

Rules Committee
July 23, 2018

Attending: Marilyn Billings, David Gross, David Hoagland, Frank Hugus, MJ Peterson, Rebecca Spencer, Marinos Vouvakis, Wilmore Webley.

Absent: Bruce Baird

Guest: Chris Misra, Amherst Interim Vice Chancellor for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer

1. Minutes

Actions on past minutes were deferred due to immediate availability of Chris Misra, who was present for agenda item 2.

2. Conversation with Chris Misra

Misra opened discussion by characterizing IT activities as “going well” and offering thanks to Rules Committee Member Marilyn Billings for her service as Interim Director for Instructional Innovation. Subsequent discussion centered on the different management styles of previous IT Directors and how these styles were received by others in IT. Misra is seeking to manage through open dialogue and consensus decision-making, with much decision-making de-centralized. The diverse organization and role of IT in each college were outlined, with the irregular pattern suggesting that IT support probably does not fit a “one size fits all” approach. The staffing of Desktop Support has recovered to its full complement, and across IT, staffing levels are adequate. The organization of IT services compares reasonably well to peer institutions (UConn and UIUC were cited), for which de-centralization seems to correlate with higher campus status in rankings. Integrating the IT structures at the Mt. Ida Campus of UMass Amherst into those of UMass has been a chore, especially mapping the physical infrastructure (i.e., networks) and implementing the redundancies required by UMass. Software investments by the central administration were outlined, with one, Helio Campus, designed for data aggregation from diverse sources and another, Salesforce, designed to improve student recruitment. Problems in obtaining site licenses for major software packages were compared to those encountered by libraries in negotiating with publishers about journal subscriptions; right now, negotiations with Adobe are a challenge.

Misra stated his willingness to address the first Faculty Senate Meeting of the upcoming academic year (Sept. 13).

3. Discussion Items

A. Rules Committee members were encouraged to make themselves available for a previously announced meeting with NEASC visitors on Oct. 22.

B. Candidates for upcoming Rules Committee openings (Chair, At-Large Member, and Associate Delegate to the Board of Trustees) were discussed, with Peterson outlining her strategies for widening the sparse pool of candidates for each position. Many desirable individuals are not available due to acceptance of administrative positions or major service roles.

C. Impressions gained from the recent Board of Trustees Meetings (June and July) were shared by Billings, Hoagland, and Peterson. The Board is still dealing with issues raised by UMass Boston faculty members, students, and staff members, who are unhappy about a recent and unsuccessful chancellor search, campus budget cuts, parking fee increases, and major infrastructure inadequacies of their campus; on-going complaints by these parties seem now to irritate some Board members. Board discussions about the Mt. Ida purchase are fading. At the June Board meeting at UMass Dartmouth, several Board members critically questioned the Dartmouth Chancellor Johnson after his campus strategy overview, a departure from what other Chancellors have faced at past meetings when presenting their own campus's strategies. In general, Board discussions of contentious issues are becoming livelier. Workshops on student mental health and impacts from the declining college-age populations were given at the last two regular Board meetings.

Individual Board members have been meeting with the Interfaculty Council after Board meetings, and at the last three such meetings, the attending member complained about the limits to Board discussion set by the state's open meeting rules. Because of these rules, there is little opportunity for discussions between Board members prior to, or even at, Board meetings, with the result that Board members sometimes know little about each other and sometimes even important details of the issues at-hand. There is an impression that President Meehan largely controls the Board agenda and deliberations.

D. Item D of the Agenda, Associate Provosts and Associate Deans, was deferred to a later meeting due to lack of time today.