

**Extraordinary Faculty Assembly (FA) -- Minutes of the Meeting**  
**April 19, 2017**  
**11:30am – 1:00pm**  
**H-Wing Auditorium**  
**Number of Faculty Attendees: (approximately) 110**

**1) FA President Tae Kwak's Opening Remarks.**

- a. Prof. Kwak is impressed by the faculty's commitment to this community. He has heard many diverse opinions about the need for a vote of no confidence. Some faculty feel that taking a stand now invites antagonism in the future, while others feel that inaction signals passivity to future administrations.

**2) Approval of March 1, 2017 Minutes of the Meeting.**

- a. The minutes were approved without objections.

**3) Approval of April 5, 2017 Minutes of the Meeting.**

- a. The minutes were approved without objections.

**4) Provost Beth Barnett's Report.**

- a. The Provost referred faculty to her recent email in which she addressed concerns and potential misunderstandings about her proposed School Restructuring Task Force. She reiterated her belief that restructuring may be necessary for managing the enrollment challenges the College is likely to face over the coming years. Local community colleges are already experiencing declines in enrollment.
- b. She presented the FA with data about recent enrollment trends at Ramapo College. For example, we have been increasing our acceptance rates in order to meet our enrollment goals. Fewer transfer students are applying to and enrolling at Ramapo College. Only 25-30% of students accept our admission offers. Student enrollment for some Units is not meeting the goals outlined in our 2012 strategic plan. Course capacity utilization and second year retention rates vary across the Units and majors.
- c. Audience Questions/Comments.
  - i. Question: What about the retention rates for undecided majors? Provost's response: Data is available from IR's website.
  - ii. Question: Why the emphasis on class size? Provost's response: Class size is important for delivering a valuable undergraduate/liberal arts experience.
  - iii. Question: Isn't it the job of the Marketing and Enrollment

Management staff to recruit students? Are marketing factors the reason for restructuring discussions? Provost's response: Admissions can bring student to the College, but we must be able to give students something that they want. The goal of restructuring is to adjust curricular inefficiencies and to pull together course offerings to make programs more appealing to students (e.g., data analytics). It's not that Ramapo is doing things wrong. It's that we don't necessarily have the majors that students want.

- iv. Question: How do our numbers compare with other NJ institutions? Provost's response: The decline is happening nationwide. However, we are a small college. We are maxed out in our professional programs. Other colleges are larger, allowing them to have more programs (giving them a more financially sustainable balance of programs).
- v. Comment: Data can be interpreted in different ways and to support different agenda. What is said by one measure may obscure what is revealed by other pieces of information. New programs may take students away from existing programs. Also, the Common Application codes may be wrong for certain majors (e.g., literature), complicating data analysis. In other words, the data may be inaccurate if the Common Application codes are wrong. Provost's response: That's why we want a task force to look at these data. We are working with the state to get the English major code added to the Common Application (as well as some other programs).
- vi. Comment: It appears that the College is moving away from a liberal arts education and towards more vocational programs. This may be a myopic strategy at a time when automation is replacing many jobs and promises to do so for the foreseeable future. A liberal arts education is perhaps more valuable in preparing students for an uncertain future. Provost's response: I am not interested in removing programs. I seek to position them more advantageously with respect to the current climate.
- vii. Question/Comment: What actions did the administration take to increase enrollment in CA and HGS? What did the administration do to involve faculty in this effort? We (faculty in such programs) have not observed much outreach from the administration. For example, the administration declined to support a Global Health program (despite growth in this field). In addition, the faculty was unable to get the administration to support the International Studies program with a supplementary languages program. Provost's response: We did try a language initiative (with Montclair), but it was not well received.

## 5) President Peter Mercer's Address to the FA.

### a. Transcription of President Peter Mercer's Address to Faculty Assembly, April 19, 2017

"In 38 years at five different colleges and universities, I have seldom been privy to an exercise so unworthy of the parties involved in promoting it. We are better than this. This initiative has to me the appearances of being not only unfounded and ill-advised but redolent of a kind of mean spirited retribution with a [...] disregard for the basic principles of fairness and sound public administration.

I want to begin with first principles, and I say this not to be confrontational but to remind us of how we're ordered as an institution. The Provost is not accountable to her faculty, whether the assembly or forum. She is accountable to me, the President. I am not accountable to faculty, whether assembly or forum. I am accountable to the board of trustees. I am here today, therefore, not out of obligation but of respect. It is a respect, however, that I see increasingly less reciprocated. There are two themes which come up...

[INTERRUPTION. A faculty member interrupts.] May I proceed, Mr. President? [FA President Tae Yang Kwak insists that the President Mercer continue.]

There are two themes which come up when these matters are discussed. One is communication, and communication of course has to go two ways. Each year I give two State of the College addresses which relate the dealings of the Cabinet and myself. I have Communications Meetings each semester, we had one today and there were hardly any faculty there. On Monday, the President's Advisory Council met. There are ten faculty places on the President's Advisory Council. There were four faculty members present. I and the Vice Presidents attend every board committee meeting with faculty members there. That is almost unheard of elsewhere. And I attend the Faculty Assembly Executive Committee and the Faculty Assembly meetings, as I am now. On April the 5th, I attended the Faculty Assembly Executive Committee meeting, left with the others at 11:30 and yet scarcely an hour or so later, a meeting was held that was not in the contemplation of any members of the executive committee, and which had as its main purpose, this motion [of a No-Confidence Vote of the Provost].

The justification that I have heard for that is that there is a crisis in leadership at the senior administrative level. Well we must be terribly unlucky at Ramapo, because for the past 15 years, it appears that not a single incumbent has been satisfactory in either the Provost's office or

apparently the President's. From the moment I arrived here, as the 5th person in the President's office in 6 years, I've had groups of faculty tell me that the person occupying the Provost's office had to go. Yet when we look at the root causes of miscommunication, they exist on both sides. Middle States, you'll recall, referred to that, the problem being a horizontal one, not a vertical one. And I ask you why it is that in 12 years we have had a grand total of one new academic program.

Our summer enrollment is way down, because students frankly aren't interested in what we have to offer. I have been proposing, from the time I arrived, that we create a major in philosophy. I renewed that invitation a year ago. That is not chasing the market. A major in philosophy for a liberal arts college should be a foundational program. I'll make another pitch. I will teach in that program, if it is established. I have experience teaching ancient philosophy, legal philosophy. I will do whatever is required to personally support it in that respect.

But I have a unique role as faculty member, president, and trustee. Many of you may not know what I that. I am an ex-officio trustee as well. But I think too many of you want to spend your time doing my job or that of my Cabinet, rather than doing your own.

So where do we go from here? I am being frank with you. This is how I see it. I will be spending a good part of the summer working on a proposal for a new representative body that will be inclusive. It will be more like a wide ranging University or College Senate. I agree with you. What we have now isn't working. We need to find an alternative and I intend to work on that as my preeminent exercise during the summer. Thank you for listening."

## **6) FA Discussion.**

- a. Comments by Prof. Kwak.
  - i. Prof. Kwak noted that the previously announced motion for a vote of no confidence was not made in a way consistent with the FA's bylaws. A motion for a voting item must be made in writing and with cause to the FAEC. The FAEC unanimously voted this morning that a vote of no confidence must be communicated openly not only among faculty but between faculty and senior administration. The FA must model the behavior it would like to see from leadership.
  - ii. Prof. Kwak wished the Provost had made her presentation (re: enrollment data) to the FA much earlier than today.
  - iii. The Provost has made changes to her draft charge for the School Restructuring Task Force. She has invited the faculty to

recommend further changes. Such changes evince flexibility on her part. However, this process has not been an example of effective communication and isn't the way we should be doing things. The Provost's job description includes promoting communication across the College.

iv. The President is ultimately accountable to entire community including the faculty. We didn't create this crisis ourselves.

b. Faculty Comments.

i. The philosophy major is in ARC's mailbox. The President's participation in this program is welcomed.

ii. A faculty member expressed regret that things have become confrontational, as shared governance depends on collegiality. He reminds the FA that the faculty has merely a consultative role in many matters.

iii. A faculty member objected to the two minute limit for individual comments. She also referred the faculty to the ASEC report on the College's structure.

iv. A motion was made to adjourn the Faculty Assembly and move to a Faculty Forum.

1. The motion was seconded.

2. Prof. Kwak ruled that those in line to speak may continue before holding a vote to adjourn.

v. A faculty member expressed being personally offended by President Mercer's comments. He also noted that the President's Council is scheduled during teaching times.

vi. A faculty member affirmed his pride in being a part of the Gen Ed program. The Gen Ed allows small majors to provide dynamic learning experiences. He suggests that Student Credit Hours / FTE be used as a metric when reporting enrollment data. He would also like the administration to take some responsibility for the current political climate.

1. In response, President Mercer concedes that "things have not worked out the way I hoped." He believes faculty rushed to conclusions after he and the Provost appeared at HGS's Unit Council.

2. The Provost stated her reason for appearing at HGS's Unit Council was to discuss HGS's leadership. This lead into a discussion about possibilities for the future (including restructuring).

vii. Another faculty member expressed her offense at President Mercer's comments. She pointed to the administration's habit of foisting big changes on the faculty, to which the faculty pushes

back and the administration ultimately backs down. She takes “strong exception” to the President’s insinuation that faculty members are not doing their jobs (referring to various student successes). She suggests that the Provost form a committee of conveners who can explore what majors can do creatively with resources (given real limitations).

- viii. Another faculty member notes the “condescending paternalism” in the room. The desire for a vote of no confidence has been brewing for a long time. He also echoes the previous speaker’s observation that there has been a pattern to the administration’s governance. Transparency is not valued.
  - 1. The Provost responded that she welcomes suggestions. She states that she tries to involve faculty members in governance, even for many decisions that are technically within her purview. She asserts that she wouldn’t have formed a shared governance task force if she didn’t believe in it.
- ix. A faculty member expressed his belief that this College is unusually open to shared governance. He referred to the President giving him wide access to the College’s financial data. He believes that faculty and administration “can work it out.”
- x. A faculty member reminded the FA that the President has not reduced the number of managers (as recommended in the budget report). He also asked the Provost to see things from the Faculty’s perspective—we are often being told two different things.
  - 1. The Provost responded that she is at times forced to work with incomplete knowledge of what will happen.
- xi. Prof. Kwak was thanked for his leadership.
- c. Prof. Kwak’s Concluding Comments.
  - i. The College Senate model is a Presidential initiative.
  - ii. If faculty members want a formal no confidence vote, they can submit a motion (with rationale) in writing to the FAEC. If the FAEC does not vote to bring it to the floor, any twenty faculty members (from at least three schools including the library) may override the FAEC.
- d. The Motion to adjourn the Faculty Assembly and move to a Faculty Forum was approved.