

# Report for the Senate Committee on Faculty and the Administration (SCOA)

## General Committee Charge

The Committee on Faculty and the Administration oversees and advises the Executive Committee on matters relating to the faculty's interface with the University's administration, including policies and procedures (e.g., the Patent Policy) relating to the University's structure, the conditions of faculty employment (such as personnel benefits), and information. In general the Committee deals with the matters covered by the following sections of the University's *Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators*: I.A.-D., G., H.1., I.-K., II.E., III., V., VI. (henceforth referred to as the "Faculty Handbook").

## 2021-2021 Specific Charges

1. Assess and evaluate ways to change University structures, practices, and biases (at the University, school, departmental, and individual levels) that perpetuate systemic racism as they apply to the committee's general charge.
2. Facilitate the changes identified in the previous charge.
3. Explore existing and alternative models for providing public safety and services to the campus community.
4. Examine the effectiveness of outsourced employee benefits and human resources services (including but not limited to WageWorks and Health Advocate) with respect to how well their processes embody Penn's values.
5. Monitor the effectiveness of University support for online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.
6. Identify and evaluate possible approaches to responding to challenges of fulfilling childcare needs posed by faculty who deliver instruction online.

SCOA expended the bulk of its efforts on charges 3, 4, and 5. Charges 1 and 2 were addressed in the context of the other charges. Charge 6 was addressed by the Division of Human Resources and the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty (OVPF) prior to SCOA commencing its work (<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/penn-announces-covid-19-childcare-grant>).

3. *Explore existing and alternative models for providing public safety and services to the campus community.*

Subcommittee members reviewed and discussed the "Report on Public Safety and Outreach Initiative", which was released on April 13, 2021 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/uploads/media/031321-Supplement-Public-Safety-and-Outreach-Initiative-Report.pdf>). This report provides recommendations that focus on four themes, with the first being increased transparency from the Division of Public Safety (DPS). The Subcommittee agreed that this is a critically important issue. The report provided a long list of DPS documents that should be available for people within and outside of the Penn community. The Subcommittee agreed with these recommendations and also recommended that DPS provide annual reports on the gender and racial makeup of the Penn Police. It is clear that DPS and Penn Police will be more effective at maintaining a safe community if the members generally reflect the community they serve. Making this information public will likely facilitate this transformation and give confidence to the community. Additional recommendations discussed within the report included accountability of DPS, reimagining public safety and reducing policing, and reinvestment in initiatives that promote safety well-being and belonging that do not involve police.

4. *Examine the effectiveness of outsourced employee benefits and human resources services (including but not limited to WageWorks and Health Advocate) with respect to how well their processes embody Penn's values.*

Following the charge of the Senate Chairs, a SCOA sub-committee made up of Joel Bennett, Peter Kuriloff (Subcommittee Chair), and Marshall Meyer developed a survey of retiring and retired faculty to assess their experiences with WageWorks, Health Advocate, and other vendors providing outsourced services to Penn Faculty. The survey was sponsored by the Penn Association of Senior and Emeritus Faculty (PASEF) and developed and distributed in collaboration with it.

Eight-hundred and twenty-five faculty members were surveyed and 245 (or 30%) responded. This result far exceeded the response rate of the previous PASEF survey conducted in 2017, where 1432 faculty were surveyed and 177 (or 12%) responded. Among the 245 responding in 2021, 147 (or 60% of the respondents) rated one or more of the service providers and wrote narratives explaining their numerical ratings. Overall, they provided 230 narratives of various providers, with the most being devoted to WageWorks (130) and the second most to Health Advocate (69). Initial analyses revealed greater satisfaction with Health Advocate than with WageWorks and, in some instances, serious concerns about the service provided by WageWorks. Issues with WageWorks involved poor communications, lack of vendor responsiveness, problems with billing and reimbursement, and difficulties navigating the website.

The Subcommittee identified several questions for either PASEF or SCOA to pursue. Specific questions concern what is currently outsourced, what must be outsourced by law, and how Penn HR monitors and manages its vendors. More broadly, the Subcommittee recommends that the University determine how widespread the concerns registered here are, urges the University to promptly remedy identified problems, and, if those problems cannot be remedied, urges the University to implement a more responsive system for administering these benefits.

WageWorks is of greatest concern to the Subcommittee. Currently, multiple systems exist in WageWorks for the provision of different types of benefits. The systems have separate websites with separate user IDs and passwords, do not communicate with each other, and this in turn can confuse and frustrate end users. Our impression is that WageWorks' competitors are little better. Both WageWorks and WEX, Inc. have dismal customer reviews.<sup>1</sup> The complaints about WageWorks mirror those of Penn faculty respondents. Per their vision statements, neither company seems especially interested in benefits administration. WageWorks is now a unit of HealthEquity, whose slogan is "Connecting Health and Wealth."<sup>2</sup> And WEX seeks to position itself as a fintech company: "WEX is a global leader in financial technology solutions."<sup>3</sup> Both WageWorks and WEX have recently been through a series of mergers and acquisitions, and two former WageWorks executives were charged by the SEC in February 2021 for misstating its 2016 results.<sup>4</sup>

Given these issues, the sub-committee recommends that SCOA explore Penn's outsourcing of key HR services in comparison with the practices of our peer institutions with the aim of discovering if there are alternatives that better correspond to Penn's values.

5. *Monitor the effectiveness of University support for online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.*

A Subcommittee comprised of Ryan Baker (Education), Errol Lord (SAS/Philosophy), and Kevin M. F. Platt (SAS/Russian and East European Studies) discussed this charge and determined that the most effective approach to its fulfillment is to administer an online poll to the teaching faculty of the University. To this end, the Subcommittee devised a polling instrument, in consultation with additional faculty with relevant expertise including Alison Bутtenheim (Nursing), Camille Charles (SAS/Sociology), and Pilar Gonalons-Pons (SAS/Sociology). The poll addresses pandemic impacts resulting from the switch to online educational activities on: work-life balance relating to care for family members; research, teaching and

1 <https://www.bbb.org/us/ca/san-mateo/profile/employee-benefit-plan/wageworks-inc-1116-79656>; <https://www.bbb.org/us/me/portland/profile/financial-services/wex-inc-0021-20564>.

2 <https://www2.healthequity.com/health-and-wealth/>

3 <https://ir.wexinc.com/home/default.aspx#:~:text=WEX%20Inc%20%2F%20Investors-Investor%20Relations.%2C%20Corporate%20Payments%2C%20and%20Health>.

4 <https://www.sec.gov/news/press-release/2021-23>

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mentoring activities; incidence of discriminatory behaviors; concerns regarding prospects for continued employment; intellectual property, and other matters. As of this writing, we are finalizing the addition of additional questions relating to charge 4 (above) to this poll. We have requested approval for administration of the poll to both standing faculty and adjunct faculty and expect to initiate data collection in the early summer.

## Proposed Charges for SCOA in 2021-2022

1. Analyze and assess data derived from polling efforts in 2020-2021 relating to the effectiveness of university support for online teaching during the pandemic.
2. Review and comment on any changes at DPS as a result of the Report on Public Safety and Outreach Initiative released in April 2021.

## SCOA Membership 2020-2021

Ryan Baker, Education  
Joel Bennett, PSOM/Medicine  
Peter Kuriloff, Education  
Errol Lord, SAS/Philosophy  
Vera Krymskaya, PSOM/Medicine, *Chair*  
Steven Messé, PSOM/Neurology  
Kevin M. F. Platt, SAS/Russian & East European Studies  
Erica Reineke, Veterinary Medicine

### *Ex-officio members:*

William Braham, Weitzman Design, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect  
Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Annenberg, Faculty Senate Chair  
Marshall Meyer, Wharton, PASEF non-voting member

## Report of the Senate Committee on Faculty and the Academic Mission (SCOF)

### General Committee Charge

The committee oversees and advises the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) on matters relating to the University's policies and procedures concerning the academic mission, including the structure of the academic staff, the tenure system, faculty appointments and promotions, faculty research, and faculty governance. In general, the committee deals with the matters covered by the following sections of the University's Handbook for Faculty and Academic Administrators: I.E.-F., I.H.2., II.A.-D.

### 2020-2021 Specific Charges

1. Assess and evaluate ways to change University structures, practices, and biases (at the University, school, departmental, and individual levels) that perpetuate systemic racism as they apply to the committee's general charge.
2. Facilitate the changes identified in the previous charge.
3. Review and comment on the level and quality of departmental, school and University support for faculty to ensure that the best possible online education can be delivered during the COVID pandemic.
4. Develop best practices for decision making across schools, including for hiring and promotion, with emphasis on inclusivity across ranks and tracks.
5. Identify voting practices across departments and schools to determine who votes on what issues and why.
6. Review voting practices to ensure that those practices cannot be used to discriminate against junior faculty.
7. Monitor the extent to which departments and schools are articulating standards of engaged scholarship.
8. Recommend ways in which broader impacts of engaged scholarship are recognized and rewarded in the promotion and compensation process. Collect best practices for setting up guidelines for evaluating faculty activities.

### Recommendation Highlights

1. Schools should develop professional growth opportunities for non-standing faculty.
  - a. Faculty in these tracks do not feel appreciated and integrated in department life and do not have a voice in important decisions related to their activities.
  - b. Expansion of voting rights to non-standing faculty would not alone address their challenges.
  - c. Deans, department chairs, and senior faculty may have too much influence on how non-standing faculty would vote, given their vulnerable positions as at-will employees of the schools.
2. Use faculty satisfaction survey results to inform actions.
  - a. School-level results satisfaction surveys should be shared with all faculty during school-wide faculty meetings, and top priorities for improvement should be articulated by school leadership.
  - b. The pandemic may exacerbate the lack of sense of belonging for faculty.

3. Clearly enunciate voting practices.

- a. Ensure uniform application of voting practices within each area (department, school, etc.).
- b. Ensure that conscious decisions approved by faculty are made on occasions when multiple options are possible.
- c. Set explicit guidelines for faculty inclusion on search committees.
- d. The Office of the Provost should provide training for new department chairs on decision-making processes and offer refresher sessions every three years. Content should be informed by best practices in decision-making.

### Activity Highlights

The committee discussed the need to have meaningful representation and inclusion in decision making for faculty across all tracks. A special concern has been the non-standing faculty tracks (i.e., the associated faculty and academic support staff). Faculty in these tracks are integral to the University's teaching and research missions and should have ways to meaningfully participate in decision-making and to advocate for their interests.

While analyzing data available to SCOF on issues raised by non-standing faculty in recent years, we identified several areas of dissatisfaction for that group compared to standing faculty. However, a disturbingly large portion of standing faculty also report dissatisfaction regarding their ability to participate in decision-making, to fit well in informal faculty networks, and to receive recognition commensurate with their achievements.

We surveyed department chairs to understand variations in decision-making practices. Some departments do not vote anonymously, which may serve to influence faculty to vote against their preferences. Department chairs have authority to make a wide range of decisions without consultation with faculty. Most chairs report that they consult with faculty when making decisions, but who is included in the consultations is not well defined. We recommend that training be provided for all incoming chairs on best practices in decision-making to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### *Identifying issues of central faculty concern surrounding the role and disposition of academic support staff and associated faculty*

Discussion of issues related to academic support staff and associated faculty have been part of SCOF activity each year in the past decade. SCOF reviews each school's requests to hire in faculty tracks it was not previously approved to hire within, to raise caps on sizes in these tracks relative to standing faculty, and to change the rules for these tracks, usually to enhance the possibility of retaining faculty in these tracks. Though SCOF has not reviewed any specific proposals, the committee is anecdotally aware of some interest in requesting changes in voting privileges for faculty in some of these tracks.

Focus groups convened by the Faculty Senate (pre-pandemic) and studies at other universities have documented that faculty in these tracks

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