Minutes of the May 11, 2021 faculty meeting

The meeting was called to order at 3:01pm on Zoom by Dean Adrian Randolph.

I. The minutes of the Faculty Meeting of February 16, 2021 were approved

II. Announcement of Retiring Faculty

Dean Randolph announced the retirements of the following faculty members:

- Caroline Bledsoe, Professor, Anthropology
- Micaela di Leonardo, Professor, Anthropology
- Stephen Eisenman, Professor, Art History
- Rick Gaber, Professor, Molecular Biosciences
- John Hagan, Professor, Sociology
- Richard Kieckhefer, Professor, Religious Studies
- Carl Petry, Professor, History
- Mark Segraves, Professor, Neurobiology
- Hendrik Spruyt, Professor, Political Science
- Susan Thistle, Associate Professor of Instruction, Sociology
- Tai Te Wu, Professor, Molecular Biosciences

III. Recommendation of candidates for Weinberg College degrees to be awarded at the June 13, 2021 Commencement

Dean Randolph moved for the conferral of Bachelor of Art’s degrees on June 13, 2021 for the 961 Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences students, 3 Bachelor of Philosophy students, and 46 Bachelor of Science and General Studies students enrolled in the School of Professional Studies who completed graduation requirements in the 2020-2021 academic year. Professor Omar Farha seconded this motion. This motion was approved by the faculty.

IV. Proposal for a Departmental Major in Data Science. Second Reading by Assistant Dean Laura Panko.

Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Assessment Laura Panko presented the second reading for the major in Data Science. Assistant Dean Panko reiterated that the Department of Statistics currently offered a minor in Data Science that has been exceptionally popular among students, so much so that a major program has been
deemed appropriate. The proposed major would become available Fall Quarter 2022. The major proposal included courses in Mathematics, Computer Science, Statistics, Data Science, two domain science electives, and an ethics requirement. After this description, Assistant Dean Panko opened the floor to questions from the faculty.

Professor Ezra Getzler noted that the Data Science major courses did not possess a unique course code. He inquired if there was a mechanism the College could employ to differentiate Data Science courses from Statistics courses, specifically wondering if there would be distinct independent study courses for the major. Professor Jiping Wang responded that Data Science and Statistics are closely related disciplines and using the same course code for both (STAT) reflects the closeness of the two fields. Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs Mary Finn confirmed that if a Data Science student desired to take an independent study they would be able to. Professor Wang noted that the trend among Northwestern’s peers has been to merge Data Science with Statistics. Professor Sandy Zabell further commented that Statistics’ independent study course is available to many students across the College beyond those in the Statistics major.

Professor Vicky Kalogera inquired about how common double majors with Data Science and other STEM fields would be, beyond the Statistics department. Assistant Dean Panko noted students would likely not be double majoring in Data Science and Statistics, rather they would be choosing one or the other. She then affirmed that part of the motivation for creating the Data Science major was to pair it with additional disciplines such as Math and Physics. The domain science requirements are intended to increase double majors throughout STEM fields. Associate Dean Finn commented that, in the major development process, advising and facilitating undergraduate double majors was looked at specifically. She noted that advising students from the beginning will be crucial given there are a number of pre-requisites. Dean Randolph praised the department for their efforts in creating opportunities for double majoring and emphasized the potential for students to minor in Data Science as well. Professor Wang affirmed the goal that Data Science is meant to be an interdisciplinary program. Professor Zabell noted that many incoming students will have taken AP Statistics and Calculus courses, so they will be entering the major from an interdisciplinary perspective already. Assistant Professor Arend Kuyper then spoke about the current process in Statistics to establish minors in Data Science in which many students, from a variety of fields like Journalism, have established a viable pathway to complete program requirements.

Assistant Professor of Instruction Michael Maltenfort moved for a vote to approve the Data Science major. This motion was seconded by Professor Eric Zaslow. The faculty voted to approve the Data Science major proposal.
V. Summer and Fall Return to Campus planning review & Dean’s updates

Dean Randolph shared Provost’s Office messaging relating to University operations for fall quarter: namely the desire for work and instruction to be conducted primarily in-person. Dean Randolph noted that, given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, many contingencies were concurrently being established. The Educational Contingency Planning (ECP) Group was spotlighted as a College-focused committee dedicated to navigating issues related to campus return. Dean Randolph enunciated that many competing ideas exist around in-person and remote work: some personnel feel 100% in-person is the best option, others feel remote is preferable. He further stated that this divide carries over to faculty members and their course modalities. Dean Randolph emphasized that appropriate levels of flexibility will be key in gauging the needs of the moment. Dean Randolph added that the University’s stance on vaccine status could strongly impact in-person operations and commented on the likelihood of a student vaccination requirement.

Dean Randolph articulated particular consideration was being given to international students, given their uniquely challenging situation.

Professor Zaslow inquired if vaccination requirements would be in effect for summer courses. Dean Randolph responded that he did not think vaccinations would be required for summer term.

Professor Farha commented that in his experience teaching a 50% in-person 50% remote course, the in-person students were more engaged and excited to be learning, even more excited to learn than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Dean Randolph articulated that it is for this reason the Provost’s Office is attempting to oversee a primarily in-person fall quarter, while making note of the importance of policy exceptions where necessary.

VI. Dean’s updates

Dean Randolph welcomed Ralph Leslie, the new Associate Dean for Finance and Business Operations, and Matthew Johnson, the new Associate Dean for Faculty.

There being no further updates, Dean Randolph thanked the faculty in attendance and the meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Quinn Leach, Weinberg College Program Coordinator.