noted the for a responsible mode of communication.

Professors Black, Valtorta, Cutter, and Boutte emphasized the importance of settling some issues of procedure, such as what constitutes a majority and the role of the advisory members.

Professor Cooper suggests that a meeting be held to address these and other procedural matters. He also emphasized that the President indicated a preference for a committee that is more proactive than reactive.

In answer to a request from Professor Cooper, all members indicate that this time of the week (Wednesday at 1430) is a good time for meetings in the future.

The meeting ended at approximately 1550.