

Brown University Community Council

Monday, February 12, 2024

4:00 – 5:30 PM EST

Meeting Minutes

Present (In-person & *Virtual*): Christina H. Paxson, Louis Boyang, David Buchta, Sylvia Carey-Butler, Max Clermont, Cass Cliatt, Ruth Colwill, *Vilma Cortez*, Frank Doyle, *Susan Duffy*, Eric Estes, *Nicholas Greene*, Leon Hilton, Aiyah Josiah-Faeduwor, *Aliya LeeKong*, Kevin Logiudice, *Ken Mak*, Jennifer Maloney, Farha Mithila, Caroline O’Brien, Esha Patel, Ma. Irene Quilantang, Elliott Rebello, *Kayla Rosen*, *Neil Saftier*, *Robert Sobol*, Stephanie Zielinski, Sydney Menzin

Absent: William Acevedo, Nicole Bonelli, Mary Jo Callan, Dawn King, Beverly Ledbetter, Ainsley Lesure, Daniel Newgarden, Kermshlise Picard, Mina Sarmas, Alex Vidmar

Christina H. Paxson, Brown University president, begins the public meeting by reviewing the charge of the Brown University Community Council (BUCC) and the protocol and procedures for meetings. This includes taking questions from BUCC members and other meeting attendees related to agenda topics. At the end of the meeting, there is designated time for community members to raise issues to be considered for future meeting topics. President Paxson then addresses the first agenda item which is to approve the minutes from the last BUCC meeting, which took place on Wednesday, November 29, 2023. Following a proposed amendment to include mention of a request that the topic of managing the endowment and divestment be discussed at a future BUCC meeting, the minutes are approved.

Next President Paxson begins her report by thanking the BUCC members who have agreed to serve on the Executive Committee and sharing upcoming BUCC meeting dates. Before covering a few select updates from across campus, President Paxson acknowledges the notable number of guests attending the BUCC meeting reflects the current climate on campus and a time of difficult conversations, including differences of opinion around divestment, University statements, tensions, and recent threat of violence against community members at Brown/RISD Hillel. President Paxson adds that the topic of today’s meeting – promoting community-building and civil discourse – couldn’t be more important. President Paxson asserts that current priorities continue to be keeping the campus safe, caring for members of our community, protecting academic freedom, and combatting discrimination and harassment. In addition to these top-of-mind priorities, President Paxson expresses wanting to highlight a few other initiatives the University has been working on that will make Brown better. These include the launch of the Brown Collegiate Scholars Program, with the goal to develop a program that would help prepare Providence high school students for success at four-year colleges; Brown’s plans to be need-blind for international undergraduate students starting the next admissions cycle, which will

involve thinking about recruitment and on-campus supports; plans to begin construction of the Integrated Life Sciences Building in Summer 2024; and upcoming signature events, including lectures from Former US representative Liz Cheney and civil rights attorney Sherrilyn Ifill. President Paxson then opens the floor for questions about the topics covered in her report. BUCC members ask questions about:

- The opportunity for additional financial support for international graduate students, especially during their first year transitioning to Brown/Providence
- A pipeline for diversifying the workforce that will get to take advantage of the Integrated Life Sciences Building
- Posting the names of the Executive Committee members on the BUCC website for transparency
- Whether the donation for international financial aid specifics from which country students would need to come from
 - President Paxson responds that donors can express a preference, but it is not a requirement/restriction of the gift. Brown admits students, then matches them to scholarships; that matching process tries to take into account these preferences. International student financial aid will be handled the same way as financial aid for domestic students.
- Parking in Jewelry District, as transportation continues to be part of conversation for the area
 - Vice President for Campus Life Eric Estes notes that focus groups took place in January and a survey is forthcoming to gather input about continued development in the Jewelry District.
- Whether the University has consulted or will consult community members about changes happening in the Jewelry District
 - VP Estes responds that consultation is happening in a staged approach; Brown has started having these conversations and they will continue to happen.
 - President Paxson adds this is also part of a broader conversation about the future of the Jewelry District, and that is not Brown's decision alone; this happens in concert with many state, city, neighborhood associations, and other partners.

President Paxson transitions to introduce today's topic, highlighting the newly created webpage, "Strengthening Our Community Amid Conflict" that is a central hub for many resources and programming taking place this semester that focus on community building. President Paxson introduces today's three presenters: Provost Frank J. Doyle, Vice President for Institutional Equity and Diversity Sylvia Carey-Butler, and Vice President for Campus Life Eric Estes.

Provost Doyle walks through programming sponsored by the Provost's Office, in collaboration with faculty, related to having difficult conversations related to academic freedom and freedom

of expression in an academic context. Events include lectures, panels, and workshops aimed primarily at faculty over the course of the spring semester. Speakers include the former president of the American Civil Liberties Union, a senior program officer from the American Association of University Professors, Brown faculty, and others. Several of these events will be recorded for later viewing. The Sheridan Center will also be facilitating a faculty discussion series on difficult conversations in the classroom. Provost Doyle opens for questions.

A BUCC member asks if there is programming for students on freedom of speech, to facilitate student voice. Provost Doyle responds that this programming aims to equip faculty with skills to help in the classroom forum. VP Carey-Butler and VP Estes will speak to opportunities and spaces for dialogue for students. President Paxson adds that an ongoing question is where does free speech end and harassment begin, and that's something we have to confront. The other issue is about community members' level of comfort speaking up in class. President Paxson continues, the Campus Climate Survey (though with a low response rate from students), indicated that many people did not feel comfortable speaking in class or feared being shut down. That is something that's concerning - you come to university to listen and learn and express yourself and listen some more and if that's not happening in our classrooms and other spaces around campus, that's something we need to have a community discussion about. This ties into academic freedom, and how to use it responsibly - these are all tied together.

A BUCC member asks President Paxson about her estimation of where free speech ends and harassment begins, and how she thinks about that question. President Paxson responds that if you look at the definition of discrimination and harassment, there's very clear language about it being pervasive, persistent or severe; determining what crosses this line depends on the facts of each individual case. It's complicated, and the U.S. Department of Education hasn't provided clear guidance - it is not clear cut. Another BUCC member adds a comment about the importance of not shutting down people from speaking their truth and speaking up for themselves, making sure everyone can use their voice.

Next Vice President Carey-Butler speaks to how the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity (OIED) is working to create spaces for Brown community members to engage across differences. Examples of programming include "Bridge to Understanding" lunches for students and a Global Day of Inclusion for staff. OIED is also holding workshops on "Combating Antisemitism" and "Combating Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism", increasing students' and staff's knowledge, awareness, and understanding. A faculty representative on the BUCC asked if OIED programming was open to faculty. The response was no, not currently, as most faculty programming is coordinated by the Office of the Provost. One idea emerged that perhaps Professors Paul Nahme and Shazad Bashir could talk together at an event for faculty.

A BUCC member asks whether or not the University is creating spaces for students to advocate, noting a disconnect between "what we teach and what we do". VP Carey-Butler notes that VP

Estes will speak more to this but the hope is that students will feel comfortable sharing and speaking with faculty facilitators during the OIED workshops and be able to communicate across differences.

There are no more questions from BUCC members at this time, so audience members are welcome to ask a question related to the presentation topic. A student attendee asks how student input has been incorporated into the materials and sessions being offered. This segues into VP Estes's Campus Life presentation, which does a deep dive in the one component of the Division's programming: Community Dialogue Project (CDP) Training Modules. The CDP began pre-pandemic but was ramping up development last year, seeking to address questions about how we build community together and how we talk to each other at Brown. VP Estes shares that modules were first delivered to different student leader groups in August and September, and became available to all students in October and November. Module topics include Active Listening, Perspective Taking, and Difficult Conversations. Data was captured through pre- and post-training surveys to determine impact of trainings and new opportunities, per input from students. In final comments, VP Estes notes that as a result of qualitative survey comments, a new module on empathy was created as an offering for students. VP Estes invites Associate VP for Campus Life and Dean of Students Koren Bakkegard to share additional insights. VP Bakkegard notes the CDP is in the process of hiring undergraduate peer facilitators and a director, and hopes to then hire graduate facilitators as well.

As a follow up, President Paxson asks VP Estes to speak to additional examples within Campus Life that student voice informs programming. VP Estes highlights the Brown Center for Students of Color Heritage Series; there are student coordinators that work closely with staff, but the programming is student driven. Next, the floor is open for questions from BUCC members. One member asks about the availability for active listening sessions for faculty and staff, in addition to students. VP Carey-Butler responds that she will bring this idea to her team, and Provost Doyle notes that pedagogical experts in the Sheridan Center can help with this, as part of their upcoming programming. The BUCC member asks if the University can bring activists to campus to provide trainings for students. President Paxson adds that there have been trainings like this in the past, on strategic activism - perhaps that is something current students would be interested in. VP Estes shares that the identity centers on campus are doing something similar, bringing scholar-activists to campus to speak about how they have gone about making meaningful change in different ways.

Another BUCC representative then comments about the current situation of students having charges against them for a recent protest. President Paxson responds that this is something the administration thinks a lot about. She notes that we talk a lot about rights, and we also have to talk about responsibilities that come with those rights. President Paxson asserts that the administration has been really clear so that people really understand what the consequences of

their actions are, and that they're not surprised by what happens - students know and they make choices. Brown is all about making choices and helping students learn how to make the choices that are right for them. Additionally, President Paxson notes that these were hard decisions - that no one wants students arrested for something that's illegal, but you make it really clear to students that this is a choice. There's a long history of civil rights activism where people willingly violate the law knowing what the consequences will be and being willing to accept those consequences. President Paxson says she believes that's where we are right now; she respects the students for what they are doing and believe in, but she also believes that making sure the consequences of actions are put in place is really important for an institution. A BUCC member chimes in, saying Brown teaches students to challenge institutions, and he feels it is hypocritical for Brown to punish students for doing just that. President Paxson responds that Brown tries very hard to promote the voices of students, staff, and faculty, but wide-ranging conversation has some boundaries: you can't impede the functions of the university - which imposes on the rights of others - and you need to make space for voices of alternative views. President Paxson continues, saying Brown has minimal policies on this, but they are there to protect how the University operates, consistent with our mission and in a way that doesn't encroach on the voices and rights of others.

The BUCC parliamentarian asks if there are any additional questions from BUCC members before opening the floor for community members to speak to any community issues.

A BUCC member asks how OIED is engaging diverse students in programming. VP Carey-Butler responds that students have been involved in the curating of current programming, though more can be done. VP Carey-Butler says she is hopeful that students from different backgrounds and perspectives will come together to participate in these conversations.

A BUCC member comments that the programming presented today highlights "vertical" offerings for different campus constituencies, and the feedback from BUCC members suggests benefits from providing these opportunities across groups and chances for these groups to interact as well. Another idea is to use the DIAP (Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan) as a model to get leaders from across campus to focus on the topics of civil discourse and community-building within their units/departments. President Paxson comments that this could be considered as part of the "Inclusion" component of departments' plans.

President Paxson then opens the floor for comments from audience members, noting that if community members reach out two days before the BUCC meeting, the council will prioritize making time for their comments. No one has done that for this meeting, however, so any audience member may now speak. A student attendee shares his reflections on the meeting's presentations and discussion, saying he believes key questions were being dodged. He brings up the right to protest and its importance to Brown's mission and academic freedom. The student

comments that at Brown and the BCSC students learn about the power of student protest for enacting change on campus. The student brings up calls for divestment from Israel. He says while this meeting has focused on open dialogue and difficult conversations, students starved themselves for the chance to have an open conversation with decision makers at the university to no avail. The student says it feels difficult to reconcile the emphasis on having difficult conversations and the missed opportunity for students to be involved in conversations with decision-makers.

President Paxson responds, saying she has met with many students in attendance and other individuals across campus with wide-ranging views since October 7. She notes that she believes there is a difference between being listened to and having things go exactly how you might want. President Paxson reiterates that if a group brings forward a good proposal to ACURM, it will go to the Corporation, noting that she does not have to bring proposals to the Corporation, but she will bring this one. Another attendee chimes in asking why a proposal has not been brought to the Corporation already. President Paxson responds that the Corporation knows what the proposal is and they did not want to hear it. President Paxson reiterates that students wanted to put a divestment proposal on the Corporation's agenda and the Corporation said no. President Paxson continues, saying there is clear guidance about what it would take to put something on the Corporation agenda. If students want to move forward in a productive way, there is a path available, they just need to take it. The student attendee responds, arguing that the ACURM process takes too long and is an example of how bureaucracy is used to stifle student voice, and says there was already a proposal to ACCRIP in 2019, which students have since revised and delivered it to the president. President Paxson replies that this report arrived about three days before the start of the Corporation meeting, which is too late to be considered for the meeting agenda. President Paxson disagrees that ACURM is a bureaucratic hurdle, and adds that ACURM is made up of representatives of the Brown community: faculty, students, staff, and alumni. When a proposal is considered, it's important to get input from the broader Brown community. President Paxson concludes, saying Brown has a very large community, and to rush a proposal through without proper vetting would be unfair to others.

President Paxson wraps up the meeting, saying that based on input from committee members, divestment will be a topic discussed during an upcoming meeting. She notes that one reason why it was not on the agenda for today's meeting was because there is an information session planned for faculty later this week, we've had information sessions for students, and there is an upcoming staff town hall that will cover this information. This will help inform community members about divestment and how the endowment works, and then the BUCC can come together to have a conversation about divestment more broadly, and more broadly about ESG standards and how they work at Brown.

The parliamentary motions to meet at the next meeting date and time for the BUCC on Wednesday, March 20, from 4:00-5:30 p.m. The motion passes. Motion to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,
Sydney Menzin
BUCC Secretary