

Tennessee Tech University (TTU)
Faculty Senate Retreat
August 20, 2018

I. After breakfast was served, President Oldham made the following introductory remarks:

- A public / private residence hall with the theme of innovation is being proposed.
- This year's freshmen class may be the third largest ever.
- Transfer student numbers were flat this year.
- Last year's 5-year graduate rate broke 50%.
- There are resources, but we must be vigilant on how we spend them.
- It would be nice to control future tuition increases and lock in tuition rates, but there are problems with doing this.
- The budget is currently being prepared for Board approval. More details will be forthcoming after the final fall enrollment numbers are known. The budget will come before the Board in October. The current revision includes a conservative tuition estimate because we graduated so many students last spring. Due to the large incoming freshmen class, the budget is looking promising.
- The faculty received a 2.5% average salary increase.
- There may be too many required gen ed credits. We might consider reducing them from 41 to 30-36 credit hours.

II. After these preliminary remarks, Senators took the opportunity to make the following observations and/or posed the following questions to President Oldham:

- A. Faculty have expressed feeling underappreciated and there is a problem with morale. One example was during a radio show promoting TTU wherein mention was made of advisors and residence life, but absolutely no mention was made of the important role of faculty at the university.

President Oldham expressed concern and stated that he will listen more. He further indicated that there are many opportunities at TTU where faculty can make a difference. He is committed to the faculty and indicated that he makes this very clear when addressing students and their families at SOAR sessions.

- B. There is a strong concern that the Board is interested in getting rid of tenure at TTU.

President Oldham stated that this was a myth, and that statements and questions from Board members are indicative of their desire to learn more about the tenure process. However, he also indicated that there are leaders in the TN legislature who like to talk about tenure and its role in universities. If there is a threat regarding tenure, it is coming from the legislature, not from the TTU Board. Provost Bruce plans to look into tenure and promotion practices at TTU this year and will include faculty in this process. One specific focus will be the examination of a post-tenure review process. President Oldham reiterated that he supports tenure and has defended it in the legislature and will continue to do so. The legislature needs to understand that tenure at a university is different from tenure at a K-12 school. He advised that the best way to defend tenure is to administer it properly. One problem with tenure at TTU, he noted, is that we tolerate outliers.

- C. It seems that the Board, some TTU administrators, and many in the community do not understand what faculty do. In a recent Board meeting, when faculty workload was questioned, no one defended the faculty. There is a need to support the faculty in Board meetings and to the public at large.

President Oldham advised that faculty should pay attention to questions about and perceptions of tenure in the public sphere and in the legislature. They reflect a public perception. He asked that the Provost be given a chance to help improve communication matters. He also pointed out that the strategic plan was faculty driven, which points to the important role of faculty at TTU.

President Oldham asked whether he could invite Vice President Stinson and Provost Bruce to attend Senate meeting with him.

Senators suggested improving communication with Board members by matching each of them up with a faculty member, inviting the Board members to Senate meetings, and inviting them to attend departmental meetings. To the last suggestion, one Senator asked whether we really want Board members poking around at the micro level.

- D. A Senator suggested that President Oldham take some time to go on a “listening tour” around campus. He could interact with new faculty or regular faculty members to get a feel for specific needs as well as the general climate at TTU.

President Oldham liked this idea. He also pointed out that he had visited every academic unit when he first arrived on campus.

- E. The budget needs to be better communicated to the faculty, especially concerning budget cuts. Some specific concerns included the cutting of some UNIV 1020 courses (or similar courses) as well as not knowing if overload pay would be allowed or not with less than a week before the semester begins. These decisions taken during summer months do not allow for significant faculty input.

President Oldham clarified that the budget was not cut, but rather it was overspent. He also noted that there is a need to work out of spending a disproportionate amount of money on teaching overloads and adjunct faculty moving forward. He will look into the overload pay issue. President Oldham also stressed that TTU needs a university guideline on faculty workloads, indicating that the average faculty workload per semester is 265 student credit hours, which is not heavy. He noticed that some faculty have heavy loads, while others have lighter workloads. He is not advocating for “one size fits all,” but the faculty workloads need to make sense. He also asked to what extent the Deans have communicated to their Chairs regarding the overload pay issue. Senator Killman replied that a committee was formed last year to work on the faculty workload question, but a consensus has been difficult to come by due to the vast diversity of academic units on campus. When asked if decreasing the amount of adjuncts on campus meant an intention to hire more full-time instructors, the President replied that they have already hired more full-time lecturers. As for the UNIV 1020 courses,

President Oldham noted that a lot of money is being invested in them and wondered if any assessment was done to see their effect on retention. Senator Stein replied that he had done some initial assessment and that no effect on assessment was found.

F. A Senator asked whether salary increases would strictly be merit-based in the future.

President Oldham replied that this is probably the case and asked if this was fair. A Senator replied that academic unit size calls into question the merit-based system. President Oldham conceded this point. He continued that if faculty did a reasonable job last year, they got something. Some discussion ensued on issues surrounding raises. Ultimately, the Department Chairs decide who receive raises or not. President Oldham observed that when he first began at TTU, there were low faculty salaries and that the student / faculty ratio was 22:1. Now, faculty salaries are 15-20% higher and the student / faculty ratio is 18:1. These points were a priority for President Oldham in the past and will continue to be so in the future.

G. President Oldham asserted that the use of adjuncts should not be to reduce costs, but rather as an opportunity to bring in specialized experts to teach a class on their area of expertise that students would not be able to attend otherwise.

President Oldham closed on some final thoughts. We are blessed to have careers in Academe. He takes our comments and concerns seriously and continues to work on shared governance.

III. Dr. Debbie Barnard, Chair of the Financial Aid Committee, addressed the Faculty Senators and asked them for input on how to improve communication with the Financial Aid Office. Some comments, questions, and suggestions follow and others will be sent to Dr. Barnard directly by Google doc:

1. Normally a faculty member does not know who has financial aid in class and who does not.
2. What are the degrees of freedom for financial aid?
3. A Financial Aid 101 workshop would be beneficial for faculty and advisors.
4. When advising for summer school, it would be beneficial to know (or implement) the extent Hope scholarships can be used and what constitutes satisfactory academic standing.
5. What is the status of university and academic scholarships? How many have been awarded? How are these scholarships determined?
6. Clarify the application of federal work-study and assess how it may conflict with a student's course load.
7. The fact that federal money will only be applied to courses in the student's program of study will be problematic.
8. How can students apply for waivers for test fees through the Office of Financial Aid. This opportunity needs to be publicized more widely.
9. Clarify differences between federal grants and academic grants in work-studies opportunities and elsewhere.
10. Can we streamline the process for applying for different scholarships?

11. Can students receive their financial aid in their accounts earlier? Every semester some students indicate that they cannot buy their books until a week or two after the semester has begun, putting them behind in their studies from the beginning.

IV. The Senate President asked Senators to break up into groups and consider some important issues that will need to be taken up by the Senate in the 2018-2019 academic year. These issues included:

1. Tenure situation at TTU. It is direly important to indicate the importance of tenure to the Board. Senator Stein made two important points: first, we will not be able to hire the best faculty if tenure is not available at TTU, and second, tenured faculty members were terminated in recent years for performing poorly. The tenure system is working here and need not be changed. Senator Killman stressed the need to advocate for tenure at all levels, including Board members, administrators, community members, students, etc.
2. Definition of productivity. Discussion on this point ensued. Some saw the need for the Senate to create a wide-ranging definition of productivity and to make it a Senate resolution. Others thought that each department should take responsibility for coming up with a definition specific to their academic unit.
3. Ask for a role (representation) in the tenure review report mentioned by President Oldham.
4. Follow up on the study of gender equality pay conducted last year.
5. Examine treatment of valued emeriti faculty (issues of parking, office space, etc.).
6. Examine salary inversion issue (Department of English).
7. Set time limits in Senate meetings to get through business efficiently.
8. Receive update on Fitzgerald issue. Also, revisit and revise the 780 policy.
9. Discuss whether to invite VP Stinson and Provost Bruce to Senate meetings with the President. Some felt that they will be able to answer questions that the President cannot, while others thought that they might take up valuable time unnecessarily. (SEPT 10 AGENDA)
10. Discuss the possible restructuring of gen ed requirements and understand what were TBR requirements and what continue to be State requirements. Faculty should contribute to any revision of our gen ed requirements.
11. Discuss the position of VP for Research and Economic Development.
12. Discuss whether our Carnegie classification is advantageous or not.
13. Discuss and ask for clarification to the notion of “STEM-infused” and the importance of academic units to be nationally renowned.
14. Discuss whether the Library has the resources needed to comply with the Carnegie classification of TTU.
15. Invite Brandon Johnson, Vice President of Enrollment Management, to a Senate meeting to update us on enrollment matters, including the marketing of coming directly to TTU instead of a community college. (SEPT 10 AGENDA)
16. Ask President, “What do we need to know that we don’t already?”
17. Begin the process to select the next faculty representative on the Board. (SEPT 10 AGENDA)

These notes were discussed at length at the September 10, 2018 Senate Business Meeting and corrections and critical feedback were made. See the Minutes of the September 10th Senate Business meeting for these discussion notes.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Groundland, TTU Senate Secretary