Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Arts & Sciences Council

Thursday, September 27, 2018

Call to Order

José María Rodríguez García (Chair) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Arts & Sciences Council and then outlined the agenda for the day. He reminded the Council that, due to a previous commitment, Dean Ashby was unavailable to speak to us today. She will share her thoughts on the first- and second-year experience initiative at the next meeting.

The minutes were then approved.

Introductory Remarks

Rodríguez García then shared his vision for his first year of work as Council Chair. He reviewed the platform upon which he ran last spring. That platform was based on comments he had heard across campus after the dissolution of the ad hoc Imagining the Duke Curriculum committee. Rodríguez García wants to work organically on smaller pieces of undergraduate instruction, beginning with potentially transforming the first- and second-year experience while also conducting concurrent faculty-driven conversations on advising, admissions, team-based pedagogies, study-away opportunities, cross-disciplinary instruction, etc. The Council’s medium-term focus on these and other items, most of them placed under its purview, should make the Trinity faculty at large better prepared to start afresh a larger conversation about curriculum reform in perhaps two years from now.

He reported that this semester and in the semesters to follow, units will be coming online gradually with their first courses that are part of the first- and second-year experience. Deans Ashby and Petters want to conduct a robust assessment of those courses after they come online and meet their projected learning outcomes. In the meantime, he’d like to get some clarity on and have discussions about what our undergraduate advising needs are. He is interested in helping improve pre-major advising, and ECASC has already spoken with Professor David Rabiner, Director of the Academic Advising Center, about this issue. ECASC also wants to help strengthen advising in the majors, as well as residential advising and career advising if possible. Other constituencies and areas that have urgent and distinct advising needs are the expanding student demographic that completes a study-way experience and various cross-sectional initiatives like Program II and Bass Connections.
Another part of Rodríguez García’s platform was to have diverse faculty voices heard on all Council committees and in all college-wide discussions. So, regarding Council committees, he’s working with ECASC right now to reactivate some of the dormant committees which have been inactive for some time. Reviving the dormant committees is one way to get more faculty involved in faculty governance. We’ll have again a standing committee on Teaching, Academic Standards and Honors. He’s talked to Dean Ashby about this. She likes the idea and has pledged to transfer back the prerogative of granting faculty teaching awards back to this committee when it’s up and running again. The committee would also work on other issues. The charter in the bylaws is quite simple: “the enhancement of the teaching of undergraduates in Trinity College.” That’s just the starting point, and if this committee is reactivated, its membership would work on a revised charter and there would be discussion in Council. But the committee, as it is now described, can be re-activated as long as enough faculty express in interest in serving on it.

Also, Rodríguez García would like Council members and the Trinity faculty at large to be more active in campus-wide conversations. He used advising as an example. In December 2012, then Dean Laurie Patton charged a university task force on advising. That task force produced a report with recommendations in March 2014, but didn’t share it with the Council or otherwise publicized it. Furthermore, that task force was not in conversation with the A&S Council because our advising committee (called in the bylaws Faculty-Student Interaction committee) was inactive at the time. So if we keep more committees active and engaged, we will have a greater voice in the important conversations that will continue to happen regardless of whether we take part in them through Council or not. He thinks it is worth trying to be a partner in these conversations.

Finally, Rodríguez García would like to see larger numbers of faculty located in more areas of campus engage in service. We’ve had departments that have enjoyed a great degree of autonomy. For example, those large-sized departments that have great resources and rank at the very top nationally. They may have experienced the temptation not to get very involved in faculty governance. Let’s say Economics. They’ve always had a Council representative, of course, but for the past few years we didn’t have a single faculty member with a primary appointment in Economics serving on any active standing committee out of the list of eleven committees described in our bylaws. Now we have several Economics faculty serving, so that’s a way we can benefit collectively from learning more about some of this Department’s successful initiatives, such as the programs on advising in the majors and teacher training.

Rodríguez García said the biggest challenge in ECASC and in Council will be how to reclaim the faculty initiative in some of the conversations that directly affect undergraduate education. He’s been under the impression that some of the conversations which in recent years took place in Council in a way were already scripted, that they didn’t begin from the bottom up, with faculty learning from and talking to faculty. He thought that perhaps we were giving up the initiative that our bylaws grant us to be the originators of conversations. So he and ECASC are discussing the following. When there is a major proposal or initiative that comes to our attention and the originators are requesting time in Council, it’s worth, in some cases, to hold first a panel discussion of faculty who are already engaged in that thinking, so that faculty can learn directly from faculty experiences. Then we bring a representative from the administration to a meeting to tell us what they think the issues under discussion are. He mentioned as an example the priorities that the highest-ranking administrators have recently made public (some of the initiatives implied in President Price’s five-pillar framework, for instance). He’d like to have a conversation on some of those topics before a proposal comes to Council for discussion, deliberation, and possible approval. In this way, Council can be collectively better prepared to engage in conversations that may lead into the enactment of new policy in undergraduate education.
Rodríguez García then referred to the topic of the day—the faculty conversation on classroom space and infrastructure. He announced that he has charged an ad hoc committee of that name. This is in response to a request made by Dean Ashby and Senior Associate Dean Ed Gomes last April to have a better sense of how faculty relate to our existing instructional venues and spaces and, if faculty could participate in a conversation leading to renovations, where would our priorities be? Because of the summer recess, Council didn’t have the chance to start discussion until today. An ad hoc committee has been appointed, According to our bylaws and Robert’s Rules of Order, Council doesn’t need to approve the charge, which is basically to gather faculty input through a variety of channels.

We’ll begin with a discussion with our invited guests, then we’ll continue with a series of town hall meetings, then we’ll have a faculty survey, then another Council discussion, then the committee will draft some recommendations on how Trinity faculty feel funds for renovations would be best spent next summer. Rodríguez García said it was very urgent that we proceed with appointing this committee because our recommendations need to be issued in early December, so we have only a few months to go through all those stages. He asked that we move forward with the committee, especially given the committee is ad hoc and there is no expectation that it will be made a standing committee. Its membership is published on the Council’s website.

Rodríguez García wants everyone to feel that their voices are heard, so if someone would like to vote on the charge or even the existence of the committee, we will. He thought it would not be productive to wait another month to vote, however, because that would only mean that we’d miss out on the opportunity to provide input for summer 2019 classroom renovation. He welcomed comments.

Ron Grunwald (Biology) asked if there is an immediate request for solicitation among our faculty for ideas and suggestions? What’s the next thing that we’re being asked to do?

Rodríguez García said that today we’ll listen to a brief presentation about the responsibilities of different Trinity and University administrators who are involved with classroom space. Then we’re going to have a discussion amongst ourselves on how the process works. Then the ad hoc committee will be in charge of organizing town hall meetings where we hope to gather much more input from faculty. Then those ideas will inform the questions asked of faculty in the survey. Then we’ll come back for more discussion in Council.

Carol Apollonio (Slavic and Eurasian Studies) is chair of the ad hoc CSI committee. She began her presentation by saying that the rationale behind this committee is that our teaching depends heavily on the kinds of spaces in which we teach—the infrastructure, equipment, lighting … everything you can imagine that would impact your teaching. The committee’s goal is to make sure the faculty voice is taken into account in the complex process of decisions about teaching spaces.

The Committee’s charge consists of:

1. gathering information about the university’s decision-making process related to classroom space and infrastructure;
2. clarifying the faculty role in that process;
(3) gathering faculty priorities and concerns relating to our teaching spaces; and

(4) providing key desiderata and recommendations to A&S Council, the Deans’ Cabinet, and the Registrar’s office by December 10.

Additionally, in the longer term, and based on our work this semester (5) we hope to establish general procedures or mechanisms for incorporating faculty voices into Duke administration decisions having to do with classroom space and infrastructure.

The committee have an incredibly tight deadline, and the reason is so we can contribute maximally and effectively to conversations about upfits and renovations for this summer. The goal is to ensure that our voices are heard and that we can contribute in ways that are appropriate and wise. Based on the committee’s experience this semester, they hope to have a sense on how our work can enable the faculty voice in future.

Chris Walter (Physics) asked if they were looking for input on the normal yearly process or, for example, on a larger 10-year project?

Ed Gomes (Trinity) said the plan was to start a deliberate exercise to have a different process regarding space renovations moving forward.

Jesse Hunt (Armed Forces) asked how the Trinity process strategically aligns with the larger Duke space utilization study? Are there plans in place to avoid overlap?

Jerry Conrad (Trinity) said that we’re a part of that committee and will be able to bring information gathered through Trinity to the larger Duke discussion.

Gomes said there is definitely going to be some overlap. They will make recommendations on things that they would like to see A&S and other schools do in terms of space utilization. He is unclear about the impact on decisions about renovations unless they tell schools to take spaces offline and do something else with them. So, yes, there will be overlap but the information we get from faculty is just a way to gather information.

Hunt said their survey included specific questions regarding classroom space. He asked how that information will feed into this effort, or are they both completely separate?

Rodriguez García said an important distinction is that this is strictly focused on instructional spaces. The university-wide study involves classrooms, labs, common spaces, and offices so it’s a more comprehensive study. His sense from the conversations he’s had with Trinity administrators is that the two efforts originated separately from each other and they are now converging in time.

Apollonio suggested that further questions be entertained after the presentations by administrators. She then asked the ad hoc committee members who were present at the meeting, Professor Tina Williams and Professor José González, to raise their hands. She encouraged Council members to contact any of the ad hoc committee members. The complete list is on the A&S Council website. She then welcomed Ed Gomes.

Ed Gomes said he is the senior associate dean for Trinity’s Office of Technology Services and he is heavily involved in tech support areas for A&S, centers and institutes, and the Office of the Provost. He meets regularly with colleagues in the Central IT administration and has a dual reporting function in OIT.
He was asked to provide information on his role and his decision making responsibilities. He manages a team of eight full time professionals plus work study students who support 270-odd teaching spaces. That means supporting the maintenance of the AV integrations, coordinating the IT integration with Central IT, and working with Facilities so all these come together to provide a fully functional space. He and his team also analyze the yearly costs for projects. That number includes maintenance for existing technology, replacement costs, and licensing. They annually review priorities for known issues and schedule replacement of technology that ages out.

One of his biggest challenges is that the spaces serviced by his Office are geographically distributed across multiple campuses, including DKU. Another challenge is rapid changes in technology. They must also work to creatively design multiple use spaces, like the LINK. Teaching and learning spaces now bleed out of classroom boundaries to group and collision spaces. So we have to try and integrate the instruction in a formal classroom with what happens outside the classroom, and sometimes that means adding technology in those places and then figuring out ways of supporting that new technology.

The other big challenge is our annual funding allocation. It’s not enough to address all our needs, and we try to extend it as far as we can, but that requires prioritization.

Regarding how he incorporates faculty input, Gomes said he tries to get as much information from his team and colleagues who have been communicating with the faculty directly. Faculty can also contact him any time. The faculty might not like the answer they sometimes get, but he will listen. He also talks with departmental chairs regularly and he attends the Dean’s chairs meetings. His team tries, if possible, to engage stakeholders in advancing major projects.

Faculty can assist this process by contacting either his team or him directly. He asked faculty also communicate with their chairs, so the latter can forward the information to him. Another possibility is to work through Council since there’s always the opportunity to have this Council use its power to bring things to deans and express their concerns.

Lastly, he asked faculty to be aware of the lead-time necessary for renovations.

Frank Blalark (Registrar) said he is the Assistant Vice Provost and University Registrar. Most of his interactions with faculty happen when he’s putting out fires. His office’s focus is campus wide and has a broad scope to help manage space and courses. That being said, there are some colleges that they collaborate with but don’t manage space. This matters when there’s an emergency, like a flood, or space goes off line and we’re trying to negotiate with a college to use space that we don’t manage. A little different than the room reservation process when you start to think about spaces there’s the course catalog. So people start thinking about creating a course, then it moves over to the class scheduling (who’s teaching it and how many students are in it), then it moves over to room reservation. That’s important because we do run into issues with classes with predicted enrollment. When the term starts, if enrollment is smaller than expected, it’s too late to switch rooms.

Blalark said their biggest challenge is the distribution of classes across days of the week and times of the day. Before he arrived, there was a course schedule policy put in place that lead to the DSV, an application that tries to enforce rules that encourage distribution of courses across week and day. As a result of the DSV, courses have moved from being cluster scheduled around 10-2 to 1-3.

A challenge related to that is the issue of standard and non-standard meeting patterns. Duke has probably 20 standard meeting patterns as well as alternative course end times. We do a good job of enforcing the start time but there is flexibility when classes end. As you can imagine, this can create problems with
room scheduling when one class begins at 9 a.m. but the class before it ends at 9:05 a.m. Dummy classes are also a challenge. He knows that there are often spaces held for classes when there aren’t actually students in the class.

Regarding faculty input, he suggested being more engaged with the DUS and DUS Assistant in the course catalog process and taking some time to think about if you are trying to increase enrollment, realistically how many students might be in that class? If you are creating online courses, really think about how that class’s structure is set up. We found classes in our system that are marked “lecture in person” but no one is in the classroom. And when thinking about the class scheduling process, also remember that the Registrar has deadlines. He acknowledged that these deadlines are difficult for everyone, with next term scheduling beginning toward the middle of this term.

Blalark said his biggest challenge is summer. Faculty get back after the summer and are disappointed in their class space assignments, and at that time, it becomes tricky to move things around, but they try to accommodate.

Blalark said faculty can help his office by having some flexibility in scheduling room assignment. For the most part, he thinks faculty are already flexible. He reminded everyone that the Registrar doesn’t own the space, they are just the middlemen involved as different classroom spaces are placed under different campus jurisdictions. If faculty find they are in a room that really doesn’t work for their needs, they should let the Registrar’s Office know. Also, he said, they do try to schedule around a geographic area that’s close to where the discipline centers are. That can be difficult when faculty aren’t located near where their discipline centers are. The number of cross-listed courses also presents a challenge.

Lastly, he pointed out that there are parts of campus where people don’t want to be. Trent especially is difficult. People complain about that because of the bus routes and the food services being taken out of that building. But we need those classrooms; if all those classrooms were taken offline, it would create a problem.

Jerry Conrad said he is the new director of facilities for Trinity, having arrived at Duke in July. A&S has roughly 1.5 million sq ft of space, and we’re working with numerous departments and schools outside of A&S because we share space. His office is the conduit between A&S and other areas of university. They’re charged with facilities operations for Trinity, but work closely with the University Facilities Management Department (FMD) as it relates to space and upgrading space. It’s challenging because there are so many layers to achieve or complete that upgrading, and different administrative units have control over different spaces, sometime two administrations share control. He said that if you consider space in Trinity and what is his office’s charge, this visual could help: if you tip a building upside down, and shake it, whatever falls out belongs to Trinity; what stays belongs to FMD. They are sort of the owner/landlord of space at Duke and we are the renters. So that’s why we have to work in tandem with them when it comes to renovations, how we use the space, and what we’re allowed to use it for.

He clarified that FMD handles the infrastructure that supports buildings. They handle things like changing out the lights and fixing the heating and air conditioning. So they handle the shell of the building, the exterior of the building, and how it’s managed.

Conrad’s office is also responsible for classrooms and works very closely with the Registrar’s Office. They also help manage the use of space outside of class time.

Apollonio then opened up the floor for questions.
Ron Grunwald (Biology) said the past course schedules should be able to help predict future needs. Does the Registrar have tools to mine that data? Is that part of the task force effort because it seems like that would be the starting point for this.

Blalark said they do have the tools to mine the data. Technically all it requires is for them to pull all enrollments, look at when classes start and end and the days of the week they are offered and looking at them over time.

Grunwald said that data reflects the problems after they are solved, not the problems when they present themselves. So the schedule every semester in some ways represents compromise since we can’t always get the rooms we request. If we didn’t have to compromise, what would we have on campus? Is there a record-keeping of how many courses were trying to be scheduled in each room? It would be great if that data were available.

Gomes said you would have to start with the requests in the DSV (Departmental Schedule Validator) submitted to the Registrar’s Office.

Blalark said there were two kinds of data. It’s which rooms did you want that you didn’t get versus which times? The time problem is a bigger issue. So if you start adjusting for time, you start entering into the area of conflicts for students. “I can’t take your class because it’s during the time of a lot of other classes.” That’s the middle of the day problem and some departments deal with this by moving their classes so students can take them. For that data, they could probably go through the DSV to look for start/end times that did not validate and then see what we had to do to it to make it work.

Reeve Huston (History) thought that, for Council’s purpose of planning for renovations and space, the first set of information is more important. Time could be dealt with at a later point.

Rodríguez García clarified that the ad hoc committee won’t work on scheduling issues. It is working under such time constraints that it will be devoting all its effort to guiding the faculty input for the renovation of teaching venues in summer 2019. He added that the appointments for the CSI committee have been made for one year, so while the space renovation recommendations will have to be done in December, there will be an opportunity for the committee, if members wish, to continue working in spring on scheduling issues.

Tina Williams (Psychology and Neuroscience) said it would be useful to know what rooms faculty don’t want and why? Could this information be provided to the committee? Is there data on what is lacking in rooms that faculty are saying don’t work for their teaching?

José González (Classical Studies) asked if the Registrar gets mostly requests for specific rooms or for kinds of rooms?

Blalark said when you schedule a class, there’s an optimizer that looks at the class itself, the number of students, and tries to match its enrollment capacity with a room that fits. There’s an algorithm that just runs and slots you in rooms. They do look at historical data so they try to put you in a room where you’re always been.

González said in his department you choose the type of room, like a seminar room, and the assistant checks to see if what the Registrar has assigned matches what faculty have requested.

Gomes said there have been occasions, like when they first opened the LINK, when they were doing more to vet those requests because there was an anticipating of the types of instruction they thought
would happen in there. They still use the DSV for base level vetting, but then we evaluated those slightly differently because of possible technology needs that could be supported in that space.

Blalark added that there’s also priority in terms of which department or pedagogical approaches gets priority. Story Lab gets the LINK, for example. There are certain programs that get the LINK because that’s the initiative that was given to us.

Gomes said it’s a valid question and there’s some concepts they had discussed trying to do moving forward in collaboration with other colleagues to be able to take the data that we have and to create ways and opportunities for faculty to try and make requests a little differently. The idea being that you could go into some web page and click check boxes on the characteristics you want in a room and the program lists rooms that might work best. Faculty can then pass that information along to their DUS Assistants to request those rooms. He is unclear if that would create a bigger headache around scheduling, but if there are things we could do to help make information more accessible to faculty so they know the possible options.

David Malone (Education) thanked the administrators for attending and talking about the issues. He likes the idea of a committee. Time and space are such important issues that Council might want to consider continuation of the committee with a different charge. He asked about departmentally controlled spaces. At one time, his program controlled three classrooms and were asked to give them up. How does that fit in?

Blalark clarified that the Registrar’s Office can’t take space from anyone.

Gomes said it is the dean’s decision.

Malone said this happened about 15 years ago. Do some departments still control space?

Blalark said yes and that they get pushback when they ask departments to try and schedule classes in the rooms they own first before using broader rooms. We do have departments that will go out to the broader rooms and then backfill. For some of those, he can see the information, but for others, he can’t. And that’s when they start negotiations for other units to use the departmentally controlled rooms.

Malone then said that rooms seem to have default set ups, with a photo illustrating how the room should be set up.

Gomes said it’s been that way in past, but his preference is that that we wouldn’t worry about that. If you have furniture that’s easy to move, like the LINK, The idea is that the faculty member could move things around for a day so that they can create a flexible teaching space. But the idea that the room has to be set up exactly how the picture says before the next instructor comes in is problematic because it takes away the idea that you can just move things around. Also, it’s a resource issue. If you’re not going to do it and your students aren’t going to do it, then who are we going to get to set it up the way it’s supposed to be.

Conrad said part of that is there’s a request for more flexible space, but from a housekeeping standpoint, someone needs to say that we have to put the room back in some form of order at the end of the day. Housekeeping is charged with that, so that’s where the picture comes in.

Malone said it’s a challenge when there are back-to-back classes and one person uses a room in a certain way and then the room has to be re-set up in the break. He ends up asking his students to help move the furniture. It’s just something we need to think through in terms of responsibility.
Jonathan Bagg (Music) said he imagined if he posed these questions to faculty in his department, they would have specific items they want, like different chairs or a different kind of music system. Are we looking for that type of information?

Gomes said that ultimately we want to get that information regardless if it’s part of this committee or not, but if what comes out of this committee is a way to make sure that the request process is understood, and that we have the request and can take it into consideration.

Grunwald asked if there’s a boundary of what we can ask for? Can we ask for pie-in-the-sky things, like three more 100-person classrooms, if money was no limit and space was infinitely flexible? Is that not helpful?

Apollonio said they are not thinking about money and don’t even know about money. They are just collecting the most basic and important needs from faculty.

Williams asked who decides about furniture?

Conrad said it’s project specific. For larger renovations, an outside team is brought in to collaborate with the department. For small scale project, departments give direct input.

Apollonio said the committee has decided to offer an opportunity for faculty to invite administrators to view their classroom spaces. Send requests to Mary Nettleton to pass along to the administrators. For homework, she asked that Council members gather broadest information possible. Go back to your departments and figure out how to get everyone to contribute concerns and suggestions. It probably won’t be hard to collect this information.

She then asked Council members to break into groups to discuss immediate needs about classroom spaces and to write down their responses on an index card. The CSI will use this information to help shape the survey.

Council then broke into groups to complete the exercise. Once completed, the meeting was adjourned.