

FACULTY MEETING

July 17, 2020

Virtual

3:30 p.m.

Call to Order: Dr. J. Dopke called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. He reviewed the process for the meeting, outlined in an e-mail sent prior to the meeting.

He reviewed the proposal which serves as a motion. The proposal is:

“We, the faculty, respectfully request that no one be compelled to teach, learn, live, or work on campus during the fall 2020 semester. Faculty, staff, and students whose work can be completed remotely are permitted and encouraged to do so for the sake of public health.”

The motion was seconded and discussion commenced.

Dr. Keeton: I understand the difficulties schools are having making these decisions. I’m disappointed that it took this long in the summer to have a campus wide discussion. I support the resolution although not perfect for the administration, but they have had all summer to discuss and failed to do so.

Dr. Liu: I’m happy to hear about everyone having to be covered with a mask; I don’t see anything about ppe; I’m concerned about returning without being tested.

Dr. Abernathy: The town hall meetings serve as the campus conversation. Regarding screening and testing, what we believe and what the CDC is recommending for campuses like ours, testing is a snapshot in time. Deep screen and testing for those who need it is what is recommended. Masks and gloves are being provided to all students and much more to keep everyone safe. Masks will be required.

Dr. Jensen: There are one or more committees that have been formed to work with reopening processes; I don’t know what the committees are and assume they have faculty members on them. Could you give a brief report of what your committee is and what you are working on?

Dr. Fonley: I’m on the committee to talk about move in. We are limited as to how can we get this collection of people in small groups and keep a flow that would possibly work. We want to keep move-in happening in as safe a way as is possible.

Dr. Woolbright: I’m on the academic return to campus committee. Looking a technology to make sure it’s there for students who become ill. Also the transition to Canvas. We’re drafting a document about attendance and classroom policies.

Dr. N. Dopke: Eric and I are on the return to campus for athletics committee. We are following the guidelines set forth by the NCAA, MIAA, and the MHSAA (the high school association for the state of Michigan). We are following those three organizations and the athletic training staff will be constantly following them and also doing as much monitoring as can be done.

Dr. Turk: I know there have been an immense number of faculty, staff, and administrators working very hard on this. I’m personally grateful for their energy and work for our jobs and our and the college’s best interests. I’m comfortable with moving ahead with the plans the administration is putting forward.

Regarding the motion, I'm a little bit indifferent about it. I'm not sure how I feel about the word "encouraged." I'm favor of how the college seems to be moving ahead.

Dr. Woolbright: As a pretenure faculty member I've been in conversations with others in my position and how this affects me and others like me. We've been told FPC will have a forum to discuss this – reminder to please do this. I'm thinking about our safety and those of our families, staff, etc. I'm hearing about all Kathleen, Mariah, etc. are doing. But the elephant in the room is that a lot of these measures are not going to be enough. We are almost guaranteed that someone will get this. If even one person on our campus were to die... we can prevent this. So much can be affected by this disease. We have to think about our families too. Of course it is all hypothetical at this point, but we have to think about this. I'm grateful to Kate and others who drafted this proposal. I know it is risky for non-tenured faculty to speak about this, but I need to say it.

Also, students are worried about what will happen to their season, to their classes, etc.

Le: Shares Lauren's concerns. Question to Jeff: So far I'm grateful there has not been any layoffs yet. You're doing a marvelous job so thank you. Others are considering changes with unemployment, etc. What would it take for you to change employment decisions?

Dr. Abernathy: My intent is to not to have any layoffs. That said, if we're online in the fall, it's a loss of \$12 to \$14 million dollars. We would take an additional draw of \$4 million from endowment but will likely have to have layoffs and/or furloughs. There would also be a continuing impact of that circumstance of going online in the years ahead (one to two million in the years ahead if online in the fall). I'm grateful Lauren that you spoke out. No one should feel they cannot speak out. It should never have any impact on tenure decisions.

Dr. Argueta: Knowing that we will be in a close environment with limited ventilation, masks will not be enough. It'll be not if, but when we have an outbreak. I think we should be more conservative in our decisions. Going online as much as possible will help us to diminish this situation.

Ms. Conz: I'm concerned about outside of classrooms – enforcing students' social distancing. How do we monitor this? If we pass the resolution, I wonder who will be determining whose work can be accomplished completely remotely? Will it be the faculty? Staff? Administration? I'm happy to see we're concerned about our African American and Latinx population. Can we think about these students in a special way? Have we ever considered an alternative to 100% or 0%? Have we considered a smaller percentage of students coming back?

Dr. Abernathy: We're looking at dorm rooms as a family unit so no masks, but bathrooms, dressing rooms, and within 6 feet of others, students will need a mask. Students will sign a pledge that they will live by the standards. Who will determine remote working? It's advisory and non-binding. Cabinet will make decisions but with faculty input. In the end the administration has to make the determinations. Because of the screening put in place we believe that students will be safer on campus where we're requiring masks, etc. E-mail went out today to students with all the protocols in place. Alan Gatlin leading this charge.

Have we considered an alternative plan to bring a smaller percentage of students to campus? Yes, we considered it and larger institutions are doing it but we feel we're okay with all the protections put in place. Larger institutions are looking to get down to our size.

Dr. Olbertson: Thank you for the attention to the financial impact of not having classes online. I'm deeply aware of the significance and thank you to all task forces and for the detailed plans. However, we can put into place all these plans, details, 100% cooperation of all student body. WE don't operate in a bubble. We don't know what our students are doing. Hillsdale is having an in person commencement this weekend. We are surrounded by decisions that could unravel what we're doing on campus. We could be looking at K -12 schools not in classes and faculty/staff could be responsible for children or elderly people off-campus so there are other things to take into consideration.

Dr. Vivian: I'd like to reiterate thanks for all the work done. Thanks to Kate for the resolution. Tina retired from Alma because she worked in a very enclosed environment all winter and had awful flu last year. Online classes went off just beautifully so the online experience was great. I support the resolution. I don't think the students' experience would be diminished in any way. I fully support the online option. What is the plan if there is an outbreak?

Dr. Abernathy: The plan is to monitor very closely with the public health department, Anne Lambrecht, and campus as a whole. We will see cases, for sure. Currently there are no cases of COVID-19 in our hospital. We are looking daily at the changes that are happening. We're watching carefully. The Governor's office is considering whether residence halls would be allowed to open. I think they will be but she's considering it.

Dr. Keeton: My frustration with online in part is it's so difficult to keep track of thoughts as we go through these meetings. My understanding is that we're not saying we're going 100% online, but giving individuals an option, for their reasons, to go online. The opening rules say that the college is saying scarves and bandanas are okay for masks. Why is this okay?

Dr. Abernathy: Faculty who have medical circumstances have gone to HR and accommodations have been made. There is considerable latitude on what in-person means.

Mr. Gatlin: The mask policy information came from the CDC and the WHO websites but may have changed in last few days. Scarves and bandanas are acceptable according to those organizations. We are providing proper masks to all students. But the handwashing, etc. policy came from CDC, WHO, and the Department of Health.

Dr. Slaughter: I'm appreciative for the meeting on Monday. Could we get clarification for how much latitude we have for the in-person experience? Thanks for the survey to faculty. We are making a survey to go out to students – working on it now. Online tools can allow for face to face instruction that is not in person but that can be very rich. This resolution allows for calling for a process for employees to have some empowerment. A transparent process would be good for people who don't want to be on campus.

Bigger schools have more space to put students if they come down to our size. Do we have space for quarantine for employees and staff who may need to? Students do better on campus I think. I appreciate that we had options in March for students. And I second the concerns about child and parent care.

What's our threshold? At what point do we close down if there is an outbreak?

Dr. Abernathy: We are working to make accommodations for students as transparent as possible. We have an online opportunity for our foreign students and others. Quarantine space is being worked on. We don't have the space we provided for medical folks over the summer as those rooms will have students in them.

There is no specific answer to how many cases it takes to close down because there isn't anything from the health department yet. The best case may be sheltering in place on campus rather than sending students home. That said, Alan Gatlin's been overseeing all that work.

Mr. Gatlin: We don't know what the circumstances will be – if there are only one or two cases we might be able to handle it. But if there are many we will have to move in a different direction. I'm reluctant to put a number on it. We have 12 to 18 spaces for quarantine areas.

Dr. Cameron: Thanks to everyone who has worked so hard. My summer class was amazing and I have double the skills now. I think students will have the same sort of concerns. SVSU gave the faculty the choice and the numbers came out just fine – a good balance.

Dr. Hulme: I echo the thanks. This has been a stressful summer for everyone. The last sentence in the proposal – "...are permitted and encouraged to do so..." For many of our students on campus is safest and so encouraging people to do this for public health may not be best. The best thing for public health may be by being on campus for 14 weeks in a row. The last sentence may not be appropriate. We haven't talked about going to school on weekends and that might free up much-needed space that would allow more safety for faculty and students.

Dr. Jensen: There's no good answer – just trying to choose among poor answers. I understand that my job and career is at stake and the virus is not predictable. I support the resolution. I believe that we will see cases on campus, students being who they are. We are like being on a cruise ship here on campus.

We are clear about why we are coming back: revenue lost if we don't; worry about students leaving the college if we go online. What other work is being done with other schools in the state to coordinate going online at the same time. If we have to go online, if we put work into messaging now, about how good Alma College-style online classes are, we can make a good case for that now. Put that positive messaging out now.

Dr. Abernathy: This isn't only about revenue. Our students most at risk will suffer the most if we go online. They did not have a positive experience. Our students did not all engage. That's what we learned from our students. Progress would be lost for many of our students, especially the highest risk students.

We are always in conversation with our colleagues across the state. We could coordinate but no one is considering it right now. Most feel students are safest on our campuses with policies in place.

Dr. Nichols: Colleges are planning on making plans for our students to come to campus but taking classes online. I imagine many will return to campus and take classes from dorm rooms. I suppose there isn't any way to know how much attrition there would be. I believe we will survive the passage of this resolution and this difficult year.

Dr. Turk: No doubt that there is a lot of conversation that can be had, but can we go back to the proposal that's there and change it to what I said earlier? I am feeling confident in my abilities to go back to school and face to face. I think it would be fair for faculty to be able to express their fears about returning. Move to strike the word "encourage" and open the door for the administration to accept concerned faculty.

The amendment was seconded. There were no objections to the friendly amendment. The motion for the friendly amendment was approved.

Dr. vonWallmenich: I second Will's comments. Remember there are other legitimate reasons to not want to be entirely online. It's an okay thing for some of our students. In spring and summer students can opt out. Without resources, we are putting our most at risk students at a disadvantage. I know of one student who had all the resources but she struggled to learn online.

Dr. Furlong: I'm concerned about the consideration of age. Hospitalizations increase as age increases. We shouldn't have to go through the whole ADA with HR if we're of a certain age which puts us at higher risk.

Dr. Fobes: I thank the administration, staff, and faculty, who have dedicated a lot of time during the summer. I very rarely speak up at faculty meetings but I feel compelled to follow-up on Patrick's topic. Those of us in our 60s and older are most at risk. Eight out of 10 COVID 19 deaths reported in the US have been an adult 65 years and older. I feel that the college is asking me to put money over my life. After taking salary cuts, after a tenure track position vacancy, after the results of the task force on cuts (not public yet), I feel very disrespected. I'm glad for Elizabeth, and others who have gotten accommodations. I am submitting myself for the ADA accommodation request. It's humiliating and I'm feeling vulnerable. The resolution is about faculty autonomy. That's been lacking the last few years at Alma College.

Dr. Cartrite: Do we need to offer an online option for our classes just in case?

Dr. K. Dougherty: Given how much is unknown for us going into the fall semester, we should all be cognizant of what we would have to do given a circumstance where we have to go online. Realistically we need to be prepared for every eventuality.

Ms. Dickson called the question.

The vote on calling the question and thereby ending discussion was approved.

The revised proposal is:

"We, the faculty, respectfully request that no one be compelled to teach, learn, live, or work on campus during the fall 2020 semester. Faculty, staff, and students whose work can be completed remotely are permitted to do so for the sake of public health."

Faculty will receive by e-mail a Qualtrics survey for voting. It will include the updated text of the resolution. Vote in favor, against, or abstain. The poll will be open over the weekend. The deadline to vote is Monday at 5:00 p.m. The outcome of the vote, reported later, is the motion passed.

Announcements: Dr. vonWallmenich said The Scot yearbook was left with many empty pages this year. The class of 2020 did not get to say goodbye. She asked that faculty consider submitting a message to the students from their department. She will be happy to help craft a message if anyone needs it. She feels it would be deeply meaningful to our student graduates.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Deel, Assistant Provost
Secretary to the Faculty