

Brown University Community Council

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

4:00 – 5:30 PM EST

Meeting Minutes

Present (In-person & *Virtual*): Christina H. Paxson, David Buchta, Mary Jo Callan, Sylvia Carey-Butler, Max Clermont, Cass Cliatt, Ruth Colwill, Frank Doyle, Eric Estes, Leon Hilton, Aiyah Josiah-Faeduwor, Dawn King, *Ainsley Lesure*, *Ken Mak*, Jennifer Maloney, Farha Mithila, Daniel Newgarden, Esha Patel, *Kermshlise Picard*, Ma. Irene Quilantang, Elliott Rebello, Kayla Rosen, Neil Safier, Mina Sarmas, Robert Sobol, *Stephanie Zielinski*, Sydney Menzin
Absent: William Acevedo, Nicole Bonelli, Louis Boyang, Vilma Cortez, Susan Duffy, Nicholas Greene, Beverly Ledbetter, Aliya LeeKong, Kevin Logiudice, Alex Vidmar

Christina H. Paxson, Brown University president, begins the public meeting by welcoming guests and reviewing the protocol and procedures for Brown University Community Council (BUCC) meetings: the council sits at the tables and the audience sits in the rows of chairs on either side; when we get the Q&A discussion section, Council members go first and then we move to members of the community; and we try to save time at the end for community members to raise new issues or topics not discussed otherwise during the meeting.

President Paxson makes a few remarks before going through the business agenda. She notes that there was a request at the February meeting that the March meeting focus on divestment and feature a presentation from the Investment Office. The Investment Office team is traveling today and therefore no one is available to present, so this will be the topic of April's meeting. The other note is that President Paxson will be traveling during the April meeting, so she will join via Zoom, with Provost Frank Doyle serving as the Council Chair in-person.

President Paxson addresses the first agenda item to approve the minutes from the last BUCC meeting, which took place on Monday, February 12, 2024. There are no comments or corrections. The minutes are approved.

Next, President Paxson introduces the topics of today's presentations: UCS Sidechat Poll Results Overview given by UCS Polling Co-Directors Jay Philbrick '24.5 and Emily Hong '26; Sidechat Content Moderation Updates given by Vice President for Marketing Communications and Content Strategy Carly Kite Lapinski; and Ad Hoc Committee on Admissions Policies Recommendations Overview given by Provost Frank Doyle. Regarding the last topic, President Paxson notes that one piece of business that was not yet decided upon is related to family connections to Brown; she hopes the Council and community members can provide feedback on how to get comprehensive community input on this matter moving forward. President Paxson

then turns to Jay Philbrick '24.5 and Emily Hong '26 to begin their presentation on the UCS Sidechat Poll Results Overview.

Philbrick and Hong share the goals of the UCS Polling Committee and examples of previous projects, a description of their polling process, and background on the Sidechat platform. The UCS Polling Co-Directors discuss their Poll sample, acknowledging it is relatively small (228 respondents), so it might not be representative and there is higher potential for selection bias. The poll asked students questions about their engagement with Sidechat, content prevalence (including reports of seeing instances of any form of discrimination or harassment), and opinions about platform content moderation. Key findings from the poll sample include:

- 90% of respondents have previously engaged with or currently engage with Sidechat;
- Of the 140 respondents who currently use Sidechat, 85% reported seeing an instance of any form of discrimination or harassment; and
- 35% of respondents believe there should be more moderation of content on Sidechat.

Discussion with the BUCC and community members follows. There are questions about poll methodology (developing questions and calculating content impressions metrics), potential content moderation tactics, and the possible continuation of this poll. President Paxson notes that this survey could inform a future Campus Climate Survey, which asks questions about harassment on social media; she adds that this is also a reminder that survey response rates are plummeting on campus, which makes it hard to get good information.

Next Vice President Kite Lapinski speaks about her team's conversation with Sidechat in February. They discussed how people could access the Brown community on the platform (only using a brown.edu email address, not just based on geography), as well as Sidechat's Terms and Service and how humans review content and remove posts that violate the Terms of Service or are otherwise objectionable. Also, on Sidechat, content is posted and then removed (rather than moderated before something is posted). If content is removed, the poster is notified, but not the reporter (so you might not know if the post you reported is taken down). VP Kite Lapinski also reiterated that Brown has limited influence over a third-party app, so Brown used the call as an opportunity to strongly encourage Sidechat to be vigilant about the content being posted on the platform, saying Brown is open to continuing the conversation, and it will be paying attention to what is happening. A BUCC member asked if there is any good scholarship about what type of content is being posted on Sidechat. Philbrick responds that to his knowledge, there is no research on Sidechat content specifically, though there has been research about content on social media platforms broadly. A BUCC member asked the UCS Polling Co-Directors if there was a particular goal for the Sidechat poll. Philbrick responds the hope was to capture quantifiable data about how Brown interacts with Sidechat, which could inform how the student body chooses to engage with the platform; the UCS Polling Committee hopes to share this information to spark action. President Paxson concludes this portion of the meeting with a comment that it's

interesting the majority of respondents said the amount of content moderation is what it should be, despite many respondents reporting seeing instances of negative content.

President Paxson then turns to Provost Doyle and Dean of Admissions Logan Powell to present. Provost Doyle begins by sharing that the Committee's recommendations have been published, along with an executive summary. Provost Doyle then provides an overview of the Committee's roadmap: holding many meetings and conversations with colleagues across campus; gathering input from students; and conducting robust analysis and open discussion. He acknowledges that this Committee was working against the backdrop of the Supreme Court decision on race-conscious admissions, national conversations about testing and access to standardized tests, and a lack of trust in higher education institutions. The guiding principles for the Committee included Brown's holistic admissions process that considers the whole student in the admissions application; being informed by Brown's own data; a commitment to candor, collegiality, and confidentiality; and being driven by Brown's mission and values. The Committee's recommendations, which have been accepted by President Paxson, include:

- Preserve Early Decision - it's attractive to students, consistent with peer practices, and serves as a tool to shape the composition of the student body. Dean Powell adds that there is no financial disincentive to Early Decision - if there is an affordability gap that cannot be bridged, Brown would release that student from their commitment to attend.
- Reinstate the testing requirement, with a commitment to testing in context (and improving communication and outreach to students and schools about what this means).

The third focus area - the matter of family connections (including legacy students and students of Brown faculty and staff) - remains a work in progress. Provost Doyle shares that the Committee wrestled with competing values: on the one hand, there is the question of family connections being an unearned advantage in the admissions process, and on the other hand, there are arguments that these connections enhance a lifelong affinity to the institution and build intergenerational community. The Committee felt they needed more time, consultation, and input to reach a decision about this and plan to collect more data and hear perspectives about the tradeoffs here to inform their conclusion. Provost Doyle reiterates that this meeting is an opportunity to discuss ideas for how to gather input on the matter. The floor is open for questions and comments. BUCC members ask about changes in the applicant pool in recent years; disaggregated data for admitted family members of faculty and of staff; plans for communicating with students and schools about the reinstated testing requirement; how student input informs admissions office practices; data used to inform Committee recommendations; and the Committee's consideration of equity in its decisions.

President Paxson then opens the floor for audience members to ask questions related to the presentation topic. A current undergraduate student from the audience asks how student input is taken into consideration to inform decision-making, especially around the decision regarding family connections in admissions. Provost Doyle responds that they welcome the input, and

reiterates that they need to hear feedback on the topic from all members of the Brown community, including current students, faculty, staff, and alumni. President Paxson adds that we have time before the next admissions cycle to have good community discussions about this topic. The next question asks about the reasoning behind requiring students to submit standardized test scores to be considered for admission to Brown. Dean Powell notes that it is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their excellence in the holistic context of their application. The final comment is from a graduate student in the audience, who expresses their frustration that divestment was not on today's BUCC meeting agenda. President Paxson replies that the Investment Office will be presenting at the next meeting, as requested by members of the BUCC. The meeting adjourns.

Respectfully submitted,
Sydney Menzin
BUCC Secretary