



HMS/HSDM Faculty Council

Faculty Council Minutes  
February 12, 2025

**Present:** Aguayo-Mazzucato, Agudo, Astley, Becker, Bi, Biddinger, Chen, Daley, Drachman, Fregni, Gehrke, Giannobile, Greenberg, Harris, Henske, Huang, Ingelfinger, Morton, Murray, A. Nazarian, Royce, Shih, Song, Tsai, Wagers, Wu

**Guests:** Drs. Chang, Huskamp, Kuritzkes, Schwartzstein, Shin; Mss. Bittinger, Brodrick, Godin, Mulhern

**Staff:** Mss. Hecht, Peet, Ryan, Spearman

*This Faculty Council meeting was held in person at HMS in the Waterhouse Room.*

Dr. Lisa Henske welcomed the Faculty Council (FC) and called the meeting to order around 4:01pm. She asked for and received approval for the January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, meeting minutes as presented. Next, she gave the Vice Chair Election announcement. Dr. Henske explained that the Vice Chair will carry out a two-year term, first as Vice Chair and second as Chair of the Faculty Council. She stated that this role is very important to the school and that HMS is a place where the deeper you get the more amazing it is. Dr. Henske explained that in advance of each monthly Faculty Council meeting, the docket committee convenes and both the Vice Chair and Chair attend. The chair also is a member of Dean's Leadership Committee. Dr. Henske stated that all eligible members will receive notice and that the deadline to express interest in the role is February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The Council will vote via electronic ballot and the results will be announced at the March 12<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Next, Dr. Henske introduced Dr. Daniel R. Kuritzkes, the Chair of the Promotional Review Board (PRB) and Harriet Ryan Albee Professor of Medicine. Dr. Kuritzkes addressed the FC and presented on student promotion and the PRB. He explained that the PRB reports to the Dean for Medical Education, Bernard Chang. Dr. Kuritzkes said that the board oversees and provides guidance to students who are having academic difficulties or who run into trouble throughout the course of the medical curriculum. He added that this includes health reasons, as well as issues regarding professionalism. The FC received Dr. Kuritzkes pre-reads in advance and opened the floor to questions.

A discussion ensued. The FC discussed the fact that there is an urgent need to help students with professionalism. They contemplated the question: How do you define professionalism? Dr. Kuritzkes explained the easiest definition of professionalism: "behaviors that effect the way in which student interact with other individuals of the healthcare team in the clinical setting, whether than be interacting with patients or interacting with each other. He added that sometimes issues of professionalism can expand to include other types of behaviors, for example, chronic tardiness or recurring unexcused absences. Dr. Kuritzkes went on to explained that some issues touch on academic integrity as well. He explained that we need to think about professionalism as a skill to be learned by students, just as differential diagnosis is a skill to be learned by students. He boiled it down to: "behaving like doctors should behave," for lack of a better phrase.

Dr. Aguayo-Mazzucato asked Dr. Kuritzkes to expand on the difficulty of designing interventions, and addressing issues of professionalism during the admission process. Dr. Kuritzkes explained that Dr. Bob Mayer, Faculty Associate Dean for Admissions, would be able to address the question more closely; however, he stated that it is difficult to predict behaviors during the admissions

process. He went on to say that it is hard to identify who will have difficulties in the real domain of professionalism during the admissions process. He explained that when students have difficulties, for some students it has been difficult to find the right coaching to help with those behaviors. Often times, these students are searching for better solutions, Dr. Kuritzkes said.

Dr. Shih said that she read the report with dismay because of the number of interventions. She asked if this is a typical year or if there was an increase in concerns regarding professionalism, namely disrespect. Dr. Shih added that respect is something required during the admissions process and that it is hard to teach at this graduate education level. Dr. Kuritzkes said that he agreed with her assessment. He explained that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had an impact on this generation of students. Dr. Kuritzkes expanded on his thought, adding that the high school experience for many of these students was largely remote. He explained that he is not trying to make excuses for the students. He added that there has not been a huge increase in concerns regarding professionalism, but there definitely has been an increase. He concluded by saying that professionalism ought to be part of being an adult.

Next, Dr. Astley asked a follow up question touching on societal changes. She said that behaviors could be exacerbated by burnout or depression. However, the incidents described in the report are so egregious that they would be accepted as problematic by all ages. Dr. Kuritzkes responded to Dr. Astley's comments and said that there are some generational aspects to it. He said that he also thinks that they take those issues into account when discussing case by case student experiences.

Dr. Henske thanked Dr. Kuritzkes for leading the PRB committee.

Dr. Henske then introduced Dr. Richard M. Schwartzstein, the chair of the Learning Environment Committee (LEC), and Ellen and Melvin Gordon Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Medical Education to discuss the LEC. Dr. Schwartzstein explained that the LEC reflects the physical and communicable space where people learn. He said that most of what the committee discusses is about interactions between students and with the faculty. Dr. Schwartzstein added that the AAMC questions how faculty interact with other faculty, staff and students. Dr. Schwartzstein opened the floor to questions from the FC.

Dr. Henske asked about the concept of a teaching time out. Dr. Schwartzstein explained that there are faculty members who are intent on developing relationships with the students, which further improves the notion of the learning environment. The FC discussed the fact that many members of the faculty make a real effort to get to know each student and establish a relationship with each student. A discussion ensued. The FC concluded that students learn better when their professor makes an effort to establish a relationship with them. They also talked about how bringing core faculty into the clerkship area will increase the quality of the learning environment.

Dr. Astley chimed in to discuss the willingness to teach. Dr. Schwartzstein gave some sage advice about creating a healthy learning environment. He explained that the faculty should tell their students that there are high expectations, but that they are there to support the students. He said the role of the faculty is to make the students better doctors. Dr. Schwartzstein told the FC to tell their students that they will be called upon, not to embarrass them, but to help the professor understand how they think. He said to tell the students: "You are responsible for the learning of your peers and your perspective will help them learn better." Dr. Schwartzstein added that it is important to establish expectations at the beginning of the course and carry them through.

Dr. Fregni asked about the ideal size of working together on a team. Dr. Schwartzstein answered 4 or 5. He went on to say that there isn't an ideal number, but 3-6 or so is what he would recommend. He added that in the old curriculum the ideal size of a team was 9, but you can hide in 9. He explained that you cannot hide in a group of 4.

Dr. Ingelfinger and Dr. Schwartzstein touched on community and learning. Dr. Schwartzstein shared his hopes that the faculty would connect with each of the students on a deeper level. He said that having a relationship with them and understanding their background promotes a better learning environment.

Dr. Song raised the idea that heterogeneity is advantageous on the whole and asked Dr. Schwartzstein to speak on the pros and cons of curriculum standardization in the classroom. Dr. Schwartzstein shared his perspectives including a concern he has regarding the discussion of controversial topics in the classroom. He said that he has heard from students who are uncomfortable with sharing their opinions in the classroom because of outspoken faculty. He added that cancel culture has become prominent in the classroom amongst students. Dr. Schwartzstein cautioned the FC against indoctrinating their students into their own beliefs. He added that the faculty should be careful and thoughtful about the meaning of academic freedom. Then Dr. Schwartzstein touched on the importance of students developing critical thinking skills.

Dr. Henske thanked Dr. Schwartzstein for his time and introduced Dr. Haiden Huskamp, Chair of the Committee on Rights & Responsibilities (CRR) and Henry J. Kaiser Professor of Health Care Policy, to present on the CRR. Dr. Henske kicked off the discussion by asking Dr. Huskamp to address how the committee evaluates discrimination and bullying. She also asked what sanctions are in the committee's domain. Dr. Huskamp mentioned that they are in a period of transition as the University implements new discrimination policies. She said that there are a broad range of sanctions available and mentioned recommendations including professional coaching. Ms. Keri Godin, Director of Professional Integrity, chimed in and introduced herself to the FC. She explained that she is on the front line of concerns as they come in. Ms. Godin added that recommendations are tailored to try to directly address the conduct that led to the complaint, which is an example of professional coaching. She said that their team focuses on broader support looking at organizational structure and that they try to focus on education training more in the realm of mentorship. A discussion ensued and Dean Daley spoke about the recent executive orders. He highlighted the strength and resiliency of our community.

Dr. Henske told Dean Daley that she appreciates his messages of optimism and said that his messages to the community have resonated with her. Dean Daley explained that we need to support the trainees and junior faculty and express the value and meaning of what the faculty does. Dr. Wu touched on the uncertainty of the wording from the NIH regarding higher education. Ms. Bittinger, Dean for Faculty & Research Integrity, chimed in and shared her perspective on the status of current and active grants.

Dr. Schwartzstein spoke about the cutting of staff and administrators at the hospitals and the negative effect it will have. He added that these cuts will lead to clinicians having more work to do. Dean Daley recognized that challenged and explained that he is in conversation with the hospitals around a whole array of issues. He explained that they are working on modernizing the affiliation agreements. Dr. Henske explained that FC building resilience should be the topic of the next FC meeting. Dean Daley added that the need for input from FC is greater than ever at this moment.

Dr. Henske thanked Dr. Huskamp and Ms. Godin for their time and introduced Ms. Melissa Brodrick, Director and Ombuds, to present on Harvard Ombuds. Ms. Brodrick explained that this is her 15<sup>th</sup> year as the Ombuds. She added that her office is a highly confidential office, explaining that it is an independent office by design and that her role is as an impartial listener and thought partner. Harvard Ombuds is for anyone in the community and their services include: coaching, facilitating difficult conversations, connecting people to resources, and bringing information forward. She explained that 441 people came to Harvard Ombuds last year. Dr. Astley asked Ms. Brodrick to speak about what they are allowed to do for advertising. She wanted to know how Harvard Ombuds could outreach to people in the community and what the efforts are to encourage people to use their services. Ms. Brodrick explained that there is a total of four people in their office. She added that they host trainings and give presentations to spread the word about their services. Ms. Brodrick also asked for input from the FC on other ways to spread the word. Then, the FC talked about the heightened level of vulnerability among the faculty at this time and a discussion ensued.

Dr. Henske thanked Ms. Brodrick and introduced the HMS Student Council President, Anna Mulhern (Class of 2028), inviting her to share more about herself and the Student Council. Ms. Mulhern began by expressing her gratitude to the FC for the opportunity to speak and for their contributions to the HMS community, emphasizing the meaningful impact they have on students. She highlighted that the students feel empowered to advocate for change but noted growing concerns about the corporatization of medicine, which weighs heavily on her classmates. Many are discouraged by studies suggesting that their passion for the field is at its peak now and may wane over time. She stressed that her class is committed to maintaining that passion and actively addressing these concerns. Ms. Mulhern emphasized the value of ongoing dialogue between students and faculty, underscoring students' interest in collective bargaining. She also spoke about the importance of in-person engagement while acknowledging that stress surrounding attendance policies can create tension between faculty and students. She urged the FC to consider how they might collaboratively foster policy changes that align with a broader commitment to student wellness. Specifically, students seek adjustments that balance personal well-being with their dedication to the profession. Dr. Henske praised Ms. Mulhern, calling her an inspiring person.

Dr. Schwartzstein highlighted concerns about mental health among students, attributing challenges not necessarily to workload but to broader societal factors such as social media and parenting styles. He referenced research on behavioral trends and the concept of well-being versus wellness, citing Martin Seligman's work at the University of Pennsylvania. He emphasized the importance of understanding the root causes of these issues before attempting solutions and suggested taking a broad perspective.

The FC discussed whether current efforts to address student concerns were intentional and sustainable, focusing on skill-building and long-term impact. They explored the scale and origins of these challenges and expressed interest in learning more about group- and community-based solutions. Dr. Greenberg voiced support for collaboration between students and faculty. She noted that while personal struggles can feel isolating, they often ebb and flow. She encouraged the Student Council to consider whether proposed solutions would directly improve mental health or if a more innovative approach was needed. Dr. Greenberg cautioned against jumping to conclusions too quickly.

Dr. Song acknowledged the vulnerability expressed by students and noted that faculty share similar struggles. He discussed how learning about financial incentives in healthcare could be unsettling and contribute to inner conflict about the medical profession. He posed questions about whether students felt more empowered or disheartened by their education and whether confronting these

challenges in the classroom was ultimately beneficial. Dr. Song emphasized that while grappling with discomfort and anger is difficult, it is an essential part of learning. He also suggested examining case studies of successful small-scale interventions to find a balance between awareness and action. Dr. Drachman chimed in and acknowledged that learning about the complexities of the medical system can be overwhelming for first-year students but noted that moments of epiphany were part of the journey. He also referred to the student body, stating that they represented the future of medicine.

Then, Ms. Brodrick emphasized the importance of both scientific knowledge and interpersonal skills for success. She asked Ms. Mulhern to speak to the ability of the student body to navigate difficult conversations in today's politically charged climate and what additional support might be needed to develop those skills. Ms. Mulhern noted that while they recognize the importance of open dialogue, initiating these conversations remained a challenge. She discussed the role of medical education in fostering an environment where students can set aside personal biases and see each other as human beings first. Ms. Brodrick expressed hope that students and faculty could continue improving in this area, acknowledging that the lack of clear answers underscored the need for an ongoing conversation. She encouraged Ms. Mulhern to share feedback and remain engaged in finding solutions.

Dr. Henske thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:33pm.