

Faculty Senate President's Meeting

February 17, 2020

Members Present:

Douglas Airhart, Jeremy Blair, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Wei-Tsun Chang, Kris Craven, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steven Frye, Stuart Gaetjens, Mark Groundland, David Hajdik, A.J. Donadio for 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, Mike Rogers, Lee Ann Shipley, Troy Smith, Sandra Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Lenly Weathers, Kim Winkle, Jeannette Wolak

Members Absent:

Michael Best, Troy Brachey, Andrew Callender, Yun Ding, Sheikh Ghafoor, Mary Matthews, Mark Melichar, Zac Wilcox

Guests Present:

Luke Hayslette, Kathryn Porterfield, Lee Wray

Call to Order

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

Senate President Smith-Andrews' Comments

The format for this meeting will be President Oldham speaking on topics he wishes to share, then there will be time for questions and comments on other business. Brandon Johnson's responses to senators advising concerns will be distributed before the next business meeting.

President Oldham's Opening Remarks

President and First Lady Oldham are kicking off a kindness campaign at Tech in this, "Random Act of Kindness" week. To that end, the President offered purple and gold "Wings of Kindness" armbands to the members of Faculty Senate.

Follow-up remarks:

- **Flat-rate Tuition**

The flat-rate tuition model is set to go before the Board of Trustees for approval at the March board meeting. If enacted, the model will affect only incoming freshmen, and tuition and mandatory fees for continuing students will not increase in the coming academic year. The proposal includes a Tech Promise last-dollar scholarship for lottery and Pell Grant students meeting certain criteria and will cover any gaps in tuition costs. Tech Promise is estimated to cost roughly \$75,000 in the first year, and may reach up to \$300,000 after full implementation at four years. If enacted, Tennessee Tech will be the fourth of nine in the state to go to a flat-rate tuition model. The President noted SGA was on board with the changes and reacted positively.

One senator expressed concern that there would be difficulty in meeting an increase in student hours with available faculty, but the President said that the increase will not be the entire student population to start, and a 12-13% increase in hours seems to be manageable at current levels, though there could appear issues in certain departments. The Provost's office is looking into this consideration.

- **Out-of-State Tuition (OST)**

The OST changes will take effect next fall (only for undergraduates at this time) since they were approved by the Board of Trustees in December. Tech launched a postcard campaign to approximately 8,000 alumni in nearby states, and will email all alumni nationwide with information about recommending students to Tech in light of the decreased OST. Senators requested language regarding OST that could be included on departmental websites and a concise document explaining OST for the departments to reference as-needed.

Academic Advising Center

In light of learning about faculty concerns about the new centralized freshmen advising plan, the President stated this was not a new or rushed push; this has been in the works for 1.5-2 years but dates back to his first year in office. At that time, retention was around 70%. Though centralized advising was discussed then, a hybrid of advising centers and departmental advisors was implemented at a cost of around \$1 million. Since then, the retention rate reached a high of 79% the first year after implementation, but has fall to between 75% and 77% overall. The goal is to get first-year retention above 80% and increase the four-year graduation rate (currently 35-40%).

The faculty involved in the Strategic Plan created goals and expectations for advising, and the current centralized model for freshmen was developed in that spirit. Advising must be holistic and not solely focused on careers; personal and financial factors may play a part in advising, so a centralized approach to advising may help. Over half of universities use some sort of centralized advising model, and we must find what works for our institution. The President feels this model will help Tennessee Tech.

Following are senators' questions and comments and the President's responses:

Q: The desired percentage increase is not a big leap – is this too drastic of a change since we have seen improvement since the current advising structure was implemented?

A: Though gains were made, they have also been lost; the inconsistency is a factor and was addressed by the faculty involved in the Strategic Plan.

Q: Freshmen should meet faculty in their majors; can funds be identified to support departments reaching out to incoming freshmen and their advisors to make connections in the first year?

A: 40% of students do not stay in the same major after the first year, so where is the best place to focus funds and time to deal with that issue? Institutional reports show the change in major is consistent across majors, so it is unclear how to prevent this – is it advising in the first year?

Q: Instead of a temporary location in Foundation Hall for the launch in August, could the opening be delayed?

A: Temporary accommodations in existing rooms in the library have been made until the center is able to open in September.

Q: Won't pulling advisors or sharing advisors across departments decrease the quality in advising?

A: (Lee Wray and President Oldham respond) The model will allow for more advisors overall to be sent

to the colleges. All Student Success Centers will be maintained except for the College of Agriculture and Human Ecology which opted to use centralized advising.

Q: Will advisors be trained well enough? Some departments administer placement exams and faculty are advising from the beginning – will centralized advisors know and understand the needs of these departments?

A: Faculty are not precluded from working with students in addition to their centralized first-year advising.

Q: How will we communicate with advisors if mistakes in advising are made, and are there other metrics to measure success besides retention rates?

A: Advisors will have core areas of expertise and will be principal contacts with departments, and departmental faculty/staff can spend time with advisors to make sure they are advising appropriately. Regarding metrics, having a centralized advising model will allow for lots of data to measure success.

Q: Will faculty mentoring be lost, and can we double-check the number of advisors per college?

A: Faculty are encouraged to keep mentoring students. Centralized advising is only for freshmen; after the first year, advising remains decentralized. It may be helpful to better define the roles of faculty advisors and how they do/do not differ from professional advisors. Departments like Foreign Languages and Chemical Engineering have only used faculty advisors, but they can still remain involved in the first year, just without the transactional pressure of advising. Yes, we will double-check the number of advisors.

Q: How many majors will each centralized advisor see/how will they navigate in working out the kinks?

A: Advisors will cover groups of majors that make sense. The four theme groups presented in a draft document, if used, may need better definition.

Q: Why rush, in light of training concerns?

A: This does not feel rushed (to President Oldham), and most advisors will have already been here and been trained through the years, but they will have to learn of other colleges and majors.

Q: Why do we feel this move is the right move for this university?

A: Data support a central focus equals more success, but we must find the balance. Do we accept the numbers as they are, or try something new and see if it will help?

Q: Do we know why some students don't return?

A: Conventional wisdom would indicate that money is the major concern, but telephone surveys conducted years ago revealed students loved Tech, but could not return for various reasons, not solely financial. Advising must be holistic and proactive, and though there are no guarantees, this plan is worth trying.

Q: Is the library the best location for a centralized advising center? Is it welcoming enough?

A: It is possible that the location may need to change down the road, but that is unclear at this time. According to studies, one of the top reasons students choose a college is the college environment. This space is new and will be built out to be as welcoming as possible. The library is a busy place visited by many students, so it seems central to the campus.

Q: Of the telephone surveys conducted for the 25% who did not return, how many did not value college at all?

A: Nothing suggested at the time that not valuing college was a reason; some may have stated a basic reason, but there were personal factors that were behind the reasons, so it cannot be identified as one main

reason. Many were outside of the region Tech generally reaches, but our demographic is now changed and widening.

Q: Because there is no Institutional Report data since 2018, and retention rates were higher than 79% in some departments, how can we know the reasons for the drop in retention? Will we revert to the current system of advising if needed?

A: We are for what works, so we will make changes when we need to.

Q: Should advising be focused on students who have not declared a major?

A: This model will address those students.

Q: Advising is currently effective in many areas; when assessing what works, how will we know what to attribute to advising, or the flat-rate tuition, or other factors?

A: It is not possible to disaggregate the data at the level.

General comments from senators regarding the new advising model:

- Not everything we try is working; do we know if we have anything to lose, and if yes, perhaps we should make it airtight before just trying something new.
- We should use the software we already have for scheduling to help create learning communities.
- Declines in returning students is not always related to Tech but may be a reflection of the economy or other factors.
- Contact points and engagement with students is a huge factor in retention.

Other Matters of Concern

Senators would like the decline in the library's budget for research materials to be looked into as faculty are losing valuable resources. Some senators would like to see faculty represented in the Tech home page video collage. Senators would like to reinstate the Faculty Compensation Committee as well as have an evaluation of how merit was awarded at the end of 2019.

President Oldham thanked the senators for their input and ideas.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

Approved: 02/24/2020