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**ACADEMIC STAFF ASSEMBLY MEETING MINUTES**

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**Monday, March 8, 2021**

**3:30 to 5:00 p.m.**

Provost Karl Scholz called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m.

**Guest: Rebecca Blank, Chancellor**

Chancellor Blank thanked the Assembly and everyone it represents for the work they have done over a very challenging year. One year ago, the pandemic forced us to change almost everything we do on campus, and academic staff has been a part of those changes and the success we have had moving forward. UW-Madison has set a new record for freshman applications, with almost 54,000 this year as compared to 45,000 last year. In-state and out-of-state applications are showing double-digit increases, and international applications are up as well. We continue to see excellence in our educational outcomes. The 6-year graduation rate is the highest it’s ever been, among the top 10 in the country. We continue to reduce the graduation gap for underrepresented students. There is an ongoing reduction in time to degree, and 57% of our graduating seniors last spring graduated with zero debt. We have seen ongoing improvements in accessibility, with an added 5,000 scholarships with the current alumni giving campaign. Since starting Bucky’s Tuition Promise, 2,800 Wisconsin residents are attending UW-Madison tuition-free. The success of the program has led to the Governor’s proposal in the state budget to fund the program System-wide. We have a record number of students from underrepresented groups in this year’s freshman class. Schools, colleges and divisions now have diversity and inclusion plans as well. Last fall, the Chancellor committed to raising $10 million to support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including scholarship funding. We have already raised $12 million in only five months. We are starting the Rainey-Noland Fund, named after the first male and female African-American graduates of UW-Madison, to support scholarships and other programs aimed at increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campus.

We have greatly expanded COVID testing efforts this semester. Positivity rates throughout the semester have been mostly below 1%, and if we can continue to keep numbers low, we will be in good shape for the rest of the semester. Vaccines are coming, though perhaps more slowly than expected. UW-Madison is set up to administer vaccines once we get more supply. The state is identifying groups sequentially; anyone who interacts with students is now eligible. UHS has sent notices to those who are eligible and almost 5,000 first doses have been administered to date. The first goal is to vaccinate all employees by the end of May, which is dependent on vaccine availability. The next goal is to be in a position to vaccinate any students that arrive in the fall that have not been vaccinated and wish to be, again dependent on dosage availability.

UW-Madison is projecting a total loss over 15 months of $320 million. We are managing these losses with both short- and long-term adjustments. We started the year financially strong, and central funding could be used to address some gaps. We have received federal funds, and we may receive more if the current stimulus bill passes. However, these funds are not enough to cover the total loss. Campus has frozen salaries, frozen most hiring, and implemented progressive furloughs. Senior leadership has taken a 15% pay cut, and we are implementing budget cuts in all units somewhere between 4-8%, with larger cuts to administrative units and smaller cuts in academic units. The Chancellor thanked everyone for the sacrifices involved. We have worked hard to avoid major program cuts or mass layoffs.

Governor Evers announced his proposed budget, which includes almost $200 million in new funding for UW-System, as well as a 2% pay increase for all state employees and funding for a number of UW-Madison programs. Provisions would allow us to do some short-term borrowing and earn interest on cash balances. The Legislature will take up their own budget, and Chancellor Blank is meeting with state leaders working on the budget. The proposal for the capital budget was also generous. There are two buildings on campus in that proposal: a new Engineering building and a new L&S academic building, which will allow us to move out of the Humanities Building. We are asking the state to fund 2/3 of the cost of these facilities. We will know what our final budget is sometime around the middle of the summer.

Chancellor Blank is committed to restarting the implementation of the Title and Total Compensation Project in the second half of 2021. Once the new titles are in place, we can map titles to peers and evaluate how they compare to the market, allowing us to make salary changes where needed. Finally, we all need to be thinking ahead to how our new normal will look, what we have learned, and what we will do differently in the future. As we come out of this time, we need to be strategic and thoughtful about these to come back better and think about how to make UW even better than it is now.

**Guests: Missy Nergard and Alex Frank, Office of Sustainability**

Missy and Alex provided an update on the progress of the Office of Sustainability’s work. The office is relatively new on campus. There is an organization dedicated to sustainability in higher education, and their rating system is the STARS system. These metrics are tailored to higher education, including courses and research that we offer that relate to sustainability, and how we engage with campus and the surrounding community on these issues. We received a Silver rating for our first STARS assessment at the end of 2019. Most important is what it told us about our progress and our opportunities for improvement. This led to the creation of the Sustainability Advisory Council in Fall 2020. The goal of the council is to evaluate where we are lagging in the report, hear from the campus community in where we should focus, and deliver recommendations by later this summer. The council has members from academic staff, faculty, university staff, as well as a strong student voice. In addition to the council, the Office of Sustainability also supports our climate action and planning process. At the end of 2019, Chancellor Blank signed the Resilience Commitment, which directs the university to develop a climate action and adaptation plan, designed to reflect a holistic approach to sustainability. The Office serves as the project management center for this commitment and is currently figuring out what our targets are in a variety of areas. There are opportunities for carbon sequestration, innovative research, and renewable energy generation, as well as possible opportunities for solar development. In sustainability efforts for higher education, our greatest resource is our students. Investing in our students has a resounding return for sustainability. There are certification programs, as well as experiential learning in the form of panels and podcasts. UW-Madison also piloted a new program for capital projects for the Natatorium and the addition to the School of Veterinary Medicine, involving the addition of two sustainable design guidelines for learning and research to the 10 established guidelines that apply to all state facilities. There are many opportunities to get involved, including listening sessions, experiential learning, and the Office’s newsletter.

**Automatic Consent Business**

The Academic Staff Assembly minutes of Monday, February 8, 2021, were approved.

**Reports**

ASEC Chair Tim Dalby reiterated his thanks to UW-Madison leadership for its early action in the pandemic to keep employees and students safe. Tim reminded attendees that the ASEC election, which is open to all academic staff, will close on March 10. Academic Staff Professional Development Grant applications are due by March 19, and Underkofler Award nominations are due by April 9. ASEC will be piloting a series of listening sessions, similar to office hours, over the next 2-3 months. More information will be coming soon. Tim recognized two academic staff members, Dr. Shaniqua Bogues and Dr. Leslie Petty, for their Outstanding Women of Color Awards that they received at a ceremony last week. ASEC has had ongoing discussions about mental health on campus. There is a mental health and well-being summit next Thursday and Friday. The following week also provides a focus on self-care, which is more important than ever. If anyone is having any mental health issues, Tim encouraged everyone to use the resources that are available to all academic staff, including the Employee Assistance Office and LifeMatters.

Jenny Dahlberg provided the ASPRO report. ASPRO is working diligently to figure out the state budget. ASPRO was excited to hear the governor’s proposal and is now trying to figure out what the legislature will be doing. The organization is in the process of gathering more information on the budget. ASPRO is still offering a discounted membership.

Tetyana Schneider provided the 2019-2020 report of the Campus Diversity and Climate Committee. Last year, the committee analyzed 2018-19 school/college/division diversity and inclusion reports and developed recommendations from the committee. Among the committee’s discussions were the need for a unified approach to strategic planning, assessment, and programming, especially with regard to climate assessment. Many of the recommendations of the committee are underway. The committee also collaborated with student groups to make sure efforts are aligned. The committee is collaborating with DDEEA to evaluate the Fall 2020 Diversity Forum, which had more than 6,400 participants. There was also recognition of the need for professional development and competency-building for students and employees to help identify and support actions to reduce the rate of sexual assault and sexual violence.

**Resolution on Climate Divestment and Procurement (ASA #749)**

Following the first reading at the February meeting, Tim Dalby, ASEC Chair, moved approval of Academic Staff Document #749, the Resolution on Climate Divestment and Procurement. Seconded. After brief discussion, the resolution was approved.

**Provost Report**

Provost Scholz reported on data regarding teaching and learning in the fall semester. The grade distribution, the bottom of the grade distribution, and the withdrawal rate were all very similar to what they have been in previous fall semesters. On an aggregated basis, course evaluations were very similar to what they have been in previous fall semesters. These data tell us that our students are resilient and that our instructors—and those who support our instructors and students—did extraordinary work during this difficult time. People put the mission of teaching and learning front and center, and Provost Scholz conveyed his gratitude. The Provost recognized International Women’s Day and reiterated Tim’s shoutout to Dr. Bogues and Dr. Petty. UW-Madison has received nearly $10 million to support students in financial hardship due to COVID, and over 80% has been distributed. There are three administrative searches in progress: the Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs, the Chief Diversity Officer, and the Director of the Division of the Arts.

Meeting adjourned at 4:59 pm.

*Minutes submitted by Jake Smith, Secretary of the Academic Staff*