

Faculty Special Senate Meeting Minutes
September 13, 2021

Submitted by K. Craven

Members Present:

Stephanie Adams, Douglas Airhart, Dan Allcott, Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Melissa Comer, April Crocket, Kris Craven, Mary Lou Fornehed, Scott Hagarty, David Hajdik, Syed Rafay Hasan, Katherine Hermann-Turner, Tammy Howard, Samantha Hutson, Janet Isbell, Christy Killman, David Larimore, Emily Lee, Jane Liu, Mark Loftis, Chad Luke, Jeanette Luna, Lori Maxwell, Jennifer Meadows, Holly Mills, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Kristin Pickering, Elizabeth Ramsey, Richard Rand, Christopher Reames, Lee Ann Shipley, Drew Sisk, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Holly Stretz, Dan Swartling, Lenly Weathers, Kimberly Winkle, Laith Zuraikat

Members Absent:

Steve Canfield, Yun Ding, Dennis Duncan, Steven Garner, Matt Langford, Ann Manginelli, Scott Smith, Robert Wilbanks, Russ Witcher

Call to Order

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

Approval of Agenda

Senator Airhart made a motion to approve the agenda. Senator Rand seconded. There was no discussion. The motion was approved.

Overview of Covid-19 Cases

1. Cases on TTU Campus
2. Cases in Putnam County
3. Hospitalization at CRMC

Today there are 89 reported cases on campus. There was an all-time high number on Friday. It is believed that in general cases are being under-reported, so these numbers are lower than actual. Numbers from the Students Affairs Office shown in the table below.

Week	Excused Absences	non-Covid
4	206	23
3	223	31
2	111	17
1	46	6

There is a trend that between Monday and Friday there generally is a climb in numbers and then a drop to create a sawtooth pattern.

Senator Hagarty discussed the handout that was distributed to the Senate members prior to the meeting. This data was pulled from the Tennessee Department of Health. He said that vaccination rates are more difficult to find, but it is very low. It is also known that the Cookeville Regional Medical Center is overloaded. The numbers do indicate that the vaccine is working for those who have chosen to take it.

Senator Fornehed discussed her experiences working at the hospital. She said that most of the patients at the hospital are very sick and they have converted many areas to dedicate to the Covid patients. There continue to be deaths. Almost all of the Covid patients are unvaccinated.

Senator Rand described some work he has done at CRMC with his church. His has seen considerable stress and strain among the patients and families. He also discussed the hospital's need to send some patients home before they normally would have due to over crowded conditions and needing more space for the sicker patients.

Discussion of Covid-19 Concerns

- The university requires other vaccines, why not the Covid-19 vaccine? One explanation could be that the Pfizer just officially received full approval, which is needed for requiring it. Therefore, it is now a possibility.
- We should consider returning to required social distancing in classrooms and campus buildings. There are too many instances of large meetings where persons are intermingling. But what would be the threshold? The data shows that Tennessee is in the high transmission category, what happens when the category changes? There are CDC guidelines, we should follow them.
- What is the end game? A mandate is a poor way to do it. It is better to encourage and support the students. The split/hybrid from last year was not effective. Maybe we need more sections and fewer students in each section to accommodate social distancing.
- There is the problem of the slippery slope. Different rules apply in different places, hard to differentiate. Small groups of unmasked students is the biggest issue.
- Need better communication. The theater director asked about requiring vaccine or negative test to go to the play, but hasn't received any response. This probably needs to be addressed by the implementation team.
- We saw a similar thing with the SGA students talking about the survey that resulted in the change in the calendar. The students are intelligent and they see that the communication messages are mixed.
- We want everyone to get vaccinated. There are some hard decisions coming because of the government mandate that has been proposed. There is likely to be a health care crisis because of the fatigue of the workers dealing with Covid.
- We should focus on actionable measures. Maybe be more stringent about the Fitness Center and the Library. We should be using the carrot and not the stick, incentivize the students so that they want to get vaccinated. Use incremental steps.

- We want to see everyone following the same expectations, including the university administrators.
- We need to make sure there is sufficient faculty representation in the room making the decisions. In 2009 there was a pandemic plan created, all administrators. Now the Senate President is there. However, one faculty member is not enough.
- Preview Day – some faculty do not want to participate with the current plans, including not requiring masks when outside but under tents meeting with students and parents. Senate President Luna said she is in those meeting and will raise to possibility of masks throughout, not just inside.
- With the inconsistent communication it is being made more comfortable for those who choose not to be vaccinated. If we make it more uncomfortable for them, maybe more will choose to get the vaccine.

Senate President Luna summarized:

- 1) Rewarding vaccination
- 2) Slogans and communication to students
- 3) Social distancing options
- 4) Enforcement of wearing masks – more widely across campus
- 5) Flexibility to provide proof of vaccination/negative test results
- 6) Inconsistent messaging

Resolutions for Consideration

Resolution on CDC guidance and vaccinations,

https://www.tntech.edu/facultysenate/pdf/TTU_FS_Resolution_on_CDC_guidance_and_vaccinations.pdf

Resolution thanking Upper Cumberland Health Care Workers

https://www.tntech.edu/facultysenate/pdf/TTU_FS_Resolution_thanking_Health_Care_Workers.pdf

Senator Smith-Andrews motioned approval of the Resolution on CDC guidance and vaccinations. Senator Fornehed seconded.

Senator Hagarty suggested adding strongly with encourages for both instances. – This will be adopted as a friendly amendment to the motion. There was additional discussion about who should be listed in the resolved clauses of the resolution. The friendly amendment will be to say: all faculty, staff, students, subcontractors, and campus visitors. As for how to disseminate the resolution, Senate President Luna encourages all Senators to share widely. She plans to send it to the President’s Cabinet and the implementation team. There were 2 abstention votes and no nay votes, the motions passed.

Senator Fornehed motioned for approval of the Resolution thanking Upper Cumberland Health Care Workers. Senator Smith-Andrews seconded.

Senator Howard asked that Whitson-Hester be added to the name of the School of Nursing. – This will be accepted as a friendly amendment. There were no abstentions or nay votes, the motions passed.

Other Such Matters

Senate President Luna informed the Senators that she plans to collect money for a take-out-night at CRMC to thank the workers. She will collect money and coordinate with Amy Hall to purchase pizza (or other take-out) one night soon. Please send your \$5 donations to her.

Adjournment

Senator Fornehed moved to adjourn the meeting. Senator Ransey seconded. The meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Approved: September 27, 2021