

## **Faculty Senate President's Meeting**

April 6, 2020

### **Members Present:**

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

### **Members Absent:**

Michael Best, Yun Ding, Susan Laningham, Mary Matthews, Joseph Ojo, Troy Smith

### **Guests Present:**

Lee Wray

### **Call to Order**

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

### **Senate President Smith-Andrews' Comments**

Senate President Smith-Andrews opened the meeting by reminding everyone of the features of Zoom that will help the meeting run smoothly (mute, chat, raising hands).

### **President Oldham's Opening Remarks**

The President noted the beautiful trees on campus before thanking everyone for everything they are doing during this online instruction period. He stated there has been an overwhelmingly positive response regarding students' experiences and comments. While we all know this is not normal, he appreciates that everyone seems to not only be rising to the challenge, but also going above and beyond.

The President cautioned that there is still more work to do as challenges keep presenting themselves. The President and Cabinet meet as often as possible to address issues, keeping a focus on everyone's health and safety. The campus has about 10% of its workforce remaining on-campus at this time.

The peak infection rate for Tennessee was predicted to have been April 20, but updated projections have adjusted that date to April 18 and predict fewer deaths than initially expected. Tennessee Tech will maintain their plan for the foreseeable future. Buildings are being locked to minimize foot traffic and Facilities is expediting keys for those who requested access to their building. Though there are occasional glitches due to reaction times, most of the plan is running smoothly.

Steps have been taken to assist students and reduce anxiety, such as extending the drop deadline, waiving online fees for summer school courses pushed to online delivery, and offering the pass/fail grading option. Graduation is postponed, not cancelled, and students will be surveyed about their needs.

In light of all that is going on and recognizing there are many issues, the President sought insight and questions from senators.

Q: Regarding pass/fail options – when can students apply, and what will we have to know to advise them?

A: There is a Frequently Asked Questions page for reference. Students can request pass/fail beginning May 11 only after speaking with an advisor. It is solely the student's decision after being advised. Senate President Smith-Andrews can answer questions as she was on the decision team, and the President gave her kudos.

Q: Do employees on-campus have to apply for approval or show identification?

A: Governor Lee's Executive Order 23 called for people to stay home, so there is a possibility you could get stopped in town. When on Tech's campus, it is a good idea to carry your Tech ID and the form letter explaining your essential duties. This letter is provided by Human Resources and on their site.

Q: The wording on the Pass/Fail FAQ page uses the term "may" in reference to how some prerequisite and co-requisite courses may be judged. For example, some courses require a grade of C or better to move on, but the pass/fail option doesn't clearly allow for that as it says a "D" is necessary for a "pass" grade. Will the wording be made clearer?

A: If a minimum grade was required to move forward, a grade of "pass" on a prerequisite will now allow the student to move forward. It was acknowledged that a student could argue this point based on vague wording.

Q: Why are graduate students excluded from the pass/fail option?

A: Senate President Smith-Andrews said it was discussed, but graduate school grading guidelines kept them from including them; some courses of study require a B minimum, or no more than one C, for example.

Q: Could the library hours be altered to allow for more students who are now locked out of buildings?

A: The Provost is monitoring the library services. It is unclear whether University Police are breaking small groups up, but Dean Bates believes most students in the library are practicing social distancing.

Q: Respondus Lockdown and Respondus Monitor are sometimes slow options for faculty working to maintain exam integrity. Now is the time to discuss this issue – will there be a university-level solution for online exam integrity?

A: The University was trending toward establishing more online guidelines. The software was caught off-guard by a huge demand in a short time, but it is forcing us to look at the many variables, such as other software options, minimum security requirements for computers, and more. All suggestions and discussion will be welcomed.

Q: The cancellations due to the pandemic have affected some tenure-track faculty working to meet requirements for tenure and promotion. We should be proactive in discussing challenges and issues instead of waiting to be asked when deadlines are nearing.

A: If it becomes possible to pause or extend a tenure clock, it should be an individual decision as some faculty may be less affected than others.

Q: The difference is between asking an individual to decide after the fact or having a plan in place for the individual should the need arise – what are the next steps in this discussion?

A: The Provost and Deans need to discuss the issue and work on changing policies to incorporate the personal choice and timeline options.

Senators comments: This will help calm down faculty who are anxious about the effect of the pandemic and will help them feel cared-for by the University.

Q: How do we account for possible negative impacts on IDEA evaluations for faculty who were doing well in-person before moving to online teaching?

A: Some questions could change during evaluation time, but faculty and departments should want all the feedback they can get. While results should be taken with a great deal of consideration for the circumstances and should be analyzed with caution, it is still important to learn what we can from the feedback that is given. Departments can decide how to weight the IDEA evaluations in light of the circumstances.

Q: Could the Provost provide a letter for dossiers highlighting the cautions and considerations?

A: Sure.

Q: If more students are being funneled into the library due to buildings being locked, are the computers and tables being wiped down?

A: Senator Holly Mills shared that she had not observed SSC standing by to wipe down computers once users leave. She has been in the building sporadically and generally witnessed students not distancing when sitting at work tables, but is unsure or unaware of any coordinated plan to wipe down tables or computers as soon as they are vacated. President Oldham said he would follow up to make sure areas are sanitized regularly.

Q: How do we know that when this is over, a second wave of the virus won't take over?

A: We do not know. There is a hope that people cannot be infected a second time, but evidence to show that may not be the case. We are months away from a vaccine that could eliminate significant concerns of a reoccurrence. Senator Jared said looking to other countries (that were infected earlier) may help in being prepared. Senator Fornehed thinks our peak will be nearer the end of the month, and then a possible resurgence will be evident in the following 21 days from then. She also noted it is impossible to predict past May or June. President Oldham noted the state has said it has sufficient resources/hospital beds to handle a surge, and Senator Fornehed said we are at an advantage on preparation as many local physicians have ties to physicians in New York and can share their knowledge and experience. The President is committed to Tennessee Tech following its current plan through April even if the numbers begin to decline mid-month.

Q: Do we have a new Vice President for Research?

A: We were negotiating and agreeing to terms about a formal offer with the chosen candidate just ahead of the COVID-19 closures. We are still in contact with the candidate and progressing.

Q: Is there a way to make advisors aware of course and grading requirement policies before advising students to take a pass/fail option? Some scenarios could have students opting for a pass/fail since it is not calculated when the earned grade may lead to GPA issues – how will faculty and advisors know?

A: Advisors should already be fluent in co- and pre-requisite and grading requirements, but it should be easy to share with them all to pay extra attention to those courses.

Additional comments:

In the library, it would be helpful to provide the tools to sanitize computer workstations and study tables at each site so students can be sure they are working in a clean environment.

Because students are already registering for future classes, now is a good time for faculty to consider whether they want to move online for some courses, especially if there is concern about a second wave.

Chairs should be encouraged to come to Chair meetings to discuss how to treat IDEA evaluations.

Appreciate was expressed for the delay in the full launch of the centralized advising center for freshmen.

Senator Gaetjens shared that Dean Bates had conducted an informal survey of students in the library since the closure, and only around 10% of the students were there for internet access.

Senator Airhart shared that he will be at the Shipley Farm greenhouse selling flowers later in the week. He would also like to remind senators to come up with nominations for secretary of Faculty Senate for next year.

Senator Wolak encourage senators to think about a new chair for the Administrative Council ahead of the upcoming meeting.

Senator Stretz would like ideas for how to communicate about Faculty Senate meetings with her entire college.

### **Closing Remarks**

President Oldham thanked the senators and their colleagues for the phenomenal work they are doing.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

Approved: 04/20/2020