

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President
February 18, 2018

Members Present:

Douglas Airhart, Ismet Anitsal, Jeremy Blair, Troy Brachey, Andrew Callender, Corinne Darvennes, Ahmed ElSawy, Steven Frye, Mark Groundland, David Hajdik, Paula Hinton, David Larimore, Regina Lee, Lori Maxwell, Christine Miller, Holly Mills, Lachelle Norris, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Sally Pardue, Richard Rand, Jeff Roberts, Leeann Shipley, Cara Sisk, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Zac Wilcox, Kim Winkle, Jeanette Wolak

Members Absent:

Deborah Ballou, Michael Best, Tammy Boles, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Stuart Gaetjens, Melissa Geist, Jeremy Hansen, Ann Hellman, Shelia Hurley, Barbara Jared, Christy Killman, Seth King, Ben Mohr, Mohan Rao

Guests:

Curtis Armstrong, Lee Wray

Call to Order

Senate President Smith called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Announcements by Faculty Senate President

Senate President Smith reminded the Senators about the election to select the faculty representative on the Board of Trustees at the next business meeting. Candidates will have time to give us their arguments for becoming the next faculty representative. The nominating committee will send out the nomination packets with each of the candidates' information tomorrow by e-mail. Senate President Smith also indicated the need to form a nominating committee to replace Senator Smith Andrews as President-elect.

President Oldham's Opening Comments

President Oldham noted that the newly renovated University Center is now open. Spring enrollment is acceptable from a budgetary perspective. Building next year's budget is ongoing and President Oldham is optimistic based on information coming from the Governor's Office. We will know more about next year's budget after Governor Lee's "State-of-the-State" address on March 4th. President Oldham noted that funding for the new engineering building is #4 on the Capitol Projects list, which is very good.

Discussion Topics

Promotion Issues for First Cohort of Lecturers

President Oldham noted that some lecturers probably did not effectively negotiate credit for prior years of service when Tennessee Tech enacted the new promotion policy a few years ago. He does not want anyone to be caught in technicalities. It is better to negotiate these things up front to avoid any misunderstandings. He admitted to not knowing details of any individual cases. He would support some possible reconsideration, with the approvals of the Departments, Deans, and the Provost's Office.

A Senator noted that some Lecturers were asked to complete an Exception form, which the Provost's office later rejected. Currently the deadline to go up for promotion has passed. President Oldham asked to see whether the Deans of these lecturers supported the Provost's decision, if not, his office would look into it. He needs to know more about each specific case. Lee Wray will look into the Exceptions submitted, and why they were denied.

New Clock-In Policy for Staff

The only people who need to clock in online (using Time Clock Plus) are part-time hourly staff, temporary hourly staff, and student workers. Regular hourly employees will not clock in. Lee Wray clarified that all full-time employees may have to use Time Clock Plus to submit their leave reports, and only when leave is needed. He will check with Leslie Crickenberger to see if there are any real substantive changes with this new system and convey this information to Deans and Department Chairs.

Handling of Employee Dismissals

President Oldham noted that the most recent case was not a Reduction in Force (RIF), but rather due to the reorganization of a particular unit. Nevertheless, he prefers that any dismissal be handled in a gentle and humane manner. On the other hand, HR and security advise to move dismissed employees out as soon as possible to minimize risk. He has asked the supervisor of the most recently dismissed employee and HR to see if there are any lessons to be learned. Senate President Smith asked how long a university policy officer has escorted the dismissed employee from the premises. Lee Wray noted that this has been happening at least since he was hired in September 2017. Senate President Smith followed up by noting the broader question of the university environment shifting to a business model. He asked if there might be a kinder way to treat dismissed employees, especially those who have not done anything wrong.

Senators offered the following comments and suggestions:

1. Might the administration consider retirement buyouts instead of RIFs?
 - President Oldham indicated that buyouts can be successful, but they are also often imprecise. It is difficult to target a particular unit where the reduction is needed. Buyouts have been discussed informally.
2. Perhaps the administration can offer more attractive severance packages.
 - President Oldham replied that Tennessee Tech does the best as possible with severance packages and assistance, but there are limitations.
3. The tone of the campus is changing. Does an official RIF policy exist, one that is not for reasons of financial exigencies?
 - President Oldham noted that there are policies relating to employment law. He admitted that, to his knowledge, there is no Tennessee Tech policy governing an exact practice for the dismissal of employees. Lee Wray noted that HR has some guidelines regarding dismissals: how to let someone know, the need to have a campus officer accompany the employee from the premises, etc.
4. It is important to treat employees as you would like to be treated. Perhaps the campus officer can dress in plain clothing when escorting the dismissed employee. People want to feel respected.
5. Would it be possible to cut off an employee's access to sensitive data? This way they will have more time to leave campus.

6. Those employees who are dismissed remain in the community. They communicate with others and let their opinions known. The reputation of the university is at stake.
7. Do the Tennessee Tech police know which employees have guns? Is this why the police chief accompanies the dismissed employee?
 - President Oldham replied that the police chief has access to this information and it may be part of the reason for his presence. Other Senators asserted that a police presence in these instances is standard HR practice. President Oldham reminded Senators of tragic situations on other campuses. He wants to avoid any risk.
8. Would it be possible to have a representative for the dismissed employee present when leaving the premises? Also, when dismissing someone, why not call them into another room?
 - Lee Wray replied that policy dictates that the supervisor accompany the dismissed employee to the HR office. There have been instances when those dismissed returned to their offices themselves, unaccompanied. President Oldham is open to improving dismissal procedures, including the presence of an advocate for the dismissed employee.
9. A Senator shared that she was accompanied from her office after being dismissed from employment in industry. Since this was standard practice, she did not feel disrespected.
10. Before, Tennessee Tech treated its faculty and staff like family. Things have changed. We should not treat our secretaries like criminals.
11. How employees are dismissed has consequences for those who remain at Tennessee Tech, such as morale. Sensitivities are currently heightened. The administration should aim to uplift its employees and even celebrate those who have been dismissed for reasons other than cause.
12. Faculty morale relates to the retaining of junior faculty. A collegial atmosphere goes a long way to keeping dynamic, young faculty. Conversely, declining morale (due to RIF situations, for example) may cause these same tenure-track faculty to leave.

Issue of Safe Audible Crosswalks

Visually impaired students cannot access buildings (such as Foundation Hall and the STEM Center) because streets (such as Peachtree) do not have audible crosswalks. President Oldham appreciated the concern. Tennessee Tech University does not have jurisdiction over city streets. He has communicated the need for audible crosswalks to the city. He will check into this matter.

Policy 205, Faculty Tenure

Dr. Curtis Armstrong reported on revisions to the Faculty Tenure Policy. The aim of the revisions is to make tenure procedures more effective for the candidate, for the tenure committee chair, for all involved. There are 12 members on the faculty tenure committee, many of whom are Faculty Senators. Dr. Armstrong encouraged feedback. He noted the following substantive changes:

1. The actual text has been rearranged for clarity of use.
2. Section II, "Relevance of Tenure" is new.
3. Section X, "Appealing Denial of Tenure" was added.
4. Clearer language was used.
5. Material was added to Section VII, "Criteria to be Considered in Tenure Recommendations."

Faculty Senators gave the following feedback:

1. During Tennessee Tech's last accreditation period with SACS-COC, it was pointed out that individual student instruction (such as capstone courses, theses, independent studies) should be tabulated in the area of research, not teaching. They explained that SACS-COC has a maximum allowable teaching time and these individualized teaching experiences move some faculty over their allowable teaching time. In Section VII.B.2.e of the revised tenure policy, these specialized instructional activities are under the criterion of teaching. Will this be acceptable to our accrediting agency?
 - Dr. Armstrong considers this a separate issue. It should not affect Tennessee Tech's tenure policy.
2. Other important audiences for our revised tenure policy are the public and legislators, as well as some in our own academic community. The first section of this policy certainly helps explain the role of tenure at Tennessee Tech.
3. Does the sentence from Section II, "Tenure for faculty at a university is not a 'job for life'" appear in the tenure policies at other universities? Is this wording appropriate in a policy? Other Senators liked the directness of the statement.
4. Is there an appeal process for those tenure-track professors who are not granted tenure?
 - Yes, a paragraph describes how this process occurs.
5. When in the process to appeal a tenure decision, does the candidate learn the outcome? It seems that the candidate hears the decision after 60 days of the filing of the appeal, whereas administrators learn of it much earlier.
 - Dr. Armstrong will look at this issue and make a friendly amendment if necessary.
6. In the section on teaching (VII. B.2), the phrasing, "...all faculty members will be evaluated with respect to **each** of the following criteria for teaching," contradicts the statement beforehand, "Although departments/units may assign varying degrees of significance to individual criteria,..." Not everyone accomplishes **each** of the criteria listed, such as advising.
 - Dr. Armstrong clarified that the criteria in this section are all relevant to teaching, but may not all be relevant to a particular tenure-track faculty member. He will review the wording of this section and the same wording in the section on research.
7. Do we grant tenure to lecturers?
 - No, we only grant tenure to those on the tenure track.
8. Under Section V.D, the dismissal for curricular reasons is not explained, whereas the dismissal for adequate cause and financial exigency is, although not clearly.
 - Dr. Armstrong explained that Kae Carpenter's textual explanations in Policy 207 on these same points are more complete and would be applied to both policies.
9. Does it state in this policy that the teaching criterion of tenure-track faculty are evaluated in every course?
 - Dr. Armstrong replied that all courses would be evaluated, except instances such as capstone courses, the direction of theses, etc.
10. There are mentions of Assignment of Responsibilities (Section V.A.) and Agreement on Responsibilities (Section VII.A.). Also, has the policy language been revised to remove

gender specific pronouns, he and she? It would be preferable to refer to Departments, Schools, Programs, the library, and the like as an all-encompassing “unit.”

➤ Dr. Armstrong will look into these suggestions.

11. The communication of the candidate’s status at each stage of the approval process is an important addition to the tenure policy.

Other Such Matters

Senate President Smith asked for agenda items for the next business meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Groundland, Secretary of the Faculty Senate