

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President

October 30, 2023

via TEAMS

Members Present:

Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Megan Atkinson, Teddy Burch, Scott Christen, Melissa Comer, Kris Craven, Mark Creter, April Crockett, Andrew Donadio, Dennis Fennewald, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steve Frye, Syed Hasan, Samantha Hutson, Krystal Kennedy, Christy Killman, Matthew Langford, Richard Le Borne, Jane Liu, Jeannette Luna, Jennifer Mabry, Twanelle Majors, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Holly Mills, Wendy Mullen, Michael Natrass, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Hyewon Park, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Scott Smith, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Amber Spears, Leslie Suters, Kyle Turner, Hannah Upole, Lenly Weathers, Brenda Wilson, Kimberly Winkle

Members Absent:

Sean Alley, Steve Canfield, Yun Ding, Mark Loftis, Joseph Ojo, Mustafa Rajabali, Richard Rand, Christopher Reames

Guests Present:

Lee Wray

Senate President Allen called the meeting to order at 3:37 p.m.

Remarks by President Oldham

LGI (Locally-governed institutions) Presidents will be at Governor Lee's next budget meeting. Between now and next April, there will be a lot of moving of appropriations. We are approaching the state for relief with budget issues. The state is in a good funding position. There will be a special session of the Tennessee General Assembly regarding safety and security; we are not sure how much we will get to further secure our campus

We are recruiting heavily for next fall, and Preview Day went well with approximately 2,000 in attendance. Many "Tech to You" events are being initiated in coordination with Admissions. Those in Chattanooga and Franklin have gone very well.

President Oldham was asked more about the budget help, and he stated that some capital projects have seen an approximate 20% increase since outlay, and plans are in the works to address this.

Questions from the Faculty Senate:

1. College rankings: do we have a plan to improve ranking/visibility? Can faculty contribute?

Rankings should be taken in context as they are sometimes fickle and hard to explain. Via research and focus groups we have learned those who know about us are already favorable to us, but to those who don't know about us, rankings can help with visibility.

We made a jump in the annual U.S. News & World Report rankings. We continue to monitor rankings, and the Provost is interested in this as well. Faculty can work with the Provost to find ways to gain visibility and notoriety (publications, presentations, press releases, etc.) to make a difference and to positively affect public perception of Tech (which can affect rankings).

2. Compensation study: is there a definite timeline for completion? When will Academic departments be able to make salary adjustments as nonacademic departments have? Why aren't all open lines allowed to be filled and the money not moved elsewhere?

The study is ongoing and there are periodic meetings with Mercer. The Board of Trustees will be updated at their next meeting. The study will likely not be complete until February/March.

Regarding the denial/moving of lines: every situation is different. Sometimes the requests are supported and sometimes not, but each decision is made based on what's best for the institution. There is no difference between academic and nonacademic in terms of adjustments and offers.

Tech is trying to stay conscious of equity raises while the study is ongoing. When the study is completed, Mercer will provide a complete analysis regarding where we are and where we need to be. The Board of Trustees will review and make recommendations, but adjustments can be retroactive. The Board will not determine adjustments on an individual level but will decide about the strategic use of funds with regard to the analysis.

3. 43 jobs have been reclassified since the beginning of the year. It appears administrative department adjustments have been made before the compensation study is complete, but academic departments have been told to wait. Why the discrepancy?

According to records, there have been 39 reclassifications since January; 12 of the 39 were in process before the Mercer study began. Those 12 were mainly from different areas, both academic and non-academic. The remaining 27 requests were made since March 1, and 15 were approved. Eight were in non-academic areas, and seven were academic areas. Of those 27, 25 were vacant positions and the reclassification was done to address restructuring. Two were special circumstances – one in Facilities, one in the Registrar's office.

4. Budget Advisory Committee (BAC): in the meeting, a question was asked about what carryforward money was used for and why some carryforward requests were denied. The question was not answered. Where was the carryforward money applied?

Approximately 2/3 of the money remaining at the end of the year was carried forward (roughly \$20 million); 25-30% was not. Some requests were approved and others were not. For those not approved, the money moves to the fund balance which gives us flexibility to deal with a wider variety of issues. For example, \$190,000 went toward new band uniforms. This is an expense that cannot easily be budgeted for because the

recurrence is infrequent.

We would not necessarily be in trouble without the fund balance, but in an emergency, we often have unfilled position money that could be used. Money budgeted and unused will not automatically stay where it was budgeted if it is needed elsewhere, but we adjust based on what we have and what we need.

5. Hiring bonuses: are these being offered? If so which employee categories are seeing offers and what criteria are the offers based on? Are hiring bonuses included in the compensation study?

In some cases, there are moving allowances, but neither the President's Office nor HR is aware of any hiring bonuses. There may be competitive offers that drive a salary offer higher, but no hiring bonuses that we are aware of.

6. Health insurance for graduates: update?

The proposal would have a \$.5 million impact on the budget. It is still an open question, and if we go that way we will have to determine how to fund it.

Open Questions:

Q: The Budget Advisory Committee was restructured and is governed by Policy 102, though changes never came before the Administrative Council or University Assembly. Additionally, two senators with experience and knowledge about the budget were removed from the committee.

A: The structure and function has been frustrating to many. As this is only an advisory committee, the restructuring sought to place those on the committee who can make necessary changes when there are issues. One-half of the committee is the President's Cabinet, and the committee now includes all Deans. Faculty can be represented, but not necessarily solely from Faculty Senate. The committee will now meet 4-6 times per year to allow for timely discussions when needed.

Q: But didn't it meet fewer times?

A: We were meeting on an academic cycle, but will now meet on a budget cycle. The last meeting was ahead of the budget cycle, and the next will be well ahead of the next cycle so we can assess issues in time to make decisions. February will likely be the next meeting.

Q: Regarding Policy 102 and shared governance: does the BAC submit a report to you or any other department like other committees must?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Shouldn't they have to follow the same rules?

A: Not sure that it was supposed to be a standing committee.

Q: Even though it's advisory, there doesn't seem to be a lot of advising; there is no agenda and no reporting. More transparency would be helpful – could it be provided, with more lead time?

A: There will be a shared site for BAC to more easily access and share relevant materials.

Q: Why did we have a budget shortfall of \$800,000 or more?

A: We closed that gap after we presented the final budget to the Board of Trustees. It's not unusual to have a gap.

Q: We have been told if we can just get more students, we will have money for new initiatives; this feels like a shortfall because we are losing lines and carryforward money.

A: There are new initiatives, but not as much as I'd like. There is approximately \$8 million in revenue in the revised budget (including salary money). Revenue is up, but so are costs. Of the \$8 million, \$5 million was salary and \$2 million is held for the Mercer study outcome. We must grow revenue every year or make cuts. We have had two large freshmen classes, but a lot of graduations, too. The goal is to bring at least 2,000 freshmen per year.

Q: We have emeriti faculty working on externally-funded projects, but they have to buy a parking permit. Isn't it odd that emeriti don't get free parking? We want to encourage them to keep sharing their experience, but we don't make it easy for them.

A: Departments and colleges can pay for parking permits for their faculty if they wish. It's an equity issue, too – if emeriti do not pay, why do others have to pay?

A brief discussion of STEM/STEAM initiatives was shared between Senator Creter and President Oldham. The President suggested the STEM center leaders would be a better place to start the conversation on how all disciplines can be involved and what it means.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

Approved: 01/29/2024