

Provost's Advisory Council
Thursday, April 16, 2020
8:30-10am, Zoom

In attendance:

Sharon Beckman (Chair)	Regine Jean-Charles	David Quigley
Anthony Annunziato	Gregory Kalscheur, S.J.	Catherine Read
Joseph Carroll	William Keane	Tracy Regan
Mary Ellen Carter	Thomas Kohler	Ronnie Sadka
Thomas Chiles	Jonathan Laurence	Akua Sarr
Thomas Crea	John Mahoney	David Scanlon
Joseph Du Pont	Allison Marshall	Billy Soo
Kristin Flower	Madeline McCullough	Thomas Stegman, S. J.
Yonder Gillihan	Gilda Morelli	Sasha Tomic
Stacy Grooters	Karen Muncaster	Thomas Wall
Angela Harkins	Claudia Pouravelis	

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- 1. The summary of the April 2, 2020 meeting was approved.** It will be sent to the President's Office. All summaries are posted on the Provost's Office website; members are encouraged to share them with colleagues.
 - 2. Boston College Prison Education Program – Isabel Lane, Program Director**

Sharon Beckman began by introducing Isabel Lane, Program Director of the BC Prison Education Program. Isabel received her PhD from Yale in Slavic Languages and Literatures and was a faculty member with the Bard Prison Initiative before coming to BC.

Isabel discussed her background and her interest in prison education. Her teaching, both at Yale and with the Bard Prison Initiative, focused on breaking down the boundaries between traditional college classrooms and spaces where college does not usually happen. At Yale, this took the form of exploring experiential activities in classes to combine traditional classroom with the outside world. This kind of teaching is very difficult in a prison setting as experiential opportunities are limited. Teaching in a prison is one of the least traditional spaces for a college classroom. At Bard, Isabel taught a Soviet Literature and an Ecology course at both a men's and a women's prison, and a first-year writing intensive literature course at the women's prison.

She continued, providing some background on the program. The first admissions cycle kicked off almost immediately after her hire in the summer of 2019. The program has not yet received accreditation to offer a bachelor's degree but a substantive change proposal has been developed and submitted to NECHE (New England Commission of Higher Education). In anticipation of gaining the accreditation later this spring, 16 men were selected from over 100 applicants for admission to the first cohort. Starting last fall, these 16 men enrolled in first year writing, introduction to college math, and a philosophy core course. One student

was lost due to a transfer, but the remaining 15 students are currently enrolled in God, Self, and Society, a Globalization and History core course, and a Literature core course for the spring semester.

Isabel continued, discussing the impact education has on incarcerated students. Professor Cherie McGill used an exercise in which her students wrote letters to an incoming second cohort of students. From these writings, she collected an array of quotes speaking to how meaningful the opportunity for education is to a group of men who have otherwise had very little access to high quality education.

These self-reflective writings gave the students an opportunity to reflect on their lives, build community, and challenge themselves. Prison is a space where people often feel like they have experienced a significant failure in their life. There is a real bravery in the students, who have every opportunity not to challenge themselves or open themselves to new failures, but who have chosen to embrace critique and criticism, and have a passion for learning.

The program reflects the formative aspects of a BC education, which can be seen in the moments spent in the classroom. The education has changed their lives in a formative, emotional way.

Isabel then provided an update on the current status of the program given the covid-19 restrictions. The hope is to resume classes once the prison reopens for volunteers. Massachusetts correctional facilities do not have internet access, so the options were to either postpone the semester or move to purely written work. There have been weekly newsletters to the students, affirming that the program would resume in person as soon as possible, and to keep them engaged with the community and their courses. The faculty are confident that the semester can be completed meaningfully via written work.

The timeline for the future is still unclear, but work is underway with the Department of Corrections for the next admissions cycle. The current students are ready to resume when able, and there is a great group of men ready to apply to the program.

A council member asked how BC faculty and graduate students can become involved with the initiative. Prison ministry is an area of great interest to the community.

Isabel responded that the primary way for BC faculty and students to engage with the program at this time is to teach. Anyone eligible to teach on the main campus is eligible to teach in the prison. A future goal is to build out an in-house tutoring program at the prison. Currently, BC is partnering with an organization called The Petey Greene Program that provides tutors for all levels of education in prisons in Massachusetts. BC students, faculty, and graduate students can volunteer through Petey Greene. Anyone who is interested in being involved should be in touch with Isabel.

A council member asked if there are conversations about building capacity and including women's prisons in the program.

Isabel answered that the Bard Initiative, which is supporting the growth of the BC program, began in a men's prison and now is in five different prisons, including one women's facility. Most college in prison programs build up a single program to establish a record of success and trust with the Department of Corrections. Depending on BC's desire to grow the program, there may be future opportunities and capacity to expand to other facilities in Massachusetts.

David added that it is important to focus on the partnership with the Department of Corrections and their interest in a program at MCI Shirley. It is vital that the first cohort is well served over the first several years in order to have possibilities in the longer term to build out to other communities.

A council member asked how class subjects are selected and to what extent faculty members have control over the content of their courses.

Isabel responded that the planning for the fall curriculum is underway and any faculty member who has an interest should be in touch. The philosophy of the program is to provide a broad range of subjects and opportunities rather than tailor the courses to an incarcerated population. Faculty often ask if the students would be interested in a class on a particular subject. Students who are incarcerated often view learning as a way to travel and the broader the subjects, the more they can expand their horizons. All course materials do need to be approved by the Department of Corrections, but there have not been any issues yet. The work with the syllabus and book approval happens on the front end, and faculty need to be sensitive to this reality. Prison staff are not in the classroom with the faculty and students, which is an important part of academic freedom. There are challenges, but the classroom remains the classroom.

David added that it has emerged as a strong, robust, representative BC program, which offers a high quality education for these men.

3. Foreign Activities Disclosures – Bill Nunez, Executive Director of Research Administration; Joe Schott, Director of Compliance and Associate General Counsel; Sharon Comvalius-Goddard, Director of Office for Sponsored Programs; Taylor Green, Assistant Director of Export Control & International Research

David began the conversation on Foreign Activities Disclosures and the increased federal interest in the nature of academic collaborations and dependence on foreign support. This is a topic that has been building over the past several years with an historic interest in the work of both individual researchers and the larger university. In the last six months, it has exploded as a primary area of compliance concern with a focus on research activities, particularly those that have not been disclosed in the past.

Billy Soo added that the recent changes to the Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment forms this past year were related to these issues. This is a constantly evolving situation, so the forms will likely be changed again in the future.

Joe Schott discussed the current federal landscape on foreign influence. For some time, there has been growing concern from the Federal government about the strategic threat posed by China, in particular, as well as other nations, and the methods used by the Chinese to gain advantage and grow their economy and influence around the world. Last year there was a US Senate Sub-Committee report that looked into the Chinese Talents Programs. There is suspicion that hundreds of people participate in these programs. The larger part of the sub-committee report spoke to the lack of attention by the FBI and other U.S. agencies to this perceived growing national security threat, and the belief that here has not been enough scrutiny of arrangements. It is important to note that this increased interest has bi-partisan support and the expectation should be for increased scrutiny and laws to continue.

The FBI has a team set up in Houston focused on individual faculty on campuses and foreign nationals coming to U.S. campuses. There are active investigations into individuals suspected of espionage or other violation of federal laws. The Federal research sponsors are enforcing their disclosure requirements in a much more aggressive manner. The Department of Education has begun strictly enforcing the provision in the Higher Education Act that requires institutions to disclose any gift or contract of more than \$250,000 from a foreign source. These are burdensome information requests that have largely been ignored in the past. There is accusatory language in the letters to institutions regarding lack of compliance, with the implication that universities are complicit in assisting those who are hostile to the US.

There have been a number of high profile criminal cases at universities and research institutes around the country in the last year. In each of these cases, there has been an issue of lack of disclosure by the individual to the university or an incomplete disclosure by the institution to the government. There is a nexus between regular conflicts disclosure procedures which feed into the disclosures being made by the institution to the federal sponsors. The focus is mainly on disclosures and transparency so that there can be proper review. In most cases, if there is a mechanism for disclosure that asks the right questions, there is not going to be a concern that the university made a false claim to the government, and the university will be perceived as a partner worthy of continued federal support.

There are a number of areas of concern and heightened risk that are experiencing increased scrutiny. Some of these, including the loss of US-funded intellectual property, failure to disclose significant financial conflict of interest, and export control laws, are well established and understood. There are procedures and controls in place to help manage those concerns. The area that is getting currently the most focus and attention is failure to disclose foreign inputs. This includes research sponsorship, gifts, conflicts of commitment and extra-professional activities, international collaborations, visiting scholars, and international investments. A majority of the time there is no real concern, but these areas are those which the government believe there is not enough oversight and control.

Institutions are struggling with what should and can be disclosed. The way forward is to ensure that there are procedures and policies to support a culture of disclosure. Institutions need to demonstrate concern for the issues and show that there is a process in place to address them.

Bill Nunez discussed BCs response to the evolving landscape. Some steps include:

- Implementing changes to the Proposal Transmittal Form that will allow the Vice Provost for Research Office (VPR) to receive the conflict of interest piece earlier in the submission process, identify potential issues, and increase transparency.
- Expanding the existing annual Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment questions to include additional disclosures of foreign activities.
- Developing mandatory research administration training for faculty and department research administrators. Faculty will be required to complete the training before they will be able to submit proposals.
- Investigating a University Travel Registry.
- Adding additional resources and guidance surrounding disclosures on the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) webpage

Bill continued, stressing that the intent is not to restrict research but to assist faculty in their understanding of compliance issues and what needs to be disclosed. Due diligence on the part of the individual and the University is imperative. The federal sponsors are reviewing proposals in greater detail, and it is best to be as transparent as possible. Faculty should err on the side of caution and over-disclosing, but the VPR team is able to help navigate this process.

A council member asked what the impact is for faculty in the humanities.

Taylor Green responded that the VPR needs to know about and understand the collaborations that are happening so that due diligence can be done. Science areas are higher risk, but transparency from areas across the University is vital.

Bill gave an example of a group of humanities faculty who wanted to travel to Cuba, which requires a license from the government. This is the type of situation where the VPR office can assist with reviewing requirements and ensuring compliance.

A council member asked whether faculty should be reporting past involvements, and if so, how far back.

Sharon Comvalius-Goddard answered that there is no specific time limit, but that if the involvements are included in a CV or bio sketch, they should be disclosed, especially if they are related to the research or specific grant.

Joe added that it will also depend on the individual faculty member. Faculty who are grant active may need to report farther back to ensure consistency with the bio sketch and should work with OSP to determine how far back to report. More generally, for faculty not on sponsored projects, the plan is developing a culture that encourages more regular annual conflicts reporting and updating of ongoing disclosures.

Tom Chiles noted that it is important that faculty update their Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment disclosures and take this seriously. These steps are being taken to protect both the faculty and the University, as both may be held accountable.

A council member asked if co-authoring of academic scholarship is included.

Bill responded that the hope is that faculty will identify where there is significant resource or effort support. If there is a relationship with a foreign institution that is funding your research, that should be disclosed.

Tom Chiles added that it is still a moving target and the extent to which coverage is needed is still unknown. Screening all co-authors is unlikely to be possible, but papers with acknowledgments of foreign funding would need to be reviewed.

A council member asked about the implications for visiting faculty and scholars coming to BC to do research.

Bill answered that there is a process in place for collecting the relevant information and screening these visitors.

A council member asked what the effects are on collaboration and academic freedom.

David answered that BC is trying to encourage and strengthen global engagements and collaboration while being mindful of emerging federal concerns. The goal is not to eliminate all conflicts of commitment, but to manage them. An important outcome of current discussions should be a positive obligation to disclose.

A council member asked if giving a research talk or sitting on a Ph.D. committee falls under the umbrella of activities needing to be disclosed.

Bill discussed the importance of ensuring that neither the relevant university nor country are on a sanctioned list. In most cases, there are no issues, but an institution may be on a sanctioned list without the faculty member's knowledge. It is not about preventing these relationships, but ensuring that the faculty member and University follow the appropriate steps to manage them.

A council member asked if a list of sanctioned countries/universities is available to faculty.

Bill noted that there are over 20 lists that are constantly changing and being updated. If there are questions, faculty should contact the Office of Export Controls.

A council member asked if there would be communication that makes it clear and obvious what the faculty member's disclosure obligations are.

Billy responded that the plan is for a more streamlined disclosure process going forward. While the questions will be expanded, the disclosure forms themselves will be consolidated,

and there will be guidance and concrete examples of the kinds of disclosures that do, or do not, need to be made.

4. Provost's Report: David Quigley, Provost and Dean of Faculties

Billy talked about a UCT proposal to add two additional questions to the spring course evaluations. The questions very broadly address what was good and what was challenging about taking their classes remotely. There will also be a preface at the beginning reminding students of the challenges of a sudden emergency move to remote learning, and that they should be reviewing the class overall and not just the second half of the semester that was taught remotely.

David provided some updates.

Admissions and enrollment for fall 2020 are trending well at the both undergraduate and graduate level.

The Political Science department decided to let several faculty members in security studies decide whether or not to submit a proposal to the Koch Foundation. Five faculty members continued conversations and moved forward with a proposal.

Fr. Leahy's letter yesterday announced an immediate hiring freeze beyond essential hiring. Most construction is being delayed, and there will be constraints on University spending in all areas. Additionally, there will be no salary increases this year.

He then provided some updates on the COVID-19 response:

- Summer Session I and Orientation have been moved online.
- Decisions on the BC Experience high school program and Summer Session II will be announced soon.
- Commencement has been postponed and reunions have been cancelled.
- The goal for the fall is to start on time at the end of August with on-campus instruction. There are many questions that will be explored over the summer as plans develop, while working with the uncertainty and the likelihood that the situation can change dramatically between now and August.

A council member asked if research activities would resume more quickly than a full University reopening.

David noted that the state is still subject to the Governor's shelter in place orders. As things play out with a rolling reopening across the state, the University will likely follow suit with its own multi-stage reopening plan. Research labs may be among the first to come back to operations.

David concluded the meeting by thanking Sharon for her leadership, and thanked Cathy Read for her service as she steps down and retires at the end of the academic year.