

**Report from Faculty Senate  
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February 9, 2024

Dear Trustees,

The Faculty Senate has had a productive start to the winter quarter, focusing on a couple of big picture issues that are impacting higher education in general. These issues include the role of generative artificial intelligence in our classrooms and the important issue of academic freedom and free expression on campus. We are also hard at work revising and updating the Faculty Handbook. I describe our efforts in each of these areas in more detail below but would be happy to address any questions you may have. I value your perspectives and look forward to further discussions about these and other matters.

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*Discussion on Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

At our January 16 meeting, we had an update on constituent feedback about AI that was solicited by Senators during fall quarter. The key themes that emerged from our colleagues across campus were as follows:

- A major concern is about plagiarism in student work - some faculty have modified the nature of assignments as a result.
- Some have prohibited AI use in their classes, but others are looking for ways to integrate it into classes/assignments.
- We should not limit our work to academic honesty/policymaking – we need help with pedagogical approaches.
- It is insufficient to penalize students after prohibited AI use – students need to learn why it may not be in their interests to use AI.
- There are concerns about how this issue impacts faculty workload. While this is primarily an issue for the UFWW, it is important that we consider how this new technology adds to our workload.
- AI Detection: How do we know if AI was used even when prohibited in a class?
- Dichotomy: AI is a threat and a big concern for higher education, but we need to prepare students for a world in which AI exists.

We are currently putting together a working group that will explore these and other issues in greater detail and report back to the Senate later in the year. It will include members from the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC), the Academic Technology Committee (ATC), the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA), and the Associated Students (AS). I

expect the Senate to vote on the formation of this working group at our upcoming meeting on February 12.

At the January 16 meeting, we also had presentations from Dr. Kameron Harris (a current Senator and Assistant Professor of Computer Science), Justina Brown (CIIA), and AJ Barse (Student Technology Center). Kameron provided the Senate with a useful overview and background on AI technology, while Justina and AJ discussed the various resources that are currently available for WWU faculty.

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### *Planning for a Campus Forum on Academic Freedom and Free Expression*

In Fall 2023, the Faculty Senate had some conversations about free expression on campus, prompted at the time by the Israel-Gaza conflict. While the Faculty Senate should not dive into politically charged issues as they arise, we do have a responsibility to engage on the broader issues of academic freedom and free expression on Western's campus. To facilitate what I hope is a productive and ongoing series of campus-wide conversations, I have been working with the Senate, our Executive Council, and others to structure a Senate-sponsored forum on academic freedom and free expression.

The long-run goals include:

- Building a culture of free expression/academic freedom that helps us implement the policy statements that already exist (and to help us shape possible revisions to the Faculty Handbook language on academic freedom).
- Providing a venue for the university leadership to recommit to the principles of academic freedom/free expression.
- Helping faculty navigate difficult classroom conversations. Faculty are particularly interested in events that lead us to some new perspectives on pedagogy and therefore help us do our jobs better.

We are still planning this event, but we hope to hold it by early spring quarter.

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### *Faculty Handbook Revisions*

The ad hoc committee formed by the Senate in fall quarter continues to meet and is well into the proposed revisions. We have nearly completed our proposed revisions to what was previously the handbook itself and have started work on the appendices, which include the extensive bylaws of the Faculty Senate and its standing committees. We will be proposing to the Senate, and eventually to the Board of Trustees, a restructuring that will move the current appendices into the

main body of the handbook (and eliminating some of them by referring to other relevant policy documents and/or the CBA). Our plan is to present revised sections to the Faculty Senate for approval as they are completed before having a final Senate vote on the full document. At that point, we will present the proposed changes to the Board of Trustees for approval.

I expect that much of the Senate's work for the remainder of the academic year will be reviewing and voting on proposed changes as they come forward from the ad hoc committee.

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As always, thank you for the work you do on behalf of Western Washington University and for your attention to the issues that come before the Faculty Senate. I look forward to continuing to work with you for the remainder of the academic year.