

Faculty Senate Business Meeting

February 21, 2022

Submitted by K. Craven

Members Present:

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

Members Absent:

Chris Brown, Steve Canfield, Yun Ding, Jeanette Luna, Holly Mills, Laith Zuraikat

Special Guests: Sharon Holderman

Call to Order

1. President-elect Maxwell standing in for President Luna (out with faculty search obligations)
Senate President Elect Maxwell called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Approval of Agenda

Senator Smith-Andrews moved approval. Senator S. Smith seconded. There was no discussion. The motion was approved.

Approval of Minutes and Notes

2. January 24, 2022 Faculty Senate Business Meeting Minutes

Senator Airhart moved to approve the Minutes from the Business meeting on January 24.
Senator Fornehed seconded. The motion carried.

3. February 2, 2022 Faculty Senate Meeting with the President Notes

Senator Duncan moved to approve the Notes from the meeting with the President on February 2.
Senator Airhart seconded. The motion carried.

Open Education Week and OERs on Campus (Holderman, 15 minutes)

1. What is an OER?

2. How the library can help with OERs and grant support for OERs

3. Discussion

Guest Holderman discussed the explicit rights for faculty to use OERs in their courses. There is no need to ask, this is licensed material that is truly open and absolutely free to use. You can mix and edit the material as well. OERs are becoming very popular. She explained that there are search resources on the library site and faculty can create their own content, although this requires a much larger investment on your part. Unfortunately, the quality of the materials varies and there is a need to review it before adopting for your class.

Guest Holderman also talked about a grant that the university participated in to explore the savings these resources can provide. The students seem to be happy with their use. Some of the participating faculty have sighted higher quiz scores. There is a plan to reapply for the grant.

Tennessee Faculty Senates (TUFS) Update (Smith-Andrews and Maxwell, 20 minutes)

1. Report from January TUFS meeting

2. Upcoming legislative challenges: faculty tenure, over-reach into higher ed classrooms, other topics

3. Discussion

TUFS consists of 11 4-year institutions. There is a lot of information on the web site. The last meeting was on January 28, this is one of 4 meetings per year. Topics that were discussed included the rainy day funding, changing in the funding formula, athletes kneeling, military and in-state tuition, the name-image-likeness policies, Covid 19 issues and challenges, guns on campus, changes in the use of the ACT test for admission, the attack on tenure (there is a desire to make it harder to attain and easier to remove), the efforts to supply broadband for all, and the increase in the Hope scholarship. TTU is potentially hosting the next meeting which will be in April.

Question – Texas is proposing getting rid of tenure entirely, is there a chance that Tennessee will follow?

Response – It is believed that if they could, they would. However, they will not be as forward about it, but will attack it incrementally such that it is likely to be eroded and not just chopped outright.

Question – What can we do?

Response – TUFS has a list of talking points to use with the legislature which came from a commissioned study. This will be share in the chat.

Question – There has been sounding of the alarm for 4 or 5 years. This is a very political argument involving the atmosphere at institutions. This is a tragedy and is connected to racism. They are trying to control what messages are being conveyed in the classroom.

Response – This is correct. It is a matter of freedom. TUFSS has taken a stance and is trying to offer assistance. There is a letter being edited that will be distributed to the legislature very soon. You will be able to see it after it has been distributed. It would be helpful if we use a common voice and refer to the letter for the talking points.

Question – What is the legislature’s stance against tenure?

Response – That it fosters the stereotype that it equates to having a job for life. This provides tenured faculty with an opportunity that others don’t have.

Senate Meeting Open to Public? (Smith, 15 minutes)

1. Should Senate meetings be open to the public/press?

2. Discussion

This is how it was until about 3 years ago when, during an intense period of activity, the meetings were closed in an effort to get control. At that time there were some meetings in which Senators were misquoted in the press. Now you must request permission from the Senate President ahead of time to attend the meetings. Enough time has passed and it is time to go back. Transparency is important and so the community can hear what is happening.

Question – Want to clarify. We are talking about the Business Meetings only. The meetings with the President are closed. You are proposing to re-open the Business Meetings to the public?

Comment – Since the Senate is an advisory board, we are not subject to sunshine rules. There are some other issues that must be considered. For example, the Senate barely fits into the conference room, we will need to find another location to hold the meetings if we open it to the public. There are some things that are different about our Senate compared to others. For example, we allow untenured faculty members to be Senators. This could cause them to hesitate to speak for fear of jeopardizing their tenure with what is said during the meetings. Also, the current situation is that any TTU faculty member is welcome to attend the meetings, it is only others who must request permission. Is it really necessary to make this change?

Comment – The reason it was changed was a concern about information getting out to the public before all of the facts are completely known. Also, members of the press possibly taking things that were said out of context.

Comment in chat – The business meeting minutes are made public on the Senate web site. The issue is with the media reporting versus the facts recorded by the secretary in the minutes. In the minutes, the comments are not always attributed to individual Senator but outside media would report the name. During the approval of the minutes, which occurs before they are released, we vet the minutes and correct any mistakes.

Conclusion – The Faculty Senate Procedures state that the business meetings are open to faculty members. All others must request permission at least one business day prior to the meeting and the decision will be made by the leadership team. In order to change this, the procedures would need to be changed. Therefore, any further consideration will require distribution to the Senators of the proposed procedures change prior to the meeting at which a vote would take place.

Tennessee Senate Bill 2290 (Smith, 45 minutes)

1. Overview of the bill

2. Responses from other universities and TUFS

3. Discussion

Chief Government Affairs Officer and Legislative Liaison Terry Saltsman discussed the situation. This is not the first or likely the last time we will see a bill like this being proposed. Mr. Saltsman is in frequent communication with many of the key constituents for these bills. Currently there are two powerful members of the legislature leading the charge. One concern is the provision of taking funds if don't follow the letter of the law, that is to say that the comptroller of Tennessee can assess large fees. As for the issue with tenure, they are not going after it directly and there is an opportunity for this to be addressed. Mr. Saltsman applauded the TUFS for drafting the letter that is going out to the legislature soon. He feels that this letter gets the point across. He will continue to participate in the dialogue with the legislature members.

Senate President Elect Maxwell expressed gratitude at all of the extra time working on this.

Mr. Saltsman expressed his appreciation for the Senate and the assistance in educating him on the issue.

Question – This is deeply disturbing. Both bill 2290 and 2283 are concerning. There have been similar bills passed in other states where tenure has been tied into it. If either or both of these become law, what is it going to mean for us?

Response – You are correct about other states. There are some higher education non-profits stirring the pot and they are doing the same in Tennessee. These bills are often written elsewhere and introduced to members of the legislature to champion in other places. There could be additional amendments but it is too early to tell what will happen.

Question – What can we do while we wait?

Response – You are taking action. There are some who think they know how the university should operate. The message is being delivered in a positive way. It is no likely that all of this will pass.

Comment – It is best to get behind TUFS. Don't want a lot of senates making statements of their own, it could detract from the message.

Response – Mr. Saltsman agrees that there is strength in a joint message. If you want to send your own message, consider including the joint message developed by TUFSS to show that you support it.

Comment – Not sure exactly what bill 2283 means. Is it saying that we are not to compel students to talk about certain topics? It seems like we are not to controvert obvious falsehoods. There is some concern about the portrayal of TTU – we need to advocate for TTU.

Comment – The bill prohibits faculty from addressing certain issues. There are substantial fines involved.

Comment – Bill 2290 is carefully crafted and coordinated with overriding and lofty principles. It is very close to the edge and could easily be misinterpreted.

Response – Mr. Saltsman attended a subcommittee meeting where they discussed if this would impact how the issues are taught and how content is distributed. The answer was no, it shouldn't affect it.

Comment – About 90% of what I teach is touched by this. We need to make sure that this will not impact our academic freedom or be directed toward the institution itself. Many history courses involve content that would be offensive to some students, so this has been discussed at the department meeting. None of the faculty intend to change their course, if that means firing one of the faculty members, then you will need to fire them all.

Comment – The supporters of these bills will see that as a victory and not a tragedy. It would seem that they are interested in qualified faculty, but they want faculty that they can control. This is not a victory but a financial catastrophe.

Comment – Potential amendments are deeply concerning.

Response – Mr. Saltsman feels that the tenure issue will be a separate bill and not be added as an amendment to either of these bills. These bills are already hitting the subcommittees and 2290 is at the next level meaning it will go to the house floor soon.

Other Such Matters

Senator Adams discussed a concern that there is a national distrust of intellectualism. She put a link in the chat to a letter regarding K-12 libraries with wide spread implication in general. This is just an example of another aspect of control.

Senator Allen raised a concern about the use of the tenure and promotion check-off list. Wasn't this required for new faculty and not retroactive to faculty already on tenure track? Does it have to be approved by the Council for that? It is not shown in the faculty handbook, but is being required in the process for everyone.

Senator Null will need to check into it as she is leading the revision of the pertinent policies. This will be added as an agenda item for the next meeting.

1. Update on Revising Policies 205, 206, 207 – Dr. Bruce asked Dr. Mark Stephens to help us with the next steps of making changes. We will bring updated policies back to Senate before we take them to Councils for approval. Dr. Luna will follow up with Dr. Stephens and ad hoc Chair Null for the next step.

2. Announcement: Council elections are just around the corner in March! This is a good time to speak with faculty interested in serving on Senate.

3. Topics/requests for meeting with the President on March 7th?

4. Any other such matters

Adjournment

Senator Fornehed moved to adjourn the meeting. Senator Mills and Duncan seconded. The meeting adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Approved: March 21, 2022