

2020 – 2021 Report for Welfare Council

The Welfare Council focuses on matters that support, encourage, define, and evaluate the quality of the faculty and retention of faculty members, including faculty rights and academic freedom; faculty support programs, such as fringe benefit packages; faculty diversity; and programs that improve the quality of faculty life.

For 2020 – 2021, the Welfare Council addressed a number of issues stemming in a large part from the Covid-19 pandemic and impacts on faculty welfare. Below is a summary of the primary discussions and accomplishments of the council.

Inclusivity, Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility (IDEA)

Inequities highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as national responses to incidents of violence and death among Black, African American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities led to a primary focus of council efforts this year on identifying immediately actionable strategies that can be taken at all levels of the University of Florida administration to advance inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

The council engaged with faculty broadly across the university, taking a grassroots approach to identifying IDEA action items of importance to faculty. The council worked to consolidate this feedback, consulting with Associate Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs Chris Hass and consulting with Chief Diversity Officer Antonio Farias. The resulting document enumerated 23 actions across 6 broad categories and was presented to the Faculty Senate. The Welfare Council also drafted and proposed a resolution for the Faculty Senate to endorse this document, which was passed by Faculty Senate on May 6, 2021. The resolution reads:

Whereas the horrific deaths of Mr. George Floyd and Ms. Breonna Taylor sparked national and global protests against racism;

Whereas there have been increased levels of violence against the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities since the onset of the pandemic;

Whereas President Fuchs wrote in his June 18, 2020 statement to the University of Florida community that he urged all University of Florida community members to become a part of a positive change against racism;

Whereas the University of Florida is dedicated to advancing truth, reconciliation and justice, antiracism, equality, and working to eradicate inequities;

Therefore, be it resolved that the University of Florida Faculty Senate endorses the adoption of the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) action items document in its current form. The Welfare Council of the Faculty Senate commits to revisit and revise this document annually, presenting the results of any revisions and progress on existing items to the UF Faculty Senate.

Separation from Employment, Layoff and Furlough

The start of the academic year in 2020 began with discussions related to faculty furloughs. Representatives from UF Human Resources, including Vice President of Human Resources Jodi Gentry and Assistant Vice President of Human Resources Brook Mercier, presented a draft of the policy to the Welfare Council. The council provided feedback on the initial draft of the policy as well as revised versions of the policy in response to feedback.

Spring Face-to-Face Teaching

The academic year began with all Fall 2020 classes online to reduce Covid-19 infection rates of students and employees. As plans for on-campus, face-to-face classes were proposed for the Spring 2021 semester, the council discussed a number of faculty concerns related to ensuring safety of students and faculty returning to campus, stress of transitioning courses to HyFlex formats, concern over pedagogical outcomes of HyFlex models of teaching, and requests for accommodation for faculty with health concerns. Upon starting the Spring 2021 semester, additional faculty concerns were raised regarding the use of the Gator Safe app for reporting unexplained course modality changes.

Spring Break 2021

With the goal of reducing Covid-19 infection rates of students and employees, a proposal was discussed to move the 2021 Spring Break week to occur during the first week of the Spring semester, effectively extending Winter Break and delaying the start of the Spring semester by one week. This proposal was ultimately enacted.

Peer Evaluation of Teaching

Welfare Council participated in fact-finding meetings and provided editorial feedback to the Academic Policy Council (APC) throughout the APC's efforts towards developing guidelines and resources related to Peer Evaluation and Self-Assessment of Teaching. These guidelines built upon the work of previous councils and utilized examples from three colleges with well-developed models of peer evaluation (IFAS, Veterinary Medicine, and Education) as well as information from The Center for Teaching Excellence. The resulting document is meant to serve as a resource of best-practices in peer evaluation to colleges across the University.

Faculty Annual Evaluations of Job Performance

Council discussed UF regulations and portions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement related to faculty performance evaluation. A topic of concern was discussed regarding the use of a metric of collegiality in faculty evaluations of job performance. Council recommended reviewing <https://www.aaup.org/report/collegiality-criterion-faculty-evaluation>.

Baby Gator & UF HR Proposals Related to Childcare

The Welfare Council asked to be kept informed about efforts related to addressing the childcare crisis which was magnified as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Board of Trustees expressed interest in addressing this need and UF Human Resources provided information to the council about proposals in development to expand the capacity of Baby Gator as well as address the need to invest in the early childhood educators that work at the facilities.

UF Food Services Contract

UF's current Aramark catering and food service contract was scheduled to expire in June of 2021, providing an opportunity for contract negotiations. Mr. Eddie Daniels, Assistant Vice President, Business Services and Mr. Matt Mueller, Director of Food and Beverage Services, Business Services were invited to present an update to the Welfare Council regarding the status of these negotiations, specifically in regards to provisions in the contract related to food justice initiatives. Contract negotiations were extended an additional year, to June of 2022, in response to disruptions related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Election of Chair

Sarah D. Lynne (Associate Professor; Family, Youth and Community Sciences; IFAS/UF) was elected as chair of the Welfare Council for the 2021-2022 term, pending re-election to the Council.