# **MINUTES**

**School of Arts & Sciences**

**March 3, 2023**

The Meeting was called to order at 3:03 by Speaker Kevin Williams.

Today’s Agenda and Minutes of the Feb 3 meeting were presented. There were no comments or changes to agenda. Dean Cronk requested a minor change to the 2/03 minutes. Send other changes to Meg K.

**Remarks of the Speaker** - Kevin Williams. Thanks to the Dean’s office for refreshments. Welcome to Provost Mayrose. The minutes from Feb 2 reflect comments of the faculty. I want to express my admiration and appreciation for your engagement and collegiality. Please remember to make your voices heard, treat everyone with respect and listen to what others are saying. One comment was about a desire for more guidance as to academic priorities for the University. As a school we will not wait for a new President’s guidance, but we will work on the SAS strategic plan this year which will fit in the University’s plan. As we discuss our school strategic plan, please remain engaged.

**Report of the Dean –** Brian Cronk. Two announcements: Middle States final report is posted on Institutional Effectiveness and Planning Website, please take a look. They will be here March 12-15. The itinerary is not set, watch the Daily to see when faculty sessions will take place. Read the self study!

At last meeting, I handed out a document requesting more information from some programs. It was admittedly a crudely compiled list of programs looking at only 2 factors. It is an opportunity to think about restructuring. Thanks to proactive departments. We are still structured for 12,000 students but now we have half of that. Reviewing programs and curriculum should be done on a regular basis. Many of you have asked for vision at several levels. Here is my simple answer: short term vision is re-imagining ourselves as a smaller institution. Figuring out what our students want, and what they are capable of, should guide us. Look at similar programs at other colleges to see how their programs and courses work.

Fred Kowal of UUP said “transformation is only possible once you have achieved financial responsibility before we get there.” So your own union rep has stated that we must find stability before a new vision can be created.

At school meeting, retrenchment came up. You can go to your union contract to article 35 that deals with retrenchment. Only the Chancellor can approve retrenchment and only the president can request that. My opinion is that it is coming and I stand by that, but it is only my opinion. Several departments have met with me since the last SAS meeting. We discussed modifications of plans they submitted.

Our Theater and Dance minors are combining. We are moving forward with degrees to bring new programs like the online synchronous MFA in Film from TFA. As Dean, I cannot create a program or curriculum. Please think of creative things we can do. I would like responses to be from full departments. Please provide consolidated department responses.

**Provost Mayrose:** I want to clarify things I’ve been hearing. Dean Cronk’s observation about contract and retrenchment is true. That is a last resort however. The list that came included programs less in demand, but we will look at every program on campus. We can grow our way out of this rather than cutting our way to the bone. I wanted to clarify my stance on that. I am also meeting with other programs.

Carol Beckley: Many have seen what came out of Chancellors office about dollars from Governors. How is Buffalo State applying for that process? Mayrose: We got 1.8 million for equipment, we are part of $53 million for 8 new lines funded through SUNY. Money is still rolling out from the state. We are working to get special funds for 19 institutions in financial trouble. Scott Goodman: The Dean has been pushing the idea that class sizes under 10 should be cancelled for the last two years. What is the current position on classes under 10 if students need them to graduate. Mayrose: Undergraduates: 10 minimum, Graduates: 5 minimum is the policy. Goodman: This is recent. Mayrose: This has long been policy in the Faculty Handbook. Goodman: It is not in DOPS. Mayrose: you must look at courses that are under-enrolled at the TRIGGER number. Then decisions like course by contract or alternative courses can be considered. Dean Cronk: courses that run 2 x per year with 8 students should only run 1 x per year. Mayrose: we have a lot of data to predict and schedule more efficiently.

Roy Bakos: Contingents feel expendable. Are there any assurances from upper-level admin above dean that can make some assurances? Mayrose: we are trying to create longer contracts with contingents with long tenure or at least 2 courses per adjunct to help with health insurance. We have reduced courses which has reduced contingent faculty. We hope we are leveling off, but there is no assurance that it can’t continue. Lorena Perez: As Chief Academic Officer what is the vision for the academic foundation? Some roles are moving in and out of academic units. We are a University and yet academics are being stripped away. Mayrose: Good question. Advising staff were in Academics, now in Enrollment Management, that comes from data. We are trying to have wraparound services in one place. General Education is now in one school (SAS). This was efficient. Perez: How are they better qualified? Mayrose: There are more touchpoint from Enrollment Mangement. Roy Bakos: What are metrics? I teach freshmen. I’ve done lots of Starfish reports. Some advisors are thorough, but often dozens of cases at a time in Starfish are closed. Mayrose: The case closed is an issue. The move I’m talking about is that completion coaches were not talking to academic affairs. Now there is one manager in Enrollment Management. Randy Bowen is working on problems with rapidly lowering flags. That is coming up as a problem we are addressing.

Scott Goodman: On the topic of rigor, I feel that this environment with enrollment pressures and memos from the Dean about justifying our programs, there is pressure to reduce rigor. We are questioned about whether accreditation is appropriate. Is there anything in the Strategic Plan that would back up the concept of rigor. Mayrose: Pillar 3 has that in it, though it is not called rigor. We should not be reducing rigor. Problems include a first semester student in 2 courses that are high DEW -- we can change the roadmap to hold off calculus and physics the first semesters. But the rigor can develop over time.

Dean Cronk: The day of next school meeting is when responses are due from departments to the memo from last meeting. What is a meaningful response: If you will use responses that are absolutes, make sure they are demonstrably true. You can’t say a university must have x program. Or that a program must have x course. I will find examples where that is not true. Do not be general. For example: “We have contacts in business that rely on this program”. You must name contacts and say what Buffalo State would lose if this was no longer the case. At my last institution, English was deactivated. The newspaper was outraged, but not one person stepped forward with any money, just their opinions. Saying something is critical is not the same as showing that the community is actively demonstrating their support. Nichols: I encourage you to leaven that observation. This is a tax funded institution. Anyone can say there is value to the program, as they are paying the taxes. Dean: We must be good stewards of the money we are receiving. You are welcome to provide any arguments. Regarding Scott Goodman’s question about accreditation: this is not a strong argument unless you can demonstrate that every college has accredited programs. If not, then you cannot say accreditation critical. Accreditation for a non-professional degrees is much less important than for professional degrees. Therefore, it will be an uphill climb to justify accreditation. Look to our peers, not Harvard or UB, outside of SUNY. There is an official list of peers on the website. If you are tempted to argue “we have always” or “we used to” or “Dr. X needs a class to teach” these are not strong arguments. Gen Ed and service courses do not count in terms of program viability. We could still offer those courses if the program does not exist. We will take a long comprehensive look at Gen Ed courses that interest our students, which they are capable of taking, that provide a good education and are taught by best professors. We must not conflate programs, courses and professors. You must be persuasive. Delay and obstruct will not work. Delay and obstruct has been the pattern. For example, we had a structural deficit increase 56% between Fall 21 and Summer 22. That is a result of delay. You should have the goal to give your programs a chance by modifying them so they are efficient and can survive. Some of you saw your program on the list and could not hear anything else in that meeting.

Good: Plans that ensure adequate enrollment (10 undergrad). SUNY Policy from 1991 states this number. Goodman: We do not have that policy on campus. Dean: I can only answer for the last two years. Goodman: That is the Provost’s policy correct? Dean: I believe so. Your program should have a plan to deal with upcoming retirements and resignations with a little adjunct help. If you have people retiring, you must revise your curriculum to deal with those losses. Our primary academic mission is what these plans should be about. Anecdotal success of students may look nice, but if you graduated 50 students and you have 1 that got a great job, we know nothing about the other 49. I hope that I have never said we need to reduce rigor. Goodman: Your statement about accreditation belies that . Dean: Accreditation is not a sign of quality. Scott: Accreditation is the highest standard in our field. We paid to renew our accreditation: Dean: Why did we spend that money? Provide evidence that accreditation = rigor, then I will believe it. Accreditation has to do with following rules in a book, like how often a course is offered. That is not rigor. You must demonstrate what it is doing for our students and the institution: Faculty member: What proves rigor? Goodman: Accreditation is supposed to prove that we are up to standards in our discipline. Our last Strategic Plans specifically stated that every program on campus should be accredited. Dean: That is under the category of “we used to.” Rigor: That is up to the department . It is not my job to define it, you must demonstrate it. I will not say rigor is “students must get jobs’. Faculty member: Is students getting jobs rigor? Dean It could be. Rigor is not one thing. Rigor is not what I am asking for. Faculty member: You said rigor is important. Dean I will never say, just give everyone A’s. That would be ridiculous. There will never be pressure to adjust grades. There may be pressure to understand your student, if they are late to class due to work, don’t lock them out. You must accommodate legitimate needs of your students. Will I pressure you to increase grade distribution? Never.

Bakos: Quick comment to help this process along. On the question of rigor - I worked for a boss who said, “I never said to fire anybody, I just told you to cut your budget.” The idea that jobs measure success in a program? That does not hold. We are part of a public university. It is a business, but our mission is supposed to be more than that. Instead of arguing back and forth, would you be willing to articulate a couple paragraphs to say what your vision for those things are -- For everything you are asking us to justify. Tell us your vision. We could use some guidance. This could eliminate a lot of the back and forth. Then we know what you envision, and we can approach that. This is creating a lot of animosity. Dean: My hesitation in doing that is that each department will have a different picture of what this means. Rigor in Art & Design is different from Chemistry. I am not in a position to say that these are the things we have to do to be rigorous. Bakos: I’m asking for rigor.

Faculty member: Your guidance about programs has been clear, but we also have had suggestions about reorganizing by combining departments. What are the benefits of those combinations. Dean: Department mergers are something I’m thinking about, because of timing on mergers. They only need to be announced 2 weeks before the end of the semester, we can do that right away. That is why I am encouraging it. Faculty member: As member of department considering mergers, should we be spending effort on programmatic response or on mergers? Dean: There was more time pressure for mergers when there was a leadership vacuum in your department. You should focus on the program now that the vacuum has been filled. Goodman: Department mergers, as with Kevin Williams’ department, that must impact your programs. That must precede programmatic decisions. If you are merging, new faculty will be involved in your programs. Dean: You must think about staffing and department structure. I am doing my best to follow policies written by the Senate and approved by President. I am starting with shorter timeline projects.

Carol B: Students working in their fields are evidence of program success. Wouldn’t that be rigor? It shows that you guided them to work in the field. Dean: Success of graduates. The worst student at Harvard is going to get a good job. Does that mean their program was rigorous? So a job does not show rigor. Jason: Will you pledge to consider a thoughtful articulation of the rigor in our department? Dean: It won’t hurt, but rigor only came up in a secondary way. Jason Grinnell: If the goal is to articulate the value of your program, then that is what you want? Dean: Rigor is not: “Let’s make our courses so hard everyone will fail, so that makes the program rigorous.” Faculty member: You started to give a list about what should be in there? Could you name things we should be doing? Dean: “It is not acceptable to deactivate the program if there are not students.” This is not a good argument. We must find a way to have the maximum effect on the minimum number of students. If one student had to go to UB to take a course, that is not a good reason. We are not a school like UB with 100 or 200 student classes that allows for tiny niche classes. We do not want to be UB. You must get rid of me if you want that. If you’re on the list and you are freaked out that is intentional. I want you to get proactive. We must start right away or we will lose another year.

Meg Knowles: You suggest we get rid of you, but what are the positive alternatives to that solution? Dean Cronk: Adequate enrollments: mechanisms for retirements; primary academic core of the decision; understanding our type of institution with moderate course size. Programs in general that have fewer credit hours will be easier to justify. Fewer required courses with more free electives will give students more options when courses are not available. 36 is a reasonable number of credits for a program. Dorothea Braemer: Can you clarify your position on new programs? You are praising new programs. It will take a couple years to build those programs. Dean: We do need a limited number of new programs, and for standard programs to become more modern and attractive to students. Programs must be unique and have a demonstrated need. Braemer: What about Certificates? Dean: All programs, minors, certificates, and micro-credentials must show demonstrated need. Carol Beckley: If you close a department, would you still have gen ed courses? Dean: I can’t answer that absolutely.

Greg Wadsworth: This conversation is … disheartening. Tough decisions need to be made. We know it is tough. Lisa Bergslein requested to find out how Buffalo State could be excellent with 5,000 students in a presidential forum. Listening to the process, which is understandably budget driven ,seem to drive us toward a lowest common denominator. I’m surprised about accreditation. But you’ve said nothing about distinctiveness. That was not on your list, and if excellence is our goal, I might expect that. Dean: The new program from TFA is incredibly distinctive, being online synchronous. We have distinctive programs like the Great Lakes program, where our location gives us an advantage. But if enrollment is less than a handful, how can we justify the resources that go into that. The goal is not distinctivness, it is to have a variety of programs that the students coming here want. Distinctiveness is not success. Wadsworth: We are looking for a way to evaluate our programs and make justifications for our programs that include things beside enrollment and budgetary concerns. Your list was not the things I expected. They are not linked to traditional things valued on campus. They are largely budget driven. Distinctiveness was thought to be a value to SUNY. Dean: That is a “use to be” argument. Organizations survive on revenue coming in and our judicious use of that in the best possible way. As Fred Kowal said, until you get by the budget crisis, you can’t do anything else. Once we are stable, come back with distinctive programs. Math faculty member: I’m in a department with multiple programs. What do you mean by creative ways to combine them? Should all programs in Math piggyback on Math Ed? Dean : Perhaps that is true. Math Faculty member: We have 2 programs just barely under your number. Dean: We can talk at your department meeting. Math: is there room to increase overlap? Dean: Perhaps, but I’d like to hear more about creative combination of programs.

Kevin: Here are a few observations. It is easy in large groups to focus on our own departments. There is no one size fits all answer. Take the Dean’s suggestion to meet with him to heart. We should not be afraid to look at our programs for more ways to become efficient. If your Chair is not beginning these discussions in your department, they need to happen. Are other schools doing this? They have rightsized the classes in School of Professions for the fall.

**A&S Strategic Plan Update**

We are moving forward with a final version June 1. Some of you submitted task force interest forms last semester. You will be contacted shortly. SP Task force will be a mix of Steering Council and members of the 4 Arts & Sciences areas, ranks, etc. People filled out a form last fall. Speak to Kevin if you would like to work on it. We already have an idea of who we are as a school, we just created a mission statement two years ago. SP Task force will organize and lead open discussions about the Strategic Plan.

**Operational Initiatives Update**

We needed people to be point of contact. About half of faculty led initiatives were adopted. The others may still get done, and ones on the list may not get done. We will see as we move forward. Scott Goodman: I don’t get it. We got the spreadsheet. We have a school Strategic Plan, and the Provost’s Operational Strategic Plan. Kevin Williams: The spreadsheet is the Operational Strategic Plan. Those on the faculty tab that were adopted by a faculty member will move forward. Dean: Everything with a person is going into the system: Meg Knowles: It sounded like you were one your own if you wanted to sign up for an initiative. Is there support for this? Kevin: You are not on your own. If you are leading an area, get some people together and start. Meg Knowles: So you are on your own to undertake the issue. Roy Bakos: Is it more exploratory? Dean: If you are the contact person, we will check in with you to update the status of that project every so often. You are not in charge of doing it, only reporting on its progress. You may need to set up a committee if you want to get something done. Meg Knowles: What if there are costs? Kevin: Ask the Dean or Provost for money. We were asked for faculty led initiatives to come up with a new plan. If we have no faculty led initiatives, how will we look to the new President? Faculty member: Like we are overworked? Kevin: We are not trying to create busywork.

**Buffalo State 2030 Initiative:** Looking for self-nominations to participate was in the Daily. Deadline upcoming.

**Byron Brown article in Buffalo News.**  Meg Knowles: Will there be a retraction? Andrew Nichols: The News simply reported what Fred said. Unless he personally wants to retract his opinion, there is no need.

**Majors/ Minors Fair:** October 26, there will be a Major and Minors Fair. We will provide more information toward the end of the semester. Please include it on your course syllabi.

**Standing Committee Reports –**

**Bylaws and Elections Committee – Barish Ali, Chair.** Email next week will ask for nominations of Steering Council work, All committees need nominees.Senate seats: 1 Humanities, 1 Arts, 2 Sciences to balance the Senate with 3 from each area. Elections should be complete by beginning of April.

**Personnel Committee – Joseph Marren, Chair** Reviewed 8 dossiers and made recommendations. 2 members must be replaced next year.

**Curriculum Committee – Emily Boyce, Chair.** 17 course revisions, 6 program revisions, 1 new course, 1 new program.

**Contingent Faculty Welfare Committee – Roy Bakos, Chair.**  There is no widespread call for Byron Brown to be President from the contingent faculty.

**Report from the College Senators -- Susan Maguire, Senate Liaison.** Make sure you read the Senate report for the new Gen Ed requirements. Shared governance is being reviewed, send ideas to Greg Wadsworth.

**Upcoming Meetings:** April 7 and April 28.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meg Knowles - Secretary, SAS