

Faculty Senate Business Meeting

January 27, 2020

Members Present:

Douglas Airhart, Jeremy Blair, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Andrew Callender, Wei Tsun Chang, Kris Craven, Yun Ding, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steven Frye, Stuart Gaetjens, Mark Groundland, David Hajdik, Shelia Hurley, Barbara Jared, Brian Jones, Christy Killman, Nancy Kolodziej, Matt Langford, Susan Laningham, David Larimore, Lori Maxwell, Christie Miller, Allan Mills, Holly Mills, Lachelle Norris, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Anthony Paradis, Sally Pardue, Richard Rand, Jeff Roberts, Lee Ann Shipley, Troy Smith, Sandra Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Lenly Weathers, Kimberly Winkle, Jeannette Wolak

Members Absent:

Michael Best, Ahmed Elsayw, Mary Matthews, Mark Melichar, Mike Rogers, Zac Wilcox

Call to Order

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

1. Welcome and President's Comments

a. Senate President Smith-Andrews praised the handling of the recent threat of a coronavirus infection on campus. She was impressed with the communication, the planning, and the protection of the student. Some senators expressed concern that protocol is not outlined in a Tennessee Tech policy, but it was shared that Tech follows the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) protocol in such cases. Another senator expressed concern that the campus at-large was not made aware that proper cleaning measures had been taken in public areas the student had visited. One senator suggested that there be an alternative offered when the campus clinic is not available, and the Senate President said she believed that was being looked into, but that all in need are encouraged to call the clinic before presenting themselves, especially in cases like this.

b. Once the Masterplan is kicked off, faculty will be asked for feedback and participation. The Senate President encouraged everyone to contribute.

c. There are efforts to get the flat-rate tuition model in place for the fall semester. The plan will be phased-in for new first-year and transfer students, and plans are to freeze tuition for four years. It is also planned to offer a Tech Promise last-dollar scholarship for qualifying Pell Grant and TN HOPE students. There will be a deep study on scholarship awards, but that procedure will not be overhauled until 2021 at the earliest. Out-of-state tuition recruitment has already begun in Virginia and Alabama. There are still concerns from senators that advising all students to take at least 15 hours does not take all students' best interests into account.

2. Approval of Agenda

Senator Larimore made a motion to approve the agenda. Senator Fornehed seconded. The motion carried.

3. Approval of Minutes from November 4, 2019 Business Meeting

Senator Stein made a motion to approve the minutes. Senator Allan Mills seconded. The motion carried.

4. Approval of Notes from the November 11, 2019 Meeting with the President

Senator Stein made a motion to approve the minutes. Senator Paradis seconded. The motion carried.

5. Approval of Notes from the November 25, 2019 Meeting with the President

Senator Stein made a motion to approve the notes. Senator Paradis seconded. Senator Norris noted a minor correction was necessary. The notes will be amended as suggested. The motion carried.

6. Minutes from December 2, 2019 Faculty Affairs Appeal Meeting

Due to the confidential nature of the proceedings, the minutes are not public and are archived in the official appeal file in Faculty Affairs.

7. Preference on Receiving Outlook Invite for Senate Meetings?

Most senators were in favor of receiving Outlook invites. Senate President Smith-Andrews will begin sending these for future meetings.

8. Reports

- a. Academic Council: Chairperson Null shared that revised procedures, approval of a new minor, and approval of a new Master of Professional Studies would be among the upcoming topics.
- b. Administrative Council: Chairperson Wolak shared that revised procedures and institutional scholarships policies would be among the upcoming topics. Council members should note the changed location of the meeting to the Tech Pride Room.
- c. none

9. Committee on Custodial Issues

- a. Update: Senator Wolak said there is no update, but she plans to meet with Dan Warren soon to make sure the Facilities and Business Services survey will be offered this spring. It is important to make sure momentum and data regarding custodial services are not lost in the interim.
- b. Craig Short resigned as the Associate Vice President of Facilities and Business Services; Dan Warren will serve as Interim Associate Vice President. It was shared that Cheryl Sullivan's employment ends on January 31, and at that time there will not be a contractual liaison between Tech and SSC. Senators are encouraged to continue using the work order system on the Facilities website to report all problems, concerns, and supply requests.

10. Required/Expected On-Campus Time for Faculty

After further inquiry at both the college/department level and with the Provost, it was determined there were no official changes in expectations or requirements, but that any stringency related to availability and office hours would be decided at the departmental level. The Provost indicated to Senate President

Smith-Andrews that “available” does not have a strict definition regarding physically being on-campus.

11. Policy 732 Intellectual Property Update

The policy was sent out to an external attorney for review, and recommendations have been made for updates to this policy. Expectations are that this policy update may be ready for review and approval in February or March.

12. Policy 780 Research Misconduct Update

This policy will be up for approval soon without any major changes other than those that resulted from mediation.

13. Merit-Based Compensation

Informal Conversation with Board of Trustees members yielded a request for Faculty Senate feedback regarding recent merit-based compensation awards. A majority of senators feel that raises based solely on merit are undermining unit cohesion and creating artificial competition while not creating the motivation for all to do more or do better. Concerns from faculty are centered on equitable treatment of all, not an unwillingness to do more or do better. Some specific areas of concern were:

- Many faculty do much more than the bare minimum, but may never be seen as high-achieving; it sends the wrong message to those who are performing well or above-average that they will never achieve a raise. It feels like a slap in the face to imply most faculty do not deserve a raise.
- Faculty in at least one department begged leadership to spread the money around because they felt guilty that it wasn't shared. Most senators agree that a majority of faculty would rather share the money than seem to compete for it.
- What is the rationale for the metric? Some faculty were told that if they met the metric, they would receive one or the other (bonus or raise), but that did not happen in many cases – some received neither.
- Where is the cost-of-living raise? Why is it prioritized lower than a merit-based raise? Most would prefer an across-the-board cost-of-living raise before factoring in merit; if money remained, then merit bonuses (not raises) would make sense and feel fairer.
- Making the decision halfway through the academic year with evaluations from a year prior as the only standard seems a problematic way to award merit. Further, new department chairs who began in the fall are tasked with awarding merit based on evaluations the new leadership did not conduct for people they have little observed.
- If the percentage eligible for consideration were broadened, there would be less concentration of the merit wealth.
- The entire process lacks transparency and consistency. In some colleges, Deans made the awards, while in others, the chairs made the awards. Some merit was awarded to faculty with heavier student loads, but chairs should be more equitably assigning student loads, so that is problematic. Awards are based on evaluations, which are also handled inconsistently, so if the source material is inconsistent, is the process for awarding fair? There should be no merit-based awards given until the process of evaluation is consistent and fair.

- The quick turnaround time for the award decisions was troubling for some senators. Further, the timing of the awards feels awkward given that they are to be based on year-old evaluations, but are being awarded halfway through another academic year with new and different faculty activity.

The senators would like to inquire what type of evidence or research the Board of Trustees would need to determine that merit-based compensation does or does not work. If the goal is to motivate, it appears to have the opposite effect; it encourages instability and undermines collaboration. Allowing for only merit-based compensation seems to unfairly punish faculty who are doing well or above average, so a cost-of-living raise would be a more equitable and positive use of the pool.

14. Centralized Advisement Center

A senator has been placed on the implementation team that will oversee the creation of a centralized advisement center to be housed in the bottom floor of the library. Though the project is estimated at around \$750,000, there has been no information shared with the implementation team about the reason for this change to our advising structure.

Senators are concerned on many fronts, including:

- What is the main reason for changing the advising structure? If increased retention is the goal, is there data to support this plan?
- How will success be measured?
- Is advising our biggest concern with our students?
- What are the biggest problems with advising currently, and will this center solve them?
- Will this be an improvement over our current system?
- Is there evidence to support that because this plan works at another university it is right for our university and our students?
- Because the center will open in an alternate location while the permanent location is being remodeled, won't this cause too much disruption to a system that is already in place? Why not push the opening to allow for the least amount of disruption?
- Most senators who were approached about this topic or were present for discussions about this center observed no one – faculty or advisors – favoring this plan.
- If the purpose is retention, wouldn't personalized advising within the students' departments be preferable to centralized, general advising where there is less knowledge of the colleges and departments? Departmental advising allows advisors, faculty, staff, departments, and colleges to build community with students from the first day.
- Were retention rates poor, and if so, can that be traced directly to our advising system?
- There are many department-specific placement tests and metrics that would have to be handled in a centralized location without the expertise to make decisions on those tests. Further, there are 2+2 and 3+3 programs that would be delayed if the students aren't advised by their departments early in their curriculum.
- If Student Success Centers will be closed and the number of advisors reduced, how will the load be handled, and will the centralized advisors be leaning on departments for help anyway? If so, where is the improvement to the system?
- If some departments who have funded their own advisors get to keep them, will that lead to inconsistency in the advising process, and how will this be addressed?

The concerns are that there seems to be no evidence this will solve any problems that may exist in a system that is functioning, and that this is therefore not the best use of funds. Senators worry implementation is being rushed without enough consideration for disruption and faculty and staff input. If the center is happening, senators would at least like to see a delay in the implementation until the final space is complete so as to disrupt advising as little as possible for the students.

15. Water Center Request

The Director of the Water Center would like to create an internal advisory board of senior faculty members of varied disciplines. Senator Stretz encourages everyone to consider the invitation to serve. Interested faculty may contact Senator Holly Stretz or Water Center Director Jeff Schaeffer.

16. Good Friday Holiday added by Ad Hoc Committee

Some faculty were surprised to find they were missing an instruction day this term, and it was because Good Friday was listed as a holiday with no classes meeting. In the past, Good Friday has been both a holiday and a work day. More often it was a work day to help balance the calendar of class days for fall and spring semesters. The Calendar and Scheduling Committees each addressed the use of holidays and their impact on instruction, and both concluded that Good Friday would not be a holiday. In the past, Faculty Senate voted to keep that day as an instruction day. According to a memo from Dr. Crickenberger, an ad hoc committee determined the placement for the holidays for the upcoming two years, and Good Friday was established as a holiday. The concern is that such a decision impacts faculty and instruction directly, but the change did not come through Academic or Administrative Councils for approval. Who is on the ad hoc committee, and how can this decision be made without input from faculty or relevant committees?

17. Old Business

None

18. Other Such Matters

- There may still be a discrepancy in compensation for lecturer cohorts. Senators were encouraged to gather facts, examples, and information regarding this issue before the senate pursues the matter with President Oldham.
- The Volpe Library's materials budget is cut every year; the total budget has been cut 50% in the past six years, and the per-student budget amount is lower than it was in 1986. Some departments are seeing subscriptions cut to resources they rely on, but there is no money to avoid this outcome. On inflation alone, the library will have to cut titles every year given the budget it receives. Senators are concerned that if we are to be a research institution, why does the university continually cut the materials budget and access to much-needed research resources?
- Though the coversheet to accompany tenure and promotion consideration has not officially been approved, some departments are being told to use it.

After all discussions, senators observed an overall lack of faculty input being sought in decisions that affect faculty; there is a breakdown of shared governance on more than one level.

Adjournment

Senator Rand moved to adjourn the meeting. Senator Fornehed seconded and the motion was carried.

The meeting adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Supporting documents:

- Water Center Request
- Holidays 19-20-21

Approved: 02/24/2020