November 18, 2020

Faculty Senate Executive Committee Report

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. Before I begin, I would like to remark briefly on two long-standing members of the CSI community who passed away this month. They are Ruth Calderon-Gutierrez, a retired faculty member in the Department of World Languages and Literatures, and Ann Helm, the former director of the Center for Global Engagement.

Ruth Calderon was a Spanish professor from 1965 until her retirement in 2010. When she retired, she was the longest-serving member of the department, and possibly in the College as a whole. She taught hundreds, if not thousands, of students in all levels of Spanish language, civilization, and literature. She specialized in pre-Hispanic civilizations and shared her love of indigenous cultures with her students and colleagues. Ruth also organized poetry-memorization competitions for students. Her colleagues will undoubtedly remember her office, which was packed with artwork and artifacts from Latin America and around the world. She was instrumental in hiring many of the current members of the department’s faculty, including me. She was also a native French speaker, in addition to Spanish. Her family had fled France in 1941, after her father escaped from a Nazi internment camp outside of Paris and, with the help of the International Rescue Committee, emigrated to the United States. She had a remarkable life and she is missed.

Ann Helm was the director of the Center for Global Engagement from 1990-2013. Her contributions to CSI and to the field of international education are too numerous to recite in this short report. Among the many partnerships she established around the world were programs in China, Ecuador, Italy, Spain, England, Australia, France, Vietnam, Japan and Denmark. For the CUNY Macaulay Honors College, Ann created programs in the Galapagos Islands and in South Africa. She also created dual-degree programs and numerous faculty-led study abroad courses and familiarization visits. She made it possible for hundreds of international students and scholars to make CSI their home in New York, and put the College on the map as a destination for visitors throughout the globe. Ann was a pioneer in international education. Under her leadership, over 9,000 students studied abroad, many of whom would never have had the opportunity to do so without her drive, commitment, and tireless efforts. Her colleagues have compiled a document that details many of her contributions to the College. If there are no objections, I would like to append it to the minutes of this meeting. A memorial scholarship fund has been established in Ann’s name, and a link for contributions will be included in the document attached to the minutes.

I would also like to report that the Executive Committee, per the vote taken at the last meeting, has drafted a letter to the Egyptian government urging the release of our student, Mustafa Ali Hassanien. As you may recall, Mustafa was detained in May upon returning to Cairo. Although he has yet to be formally charged, Mustafa is being held in the Tora Prison facing accusations that appear to be based on expressions of opinions about the Egyptian government. President Fritz has also written to our public officials to ask for his release. We will continue to monitor this situation and hope he will be freed soon.

On October 29, the Faculty Senate sponsored a Town Hall to address issues of concern to the College community. Many of the 296 ​attendees voiced their opinions on a wide variety of subjects, but the overriding message was a sense of dissatisfaction with campus leadership from CSI's administration. We have circulated to department chairs a summary of the main issues identified at the gathering, but among the most prominent fell into the categories of accountability, inclusivity and communication. Emphasis was placed on the College’s lack of vision, strategy and leadership in responding to the COACHE and Rankin Climate surveys and CSI’s performance on the Lumina Foundation’s scorecard on race and equity. (We received an F on the latter). These measures all demonstrate a marked decline in campus morale, as well as a failing grade in the areas of racial and ethnic diversity. Participants noted with dismay the college leadership’s failure to clearly articulate an intellectual, academic vision for the institution, or a way forward to manage CSI’s long-standing financial problems. There were special concerns voiced about the library and certain programs (most notably, Nursing), that jeopardize the academic and scholarly well-being of our students, faculty and staff.

The Executive Committee met with the Provost and other members of the Administration on November 10 to discuss the Town Hall meeting and other issues. We stressed the need for the Provost’s office to take concrete steps to rectify these concerns and to communicate solutions directly to the academic community. We also asked for data on class size, retention and other issues related to student success; Associate Provost Ralf Peetz shared some statistics with the committee. We urged the Provost to engage the faculty in dialogue about the pressing issues facing the College.

As we head toward Thanksgiving next week, I would like to express my gratitude for the solidarity and good will of this body and the CSI community. It has been a very challenging semester, and one that has offered both seemingly insurmountable obstacles and surprisingly creative opportunities. We wish you a happy, safe Thanksgiving and good health for you and your families.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Marcus-Delgado

Chair