

November 28, 2022

Meeting with the President notes

Via TEAMS

In attendance: President Maxwell, Secretary Killman, Past-President Luna, President-Elect Allen, Senators Manginelli, Comer, Park, Ojo, Swartling, Meadows, Smith-Andrews, Fornehed, Turner, Weathers, Lee, Burch, Null, Loftis, Upole, Hajdik, Liu, Allcott, Isbell, Mullen, Hutson, TSmith, Frye, Brachey, Mills, O'Conner, Pickering, Rajabali, SSmith, Langford, Winkle, Rand, Spears, Sisk, Hermann-Turner, Adams, Hasan, Witcher, Crockett, Shipley, Craven, Canfield, Fennewald, Reames, Ding, Alley

Absent: Senators Duncan, Howard

Guests: President Oldham, Lee Wray

Call to Order: 3:35pm

Thank you for attending today President Oldham and Chief Wray.

Everyone has copies of the questions.

Question:

Were there residual merit funds from 2021-2022 and if so, how were they allocated?

Answer:

They were used for promotion increases that took additional money. Based on Faculty Senate recommendation last year, we approved going forward with increased promotion increments for faculty being promoted to Associate or Full Professor and those dollars were used in that capacity.

Question:

In response to the vote of no confidence in the CFO, given that the Faculty Senate carefully considered and passed a vote of no confidence, what actions will be taken to restore confidence in this office?

Answer:

I would send that back to the Faculty Senate, given **you** are expressing the lack of confidence. What advice or suggestions would you provide to restore confidence in that office?

Question:

Will the President consider reorganization so that HR does not report to the CFO, as noted as a conflict of interest and raises ethical concerns? Not just a question now but a suggestion previously. Is that a consideration that we can work toward collaboratively?

Answer:

It has been and still is under active consideration. There are challenges associated – one of which is not creating additional administrative costs. Open to suggestions from Faculty Senate or anybody else. Exploring a Chief Operating Officer for the University, but it's costly. Might be the right thing to do in the long run.

Question:

Have you considered HR to be a cabinet level position?

Answer:

It's worth considering. Has challenges. Open to this conversation continuing. There's not a clear answer. I understand the concerns and will continue to look for answers to this.

Comments:

We had this conversation at the end of last semester. AVP Vetter said that at roughly half the institutions HR reports to the President and the other half to a VP. Would like to see some action since this was brought up last April. What can we do to help move the conversation along?

Answer:

Similar issues made me think of COO for the campus. A lot of things fall in that area that are fundamental to the operation of the campus. Have to decide what is in the best interest of the campus.

Question:

Is there a timeline when looking at a COO or other cabinet level?

Answer:

At the cabinet level – it's been a few months since Dr. Johnson left. Karen Lykins has served as interim. This week, I will request approval to restructure and merge the office of Communication & Marketing within Enrollment Management and Communication and it will be headed by Karen Lykins. She will be VP in that unit. As part of that restructuring, the office of the Registrar will move into Academic Affairs, effective January 1. That will eliminate 1 cabinet level position. It should be a much more effective and efficient structure and will decrease the size of the cabinet. It's pretty much cost neutral. We could look at adding a COO and splitting some responsibilities of CFO. Have been having the conversation for some years with Dr. Stinson. I think it would be a good approach, but some significant costs. Likely happier but will cost us.

Quick update - near record enrollment this fall, and we are ahead in applications and admits for next year.

Question:

What units will stay under Karen and are we hiring others who have the expertise that she lacks?

Answer:

Communications & Marketing will stay the same as it has been. Enrollment (admissions, financial aid, career placement) will stay put. Registrar will be relocated to report to the Provost. The one area that is a little short is analytics related to enrollment. Looking to fill the gap either internally or from someplace else.

Comment:

A good partnership between recruitment/admissions and the faculty is necessary. Karen is the one who frequently speaks negatively about the faculty in the press. Maybe there should be another person speaking out.

We have a new news director starting in January that will take that off Karen's plate.

Comment:

We have to be very concerned about appearances, not just how things are. They should align to build trust.

Be as open as possible and provide information as appropriate. Intent is to provide sufficient transparency so that everyone feels that everything is done on the up-and-up. We try to learn from mistakes and not repeat them habitually.

Question:

Who took Steven Keller's position?

Answer:

Frank Tittle, he is permanent.

Question:

Can we have an update on number of police officers, the status of the department and whether or not the campus is safe?

Answer:

Salaries raised about a year ago. That's not something we publicly disclose. Adjusted to help salaries be competitive. Chief Nelson will tell, they are facing a shortage of people interested in doing the job. Added 4 security officer positions to do supplemental jobs like unlocking doors and running dispatch. 7 officers, 8th starting in Dec. plan to hire 2 more in January. Data compared to other universities indicate the campus is safe. No more important duty on campus than to keep everybody safe.

Comment:

We are no longer the isolated islands of safety that we once might have been. Wall Street Journal says crime is moving toward college campuses nationwide.

Question:

What is the status of employees in ORED?

Answer:

Bit of revolving door. Dr. Pinkert is here as paid consultant to help in the Research office. Have hired a new director of sponsored programs that will start next week. He's from Vanderbilt and comes highly recommended. Where we are now vs where we were 2 years ago – down about 3 people. Working to get back to that level. Work to get those positions filled and get people engaged. Asked Dean Slater from Engineering to chair search for next VP for Research. Recommendations from the Provost for participation from research active faculty. Goal to have in place by next summer as well as vacant positions filled by then. Still making progress in terms of research funding. All proposals are leaving campus appropriately. Best answer at this time, it is a work in progress.

Question:

Who is signing off on grant proposals?

Answer:

President Oldham is serving in that capacity since Dr. Pinkert is a consultant. He has not failed to get any out in time.

Question:

Status of HR salary study?

Answer:

Size of the project required an RFP. Received 1 bid and it's under study to see if they are capable to do the work as requested. Timeline depends on how soon we can identify a suitable contractor to conduct the study. I've been told it will take about 6 months once they get started.

Question:

Has the state directed TTU to shore up reserve funds because they were low? Can we get a record of TTU reserve funds over the last decade?

Answer:

Don't have that handy. The state has never directed or expressed any concerns about our reserves being too low or in jeopardy. Universities must maintain between a 2-5% reserve. We have always been in that range. The board looks at regularly. How protected are we against unexpected issues? Should it be 2% or 5% or between? We've always fallen in the acceptable range.

Comments:

Appreciate the collaborative tone the president has expressed in this meeting. Matches collaborative tone of my fellow senators.

Mrs. Lykins said in the paper recently,

"Grievances made by senate are grossly inaccurate and university leadership strongly disagrees and deeply regrets the action taken by the university faculty senate."

We need to have this conversation – when the administration is talking to the paper thru Mrs. Lykins. You can't talk to us one way in this room and have someone do a basic hit job on us in the public forum, that's where we come at odds.

Rebuilding trust... that's where the trust rebuild needs to happen. People in positions of leadership get a lot of people not happy with you all the time.

Question:

Restoring confidence...Are there any planned changes in the way the budget committee will be run in the future to increase transparency and/or participation by members of that committee? Transparency a big portion of our problem. Most decisions are made before we get in that room.

Answer:

Tasked myself to look at entire budgeting process to see what changes need to be made. Never been totally satisfied. Goal is clear... get sufficient input and for that to be filtered appropriately through various channels ultimately to point of decisions. How to manage that process

Committees are really good at helping identify priorities, not so good at managing things. How can we use committees to help determine priorities and then let the process be more automatic or more discretion to administrative staff to follow through with those priorities.

Comment:

Restore confidence with transparency and communication. Items that led us to where we are now could be dealt with by restructure or changes to procedures in the way we do the budget committee. Instead of meeting so seldom, maybe subcommittees meet more often.

Answer:

Looking into all that and will be happy to share that with Faculty Senate when I have more thought put into it. See if that structure makes sense to senate. Committees can be very useful.

Comment:

From the chat there is no point to a budget advisory committee if there is no advising.

Answer:

Not saying it was ideal, because it wasn't. A lot of times the budget committee doesn't get involved until a lot of the sausage is already made. That's part of the problem. The timing of the process is what's problematic. Often, we don't know enough early enough to have conversations around what to do financially. We've tried to get budget committee more engaged earlier on, but that didn't work because there wasn't always anything to talk about then. Always the question of what's the right composition of the budget committee. It's a tricky question that deserved a lot of study. I'm prepared to do that. Want it to work. The current committee did meet related to October revised budget. Healthy discussion. Took input in form of a survey of members present. With Dr. Stinson and Dr. Bruce looked at all 18 unfunded requests and were able to fund 12 of the 18 requests that were most urgent. Other 6 could be deferred or not as urgent as the others. Input is taken and something gets done with it.

Comment:

Would be helpful to provide full materials in advance to committee members for them to review before the meeting. It has been a standard practice – I had to request a copy in the meeting to even review. Impossible to see tiny numbers on a screen and without any prior opportunity to review material ahead of time. Simple fix.

Answer:

Simple in concept, in practice becomes difficult. It's the timing of all the things.

Question:

Showing of good faith vs what was written in the newspaper. Hammer a nail into the wall and pull it out, the hole is still there. Going to take time for us to start trusting again. Construction on campus...have seen students go through fences and walk through where work is being done. Have seen a student trip and fall. OCHA would have a fit. Companies need to put up proper barriers and trucks need to slow down.

Answer:

Glad you brought it up. Will get someone on it immediately.

Question:

Why is there not a contingency plan in place (and it's known) so that when monies become available in the raise process, there's a plan on how to deal with it? We need to have a plan in place. If you have a

plan, you can rely on that when decisions have to be made quickly. Appears to be an ad hoc decision and that concerns me.

Answer:

There was a practice in place. Every year, HR take a look at equity issues on campus. Some required legally. If equity is based on race or gender, we are obligated to correct those. Not something we publicize. Was a standing practice to look at equity. Based on recent market conditions, had to deviate to hire some vacant positions outside the normal salary range, which triggered HR to look at comparable positions on campus. Not done perfectly. Not transparent in that sense. Was a practice that was consistent over the years. This was just further and deeper than most are comfortable with. Not disagreeing with concerns faculty senate has expressed regarding this. There wasn't an overt effort to circumvent anything, it's something we weren't prepared for, to the point of having a plan. Major reason to have the salary study is so we will have a plan in place. With financial opportunity we can address those things on a priority basis.

Question:

With regard to raises...is there any way that it could be run up the flagpole with the board, along the lines of doing an analysis – the total amount of merit for staff for last 3 years and look at that total allocation amount and present it to the board – low morale among staff – so instead merit based nature, same annual amount toward COLA. Could boost morale for staff, would not defy what the board has suggested.

Answer:

Board has discussed adjusting, within the current merit system. Once informed by the salary study, where we are related to market competitiveness, I would entertain how we can prioritize some areas over others in some years. Board has discretion to determine fence line adjustments. Must be informed by legitimate study to identify where the needs are.

Question:

The salary study – what is the scope of the study? Have an idea of what you are looking for.

Answer:

2 parts: 1) the salary study and 2) evaluation of our process of writing job descriptions and how we advertise to see what we may be doing wrong to attract the best candidates outside the salaries. Is our process too cumbersome, etc.

Question:

What salaries are they looking at? What are they comparing it to? What did we ask for?

Answer:

It is all salaries, all employees.

Comment:

This discussion has been going on for 10 years. Faculty are good at identifying problems. The faculty and faculty senate are willing partners in the quest to make Tennessee Tech as good as possible. The offer is still there and I hope you will take advantage of it.

It's been a productive and collaborative meeting. We very much value and respect everyone's tone. Everyone join us for Lighting the Quad tomorrow evening. Thank you so much.

Meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.

Respectfully submitted by Christy Killman