Minutes of the October 12, 2021 faculty meeting

The meeting was called to order at 3:02pm on Zoom by Dean Adrian Randolph.

I. Dean’s Opening Remarks

Dean Randolph opened the faculty meeting reflecting on the announcement of Rebecca Blank as Northwestern’s President-Elect. He noted that President-Elect Blank would be the first woman in Northwestern’s history to occupy the role. Dean Randolph commended this marker of institutional progress.

II. Presentation on the Office of the Ombudsperson delivered by Sarah Klaper.

Dean Randolph introduced Sarah Klaper, Northwestern’s newly appointed Ombudsperson. Ombudsperson Klaper shared her background in law and provided an overview of the role of the Ombudsperson, including procedures, policies, best practices, and frequently asked questions.

III. Faculty Meeting minutes of May 11, 2021

The minutes of the Faculty Meeting of May 11, 2021 were approved.

IV. First Reading of the Proposal to Change the Name of the Department of Statistics to the Department of Statistics and Data Science

Associate Dean for Research Catherine Woolley introduced the first reading of the proposal to change the name of the Department of Statistics to the Department of Statistics and Data Science:

We propose to change the name of the Department of Statistics to the Department of Statistics and Data Science to reflect the current status of the field as well as the educational and scholarly activities of the department. Statistics, since its inception, has been an applied science, focused on data analysis, modeling, prediction, visualization, and presentation. Data science, as an emerging discipline, while heavily overlapping with statistics, concerns principles and methods that encompass broader activities, including data collection and management, integration, analysis, and computing algorithms to tackle the challenges of the massive data generated in many disciplines with unprecedented size,
scale, dimension and complexity. While a consensus in definition of data science is still lacking, statistics is still regarded as one of the most important foundations of data science. Housing statistics and data science in the same department has become an increasing trend among leading institutions nationwide. The Department of Statistics at Northwestern is distinguished for research in the application of statistics in diverse areas such as social sciences, life sciences, economics, finance, engineering, law, medicine, and public policy. In response to the data science drive, the department has planned strategically to develop data science programs as its first priority in the coming years. Through recent and ongoing hiring the department is building up a strong faculty team in both research and teaching in data science. As a result, two undergraduate programs were established recently, namely the minor in data science in 2019, and major in data science which will begin in the fall of 2022. Thus, the proposed new name better captures the ongoing scholarly and educational activities of the department. It will help to foster a physical hub at Northwestern for both statistics and data science, which with nurture our statistics and data science programs and further broaden and promote the interdisciplinary collaboration between the department and other units at Northwestern.

Associate Dean Woolley reminded the faculty that this was a first reading of the proposed name change and opened the floor for questions and responses from the faculty.

Professor Jiping Wang, chair of the Department of Statistics, shared that Carnegie Mellon, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, University of Texas at Austin, Ohio State University, and University of Wisconsin at Madison are among peer institutions that have adopted similar departmental naming conventions. Dean Randolph clarified that, while data science is significant to all fields, the departmental name change would signify data science’s importance at the College level.

V. Dean’s updates

Dean Randolph commented positively on the state of in-person instruction and campus activities. He reviewed low COVID-19 positivity rates, which informed his favorable views on the campus return. Dean Randolph affirmed that pandemic-related policy was grounded in facts and expert opinions and his team remains prepared to collaborate on any necessary response to future coronavirus outbreaks and resultant policy would be adaptive and responsive to the needs of the moment.

Dean Randolph proceeded to offer an overview of College operations. For Faculty Affairs, he highlighted 38 faculty hires for academic year 2021-22. Dean Randolph mentioned recent, positive trends in the efforts of diversifying the faculty, citing a 5%
increase of tenure-line BIPOC-identifying faculty over the last three years. This increase was more pronounced among assistant professors; that population reported a 20% increase in its BIPOC-identifying population. Further, Dean Randolph discussed recent actions taken to address faculty equity concerns such as the standardization of teaching track faculty teaching loads and subsequent salary standardization measures as.

Dean Randolph then addressed reappointment, promotion, and tenure processes, overseen by Assistant Dean for Faculty Advancement Elizabeth Kim. Dean Randolph noted that 5 faculty achieved tenured, 14 faculty were promoted to full professor from the tenure-line, 3 faculty were promoted to Associate Professor of Instruction, and 7 faculty were promoted to Professor of Instruction.

Dean Randolph next reviewed graduate studies, helmed by Associate Dean for Graduate Studies Ann Bradlow. He noted that the College is currently examining graduate student cohorts in a holistic way, emphasizing stability and flexibility, especially for students who may take longer to degree. Dean Randolph maintained optimism that research funding would be stable in the coming year, though he commented that pandemic-related research delays & medical considerations are areas to be mindful of in the current financial environment.

Dean Randolph thanked Associate Dean for Undergraduate Affairs Mary Finn and her team for their leadership in navigating the tenuous environment for Weinberg’s undergraduate population. Dean Randolph noted that proposed changes to degree requirements were postponed for the pandemic, but implementation remains scheduled for academic year 2023-2024. Dean Randolph also stated that curricular changes, such as introducing the data science and cognitive science minors, occurred successfully in the pandemic. Dean Randolph also examined primary education pipeline gaps and measures taken to enhance student preparedness, such as the Arch Scholars program.

In reviewing research, Dean Randolph noted the College’s many accomplishments, including high volumes of books produced and articles published. Dean Randolph commented that the College’s research continued robustly, despite the pandemic. He amplified that the College’s research funding outpaced research funding growth of the university at large. Dean Randolph spoke about the College’s research recovery response, which includes a multi-year strategy, grants, replacement teaching, and research recovery awards.

Dean Randolph highlighted updates made to Weinberg College’s new website by Chief of Staff Francesca Petty and Director of Marketing and Communications Angela Crimmin.
Dean Randolph then spoke about Alumni Relations and Development’s We Will Campaign and its positive impacts on the College’s generational growth. Dean Randolph highlighted that the College’s development team raised $470 million in academic year 2020-21, with gifts benefitting every discipline in the College.

Finally, Dean Randolph commented that Facilities is currently involved with renovations of the Jacobs Center and Seeley Mudd Hall. He posited an update on those project and the university’s finances could be agenda items at forthcoming faculty meetings.

There being no further updates, Dean Randolph thanked the faculty in attendance and the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Quinn Leach, Weinberg College Program Coordinator.