

FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

Monday, 22 July 2024

3:30 p.m. – Via Zoom

ACTION MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Julia Albarracin, Chair; Everett Hamner, Vice Chair; Denise Gravitt, Secretary

ALSO PRESENT: Mark Mossman, Interim Provost; Jeremy Robinett, Parliamentarian; Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager

GUESTS: Interim President Kristi Mindrup; Ben Brewer, LEJA; Jeff Hancks, WIUQC Library

Chair Albarracin announced she called the meeting to hear updates of some of the things occurring at WIU. Interim President Mindrup related that one of the major developments since the last special Faculty Senate meeting of July 10 is that the Leadership Team met today with Martin Torres, Illinois Deputy Governor for Education. She said this meeting provided an opportunity to share with him, First Assistant Deputy Governor Teresa Ramos, and Illinois Board of Higher Education Executive Director Ginger Ostro the financial picture that was shared with Faculty Senate two weeks ago, including what the institution needs to do to balance the budget and ensure WIU's cash flow through the year. She said the information shared was intended to emphasize that WIU as an institution does have a plan; when Interim Provost Mossman and Interim President Mindrup previously met with Deputy Governor Torres in late March, WIU did not have a plan forward, so that was a very difficult conversation. Interim President Mindrup noted that this time the WIU representatives were able to show more than \$13 million in cost reductions and were able to state with confidence that around \$10 million needs to be identified for further cost reductions. She said the Leadership Team told those present that while they have been able to identify many variables in this planning process and have developed planning strategies, they have not been able to harness time. Interim President Mindrup noted that things the administration might be able to do in a short time to address the deficit are different than things they would do if they had three years to turn things around. She said the Leadership Team invited guidance and support from the Governor's Office given WIU's financial picture.

Interim President Mindrup related the initial response from Springfield was that there is no state money to bail anyone out; this message was delivered in March and restated today, but she and Interim Provost Mossman nevertheless felt better about this meeting than the previous one. She added that the Governor's Office has asked for a follow-up meeting in three weeks to see how planning and actions are taking shape. Interim President Mindrup said the Springfield representatives support WIU addressing cash flow and balancing the budget so that university representatives do not have to come back again next year. She remarked that the glimmer of hope is that the Governor's Office will convene leadership on their end in the next three weeks to discuss WIU's situation while the university simultaneously continues to work on balancing its budget. She said Deputy Governor Torres and colleagues appeared open to exploring other possibilities they may not have had before, possibly because WIU now has part of a plan completed and momentum toward an additional Phase 2 moving forward. Interim President Mindrup summarized that overall it was an open, honest discussion with the Governor's Office intended to keep them in the loop of WIU's financial situation and with the hope of drumming up some support.

Interim President Mindrup related the Governor's Office emphasizes that WIU should look at opportunities, the first of which is specific to cash flow. She said IBHE Executive Director Ostro is working to set up a meeting with WIU and IBHE representatives about the distribution of MAP funding. She said the Capital Development Board will also be asked whether WIU might be able to use some deferred maintenance funding which could be applied to what has been allocated for facilities operations. Interim President Mindrup warned that neither of these solve any big problems, but they might lengthen the university's runway to be able to continue to pursue possibilities.

Interim President Mindrup related another emphasis was on institutional borrowing; although she does not believe WIU is in a position right now to expand on what has already been done in this area, Ketra Roselieb, WIU Executive Director for Financial Affairs, is trying to leave no stone unturned. She said fundraising was also emphasized, and Clare Thompson, Vice President for Advancement, Alumni Relations, and Athletics, raised a valid point that fundraising can be difficult when situations like the current one become more public and known.

Interim President Mindrup thinks, however, that there appears to be an understanding of Western's financial situation by alumni and community members that was not present before, so there might be an inclination by a donor to contribute to the cause. She knows that the university's plan moving forward is sustainable, but this is the critical year, and it would be great if there was a donor or donors who were willing to help WIU turn things around. She stated that while Ms. Thompson keeps this on her radar and tries to tap into external funding, there might be the chance to reach into some capital project monies for the short term until the university can reach a balanced budget in preparation for FY 26.

Interim President Mindrup thinks today's meeting was a significant milestone and resulted in better understanding of WIU's situation. She did not expect the Governor's Office to bail the university out, but she does have a sense that the university community now understands what needs to be done at this moment. She also thinks they understand that the current Leadership Team was handed this situation and in short order has really made significant progress since April 1 when they began to plan.

Interim Provost Mossman reemphasized that while the university is not receiving a bailout, there was an acknowledgement from the Deputy Governor that excellent work has been done in a short period of time. He said the current Leadership Team is trying to fix what took years to make, and the Springfield representatives seem to be very committed to trying to fix WIU's issues as well and perhaps give the institution a partial bandaid. He thinks the fact that they want to meet again represents a radical difference from the previous one or two meetings with the Deputy Governor because at that time there was no plan in place but now a lot of work has been done.

Chair Albarracin asked if the meeting was prescheduled or whether WIU officials scheduled it in light of WIU's situation. Interim President Mindrup replied it was a follow-up because the university's financial situation has been able to be pinpointed since Ms. Roselieb and Interim Vice President for Finance and Administration John Smith have come on board. She said the administration now realizes it needs to move forward, particularly in regards to cash flow, so they wanted to get on the calendar with Springfield representatives sooner.

Parliamentarian Robinett asked what the Phase 2 is that Interim President Mindrup referenced. He assumes Phase 1 dealt with the things discussed with Faculty Senate on July 10. He asked how many phases are planned. Interim President Mindrup replied that Phase 1 refers to the identification of the approximately \$13 million cash savings, and the next phase involves up to \$10 million in additional reductions. She added there is no document listing what is being done in Phase 1 and what will be done in Phase 2; it is just a way to differentiate the work that has been done with the work that the administration continues to need to do in a short time.

Chair Albarracin asked if the Leadership Team shared with the Governor's Office representatives that the university is considering laying off 100 faculty members and what their reaction was. Interim President Mindrup replied they did not share a specific number because the administration does not have a number. She thinks the number going around is based on a concept, not on anything that has been vetted or finalized. She clarified that she is not saying a number because that work has not been done yet; she does, however, expect additional layoffs because the budget is comprised of 80 percent personnel. She also expects additional operations reductions and other reductions across the university. She added that while the Leadership Team did not provide the Governor's Office with a number, Springfield representatives do understand that the cuts include faculty.

Senator Gravitt noted that Interim President Mindrup says that more things will be identified to be cut, but she does not know who is making these decisions and if there is any faculty involvement or will be in the future. Interim President Mindrup replied that all of the vice presidents, including the Interim Provost, are charged to look at their divisions in order to identify additional cost savings measures up to \$10 million with the least impact on students and personnel. She warned this does not mean the administration will not need to make decisions about personnel, but they are committed to not overplanning when it comes to personnel. She added this is why the refinement of the financial situation is important; the administration does not want to lay off people if it does not have to.

Interim President Mindrup asked Interim Provost Mossman to talk about planning for the Division of Academic Affairs and how that does currently or will involve faculty. Interim Provost Mossman related that deans were asked to run various scenarios in regard to cost savings, which turned into many scenarios that are not set in stone, such as the scenarios regarding cutting 100 faculty members and working with only 90 percent of original

budgets. He said these were to generate ideas about how to come up with the needed cost savings with the minimal amount of harm to students and faculty as a whole. He would consider this meeting or any other future meeting, such as town halls or individual meetings, as ways to be as inclusive as possible with faculty and staff across the institution. Interim Provost Mossman applauds Interim President Mindrup's desire to constantly meet with the Executive Committee, Faculty Senate, and various stakeholders across the university to provide updates and talk about the issues.

Interim President Mindrup said she is trying to meet more frequently with the various groups in order to keep the lines of communication open. She reiterated that the approaches the administration must take since they have such a short runway are different than if they had a longer period of time, but this is the hand they have been dealt and the speed and method with which they have to operate. She promised, though, that the administration will honor contracts and procedures; although they may at times make requests that ask for a quick turnaround, they do not have the intention of stepping outside of established procedures, and if they need to do so they will inform those affected. She added that this is not making excuses but is the reality that things must move at a fast clip.

Parliamentarian Robinett asked if it is anticipated that all of this will be done by the Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting of August 6 or if things will extend beyond that. Interim President Mindrup asked if Parliamentarian Robinett could be more specific about "all of this." Parliamentarian Robinett replied that the discussion at this meeting has been about what plans are emerging in order to address the cash flow issue and what is needed for FY 26. He asked if it is anticipated that whatever actions are taken before August 6 will cover both of these or whether there will be additional layoffs after that date. Interim President Mindrup replied it is reasonable to assume there will be more layoffs. She warned that the specific timing of any of this has not been determined, but she can say that layoffs that require Board approval will be pursued prior to the BOT meeting of August 6. She added that if Parliamentarian Robinett is looking for a timeline of when to expect layoffs, she does not have that answer yet but will communicate as soon as they do.

Interim Provost Mossman remarked that, in the larger picture, the administration is trying to fix a number of basic issues at the institution and is fixing them. He said that as long as the projected enrollment of 5,750 – or higher – is maintained for the next 12 months, he thinks the university will get through this. He recognizes that this is the moment that is hard, but if the administration is successful now this will be in the rear window and the institution can look forward.

Interim President Mindrup expressed her confidence that the institution will get to the other side and not have to do this exercise again any time in the near future – and she hopes never. She does not want to do to future faculty and administrators what has been left to the current ones to do now. She has compassion for the present and what has to be done but also for the future because nobody should be handed this kind of scenario and be put in this kind of position. She does not think the institution should have to revisit this again because WIU will be a strong, awesome, academically excellent place with opportunity and access that serves about 6,000 students. She thinks if the university does not rely on more than this number, it will be well positioned to add to what it has with innovative new programming, reinforcing certain departments so that they can be at full staff again, and building that foundation so that future individuals can have that luxury of being able to plan and sustain their present and future operations.

Incoming fall senator Ben Brewer asked what types of positions require BOT approval. Interim President Mindrup replied the positions under the UPI contract, and Interim Provost Mossman added that is Unit A tenure track positions.

Chair Albarracin asked what Deputy Governor Torres' reaction was to the fact that Interim President Mindrup has only been in her position since April 1 but the BOT has been in place for some time. She also asked what was intended with the hypothetical exercise of imagining the university with fewer faculty, up to 100. Interim President Mindrup responded there was no reference made to the BOT during the meeting with the Governor's Office representatives today. She thinks – not to point fingers at any individual – that there was a lot of frustration in early meetings with the Deputy Governor about how WIU got to this point, but neither she nor Interim Provost Mossman were involved with those meetings. She related that in her first meeting with the Deputy Governor, she felt there was an understanding that WIU has a new administration, but there was still frustration that no one had put together a plan. She sensed from today's meeting recognition and acknowledgement that this team is taking the action that should have happened three years ago.

Regarding the exercises that all the vice presidents are doing to identify cost savings, Interim President Mindrup thinks it is necessary to go through them to see what combinations of tactics will equate to \$10 million. She noted that this is not how the administration would like to accomplish this, but in such a short time this is what is available to them. She appreciated an email from Parliamentarian Robinett pointing out that there is faculty expertise that might contribute to decision making. She stated that being able to look at some of the data with as many people as are available to look at it can be challenging, so this will be important within Academic Affairs and other areas. Interim President Mindrup stressed that these are just exercises that need to be vetted; the plans are in place are for the initial \$13 million savings. She added that each area must work diligently and in detail with the Budget Office to vet that what they perceive as savings are actually budget savings as well as a contribution to cash flow. She stated that while four months is a short time period for this type of planning, it may also seem like a long process because the inner workings of vetting this information is a complex process which is further complicated by the university's 1984 mainframe system.

Senator Gravitt remarked that she has heard that the last time the university went through a major budget reduction and the colleges were supposed to cut, the College of Business and Technology cut the required \$2 million, which was the goal, but the other colleges did not necessarily deliver that much. She asked if the cuts being asked for this time will be across the board for every college equally or will be parceled out more strategically in terms of future positioning and where the money will come from. Interim Provost Mossman replied that he has not heard that before, but the university cannot function if it pits departments and colleges against one another. He stressed there really needs to be an institution-wide approach and a division-wide approach in Academic Affairs. He stated that there are inefficiencies and issues in every college and almost every department, and these have to be worked on to figure out how to solve the university's problems. Interim Provost Mossman does not believe the university should have only one metric, such as enrollment or SCH production in a particular major or discipline, because it provides too narrow of a focus; the university needs to be looked at in a more comprehensive way in order to fix its financial problems.

Senator Gravitt remarked that one of the Unit B faculty positions cut from the School of Engineering and Technology actually puts accreditation at risk and makes one of their programs noncompliant. She asked if some of these things, such as accreditation, will need to be sacrificed or considered less important to be fixed in the long term. Interim Provost Mossman replied the administration does not want to jeopardize accreditation because that is a very important program need. He promised to double check this because he was not aware that the School would lose accreditation because of the loss of one Unit B faculty member. Senator Gravitt added that the School wanted to get another program accredited, which is expensive so maybe should be put on hold for the short term because the \$4,000 necessary for that accreditation could be used elsewhere. Interim Provost Mossman remarked the university should not be in a position where everything depends on one person in one program; he is trying to fix how departments and classes are managed to prevent this. Senator Gravitt asked if programs should pause going forward with new accreditations and stay on hiatus so that money is not committed to things that are not absolutely needed right now; Interim Provost Mossman agreed. Interim President Mindrup added this kind of thinking is appreciated. She remarked that the university does not want to replace faculty who are potentially being let go with new faculty for new programs that the university is not ready to invest in.

Senator Hamner thanked Interim President Mindrup and Interim Provost Mossman for the explanations so far, which have helped with understanding of the details. He wants to ask about what happened last week and ensure that there is an understanding of its impacts. He wants to make sure both administrators are aware of the message that was received and the felt experience he has heard, which was that more than ten faculty in a 24- to 48-hour period told him that they or others were leaving the university because of the feeling that it is going down. He said this was their response because what they heard was so severe. He said these faculty did not hear any messaging about thought experiments or hypothetical scenarios; they heard that by 4:00 the next day there were to be 25 faculty cut from each college. He does not know how the confusion happened but the question that is more important is how to recover sufficiently going into the fall and get people working together again toward the kind of retention atmosphere WIU needs. Interim President Mindrup responded the thing to emphasize for all aspects of this question is communication. She stressed the administration is providing updates as soon as they have them for any questions, requests for input, and invitations. She asks individuals to confirm with the administration whether a decision is final before putting it out into the public. She explained that as part of planning, the administration sometimes puts the most extreme scenario on the table in order to inspire good, creative thinking. She thinks this kind of deliberative process is important to understand where the university

stands and to build from that, react to it, adjust to it, and consider things that are beyond the black and white on paper, such as what Senator Gravitt brought up. She respectfully requests that individuals work through stakeholder groups; the administration has met with all of them at least once and in some cases multiple times. Interim President Mindrup said she supports responsible transparency but asks that everyone work together internally on these issues as much as possible so that ideas can be shared face-to-face and so that external audiences, such as students, are not unnecessarily agitated. She does not want this work to deter students from coming to WIU because that makes the work harder and the cuts deeper. She really wants WIU employees to encourage and reach out to each other because no one likes the university's financial picture or wants to make these difficult decisions. She thinks that the more everyone communicates, the better the stage can be set for morale because it will be really hard to improve morale for a while. She stressed that what can be done is to support and respect each other and hold onto the vision that the institution will get to the other side of this challenge. She recognizes that WIU will look different, and its challenges will have impact on people that we care about and work with, but the institution will make it to the other side of this.

Senator Hamner likes the phrase "responsible transparency." He asked if it is safe to say that the messages that went out from chairs to their departments that said this is happening was not responsible transparency and was not a message that was supposed to go out to faculty. Interim President Mindrup responded that some of the messages that went out could have been contextualized a lot better than they were. She said on the one hand there are efforts being made to be inclusive in the process while on the other hand that lends some vulnerability that can then get out of hand and go into the external realm, which is not helpful when it comes to ensuring WIU's reputation and a sense of stability for students.

Interim Provost Mossman expressed his support of Interim President Mindrup's statement. He felt very frustrated at this messaging because those were not set numbers but was rather an attempt at problem solving together. He said one example presented to deans was to imagine what it would be like to operate with only 10 percent of their budgets for one year. He imagined that deans would come back with ideas such as STEM disciplines having to front-load materials, but instead it turned into a Tri-States Public Radio article stating that the university was going to cut 90 percent of its operating budget. He said the exercise was an attempt to be inclusive in thinking through problems, but he thinks this action undermines the difficult efforts being made and which Interim President Mindrup tries to communicate and explain to everyone every day. Interim President Mindrup added she does not think this was an intent for malice; she wonders if perhaps someone had the idea that going external would generate some new support. She stressed, though, that in her conversations with the Governor's Office and others she thinks it would behoove the university better to handle its own business and not make it more political than it needs to be because it will not change the bottom line. She does not think anyone will donate because they read a headline that WIU is cutting 100 positions, particularly when it may not even be the final number, and saying so prematurely stirs fear. She has said in meetings with Chair Albarracin and others that the administration would present the information when they knew it was concrete. She noted that some of the information coming in earlier was even scarier than what is being heard now, so she is thankful that they waited until they had the actual numbers. Interim President Mindrup added this was not intended to hide anything or do anything other than make sure they had the right information. While the process might be flawed, she hopes there is trust attached to its transparency, thoroughness, and efforts to make information accessible and present it at the right time.

Chair Albarracin remarked that in regard to being careful about speaking with the outside world, she was interviewed by Tri-States Public radio, along with Interim President Mindrup and UPI President Merrill Cole, but felt uncomfortable because it seemed the reporter was looking for conflict in her answers and trying to emphasize differences between Chair Albarracin and Interim President Mindrup. She felt the questions asked were very intense and was disappointed in the way the story was written. Interim President Mindrup stressed that anyone can talk to anyone else about what is going on at WIU, and there is no mandate not to talk to the media. She said people also have the option to refer the media to the University Communications Office

Incoming fall senator Jeff Hancks asked if any additional Unit B reductions would happen before school starts because he would think at that time things would be locked in. Interim President Mindrup responded the administration has a general goal to do the work they need to do before the semester starts in order to minimize the impact on students. She recognizes, though, that some things might be realistic within that timeline while other things might be a stretch. She wants things to be normalized as much as possible before students get to the campuses. Interim President Mindrup noted that morale trickles down to students, so it is important to be mindful and balance that with consideration for the people who might have been affected by the recent decisions.

Parliamentarian Robinett said he is thankful for the very open levels of communication and being able to reach out as everyone goes through some of this. He asked if the administration is planning to put out anything to counter some of the misinformation or to provide faculty with talking points. Interim President Mindrup said this is a great suggestion, and she will take it to Alisha Looney, Interim Associate Vice President for Communication, Marketing, and Media Relations. She said that while a couple of general statements have been made to the media, her approach with the recent articles has been to clearly articulate the administration's strategy and what needs to be done, although she did not quantify anything. She does not want to position her message in a way that is adversarial to anyone who might be commenting. She stated that while her remarks are not canned because they are genuine and true, they are a general type of response because she has learned the value of not engaging and knowing the point at which it is time to tell one's own story. She thinks this might be a dynamic situation moving forward, but she appreciates Parliamentarian Robinett's suggestion and will think about what that could look like. She asked that any specific thoughts or suggestions be passed her way because she would like to see the development of tools to talk about our university.

Interim Provost Mossman said his communications are often with donors while faculty leaders are closer to the front lines of faculty. He does not think it would be appropriate for the administration to impose what should be said, which is why he hesitates to provide such talking points, but he thinks Parliamentarian Robinett is right in thinking it would be good to have everyone on the same page. Parliamentarian Robinett remarked that when the announcement went out about the actions that were to be taken, faculty leaders knew nothing about it although their inboxes were starting to fill up and they were being asked to respond. He said questions can be directed to chairs, but if chairs are not commenting and deans are saying different things across campus, there is no unity in the messaging, which can be disastrous for morale. He thinks many faculty understand the university is in a very bad financial situation and are starting to wrap their minds around it, but he hopes the administration will consider letting Ms. Roselieb present the same information to broader audiences that she has presented in smaller spaces because he thinks that is an eloquent explanation of where WIU stands. He added that when faculty leaders are caught unawares and have different stories, that further affects morale, and miscommunication can become a problem. Interim President Mindrup encouraged anyone who picks up on something like this that might become a problem to call her directly, and she will respond fairly quickly in order to prevent premature, unvetted, or uncontextualized information from causing an unnecessary reaction. She recognizes that early information does not always lead to a negative response, and some good ideas and input have come out of it, but perhaps another layer needs added to reinforce messages. Interim President Mindrup noted that Ms. Hamm takes outstanding notes which have a lot of content that can be used for talking points. She stressed that nothing that has been shared today is anything that she would feel uncomfortable with anyone knowing and carrying forward. She agrees with Interim Provost Mossman that specific talking points should be shared out from faculty leaders rather than seeming like a mandate from the administration, but she told those present that if they have ideas they want shared she will be happy to help with that effort.

Senator Gravitt asked if there is a date that faculty will know if they will have a job this fall. She knows the chairs and directors are scrambling on how to shuffle the schedules, and she recognizes that some of this has to go through the Board of Trustees, but she thinks faculty might be reassured if they knew they would be notified by a certain date so that they could start making plans. Interim Provost Mossman responded he is sure the administration would want the decisions to happen by August 6, when the BOT meets; they are trying to adhere to the contracts, but they are running out of time. Interim President Mindrup added that Board approval is required for many changes that might be made, so she thinks faculty could know for certain shortly after August 6. Interim Provost Mossman recognizes that at a certain point the fall schedule is set; in addition, there are other fall schedule considerations, including the many people who have retired, changes to Gen Ed, complications with last-minute enrollments, how many international students will arrive, and how many of those will be undergraduate students. He recognizes that there is already instability in the fall schedule, and the administration does not want to increase that instability so that it will not lead to the cancellation of fall classes.

Senator Gravitt asked, if faculty should know by just after August 6 about layoffs for the fall, whether there might be additional layoffs in December that would affect the spring schedule, too. Interim President Mindrup responded she does not anticipate any more will happen than what will occur in the next month. Interim Provost Mossman added that there can be no guarantees in the situation the university is in, but there is no intention to do so. He said no one wants to do this again, so it is important to fix the university so that it does not become a situation of kicking the can down the road. Senator Gravitt asked if ideally this would be the last round of layoffs

and for the future there would just be selective non-replacement of retirements. Interim Provost Mossman stated that, unfortunately, WIU is part of the wider problem with higher education in the United States, which includes the enrollment cliff, so the focus will be on enrollment management and retention. He thinks that the understanding that WIU is a small institution is a big step conceptually as the institution moves forward; there cannot continue to be the thinking that in a couple of years WIU will reach 10,000 students again because that is not realistic. Interim President Mindrup said the goal is to normalize so that those decisions are in the moment they are in; if there is a vacancy for an area that has an urgent need to fill that spot, then the decision will be made accordingly, or if it is an area that is determined to be one that is not sustainable or not at maximum efficiency, then a decision might be considered at that moment to phase something out. She thinks the work that has been done to optimize the schedule will provide a tool to make that decision-making as objective as possible moving forward.

Chair Albarracin asked how much the administration is considering the impact on enrollment will be from the layoffs. She stated that in many of these calculations about what to do in future scenarios it must be factored in that many students may be lost because they will not want to come to WIU due to the layoffs. She asked if Ms. Roselieb or anyone else in the administration is working with faculty in the area of Decision Sciences who might be able to model this type of thing for them. Interim Provost Mossman agrees this is a consideration, adding that in previous layoffs the decline of enrollment was about 11 percent. He keeps reminding everyone that the university will see a smaller freshmen class, so that means retention, as well as transfer student admissions, will be even more important now in order to keep enrollment numbers where they should be. Chair Albarracin remarked that larger class sizes are not very good for retention; jumping from 25-student classes to 45-student classes, or some other larger number, will be harsh on retention because faculty support is very important.

Interim President Mindrup promised to continue to provide updates, encouraged those present to reach out whenever they think the administration can be helpful, and said the administration will reach out whenever they have timely updates. She said whether by emails, texts, or calls, she will respond to make sure those present have the most current information and get them involved in the process where they can.

The Executive Committee meeting adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Office Manager
and Recording Secretary