

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

November 9, 2020

**Submitted by K. Craven**

### **Members Present:**

Stephanie Adams, Douglas Airhart, Dan Allcott, Michael Allen, Jeremy Blair, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Wei Tsun Chang, Kris Craven, Dennis Duncan, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steven Frye, David Hajdik, Tammy Howard, Janet Isbell, Brian Jones, Christy Killman, Nancy Kolodziej, Matt Langford, Susan Laningham, David Larimore, Emily Lee, Chad Luke, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Jennifer Meadows, Mark Melichar, Holly Mills, Lachelle Norris, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Anthony Paradis, Sally Pardue, Richard Rand, Jeff Roberts, Mike Rogers, Lee Ann Shipley, Troy Smith, Sandra Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Daniel Swartling, Lenly Weathers, Robert Wilbanks, Zac Wilcox, Kimberly Winkle, Russ Witcher, Jeannette Wolak

### **Members Absent:**

Yun Ding, Mary Matthews, Joseph Ojo

### **Guests Present:**

Lee Wray

### **Call to Order**

Senate President Stretz called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Senate President Stretz opened the meeting with a special thanks to all Veterans, especially those at Tennessee Tech University.

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

The President began with a discussion of COVID-19 saying that TTU is currently in a good spot with a low number of cases.

President Oldham announced his intention to close the university on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. We already have no classes scheduled, now the non-faculty employees can take the day without taking annual leave. Again, this is in recognition of the hard work in response to COVID-19 and that we all need a break.

There is also good news related to the budget. It would appear that the state is recovering rapidly and the budget looks to be in good shape. Indications are that a vaccine is close to being ready and he is looking forward to a better situation in the spring semester. He once again praised the university for all the hard work done by the employees on behalf of our students.

Budget: THEC met on Friday and approved the budget requested by the Governor. In this budget TTU will get additional money from the funding formula, this does not include a salary pool. If there is a general salary increase, it would include us. As for the capital projects, the

new Engineering Building is #1 on the list. TTU has met our obligation with match funds and the planning is proceeding. If the funds are appropriated, money should be available on July 1 and we will break ground shortly thereafter. In terms of capital maintenance, there are big needs but also reasons to be hopeful. The university continues to do a good job in that regard.

Tech After Dark: This program was held on Thursday and there were approximately 84 students in attendance. This is more than double previous attendance. The event is for recruiting local students. On Saturday the college of Agriculture and Human Ecology will be hosting another of recruiting event with around 30 students. They have been doing a good job with these events and President Oldham encouraged them to continue.

Campus Improvements: The new patio is complete and includes a fire pit. There is more work being done on Centennial Plaza including the installation of a water feature. The new Science Building is nearing completion. They have started with the work on the external grounds. Work is scheduled to start next summer on the pedestrian mall that will be replacing a part of Peachtree Avenue.

At this time the President opened the floor for questions from the senate.

Question: There are concerns with the enrollment numbers in math classes this spring. It seems like a mass exodus from these classes. Is this across campus?

Response: It does not appear to be a systemic trend across campus. We are anticipating a drop in enrollment due to the continuing issues with COVID-19, but the exact affect is not yet determined.

Response from Senator Null: There has only been one request to drop UNIV 1020 and a few to drop English. This seems to be low.

Question: Will COVID-19 affect giving? There are a lot of disruptions now affecting athletes, schedules, and advising. How might these disruptions impact enrollment?

Response: President Oldham's best guess is that there will probably not be a significant impact. Athletes have academic progression requirements, so that will keep things in that area on track. Lee Wray says he has had discussions with Mark Wilson who indicated that student athletes must maintain 15 credit hours per semester – therefore they will have to work out something to remain eligible to compete. President Oldham said the students who are struggling the most are those who need more handling. Hopefully as this continues they will get better at dealing with the unusual circumstances. He would like the faculty to assist as they can with more personal attention and be more aware of the issues and take appropriate measures. As for fund raising, there has been no negative impact, and in fact it may be a positive impact. There are a lot of dollars out there and donors are finding this a good time to make gifts.

Question: Will there still be the TSSAA tournament on campus? Will they be using the locker rooms at the Wellness Center like in the past?

Response: Lee Wray indicated that they are very aware of the concerns and taking significant precaution with regards to social distancing. As far as tailgating – we don't have a direct answer. Also, no direct answer about using the facilities at the Wellness Center. The athletes will be COVID tested before they are allowed to come to town for the competition.

Response from Senator Laningham: Thank you for waiving the online fees for the spring semester. This was the moral thing to do and we are glad that it is going to be implemented.

Response from President Oldham: It should be working correctly now. It was the intent for that to occur in the fall. The only courses that will be charged the online fees are those that are traditionally taught in an online format. This is mainly a few graduate programs and the e-campus class which we do not control.

Question: One senator expressed his concern that a student has approached him with concerns about other students attending parties. Is this something that faculty should be interested in and do we have any jurisdiction over the students' activities in this regard?

Response from President Oldham: Yes, you should be interested. The concept of jurisdiction is not as straight forward. If the activity is associated with TTU, then yes. All campus student organizations are required to register their events with Student Affairs and this must include a COVID action plan. Then Student Affairs is tracking and monitoring the events. Unfortunately, it is hard to enforce that the organizations are actually implementing the plan as submitted. Also, private (non-university) events are more difficult. President Oldham said he would like to complement the students for adjusting to the new requirements and on balance they are cooperating. There are protocols for handling when it is discovered that student organizations are not following the rules.

Question: There was discussion in Administrative Council about the TSSAA tournament. It was said that face coverings will be encouraged. How will this be enforced? Who will be enforcing this? What are the consequences for those who don't?

Response from Lee Wray: This is not currently known. He said he would get clarification and details of the plan.

Senator Response: We have no jurisdiction on enforcement. What is to say that they will keep wearing the face covering once they are on campus?

Response from Lee Wray: I will check.

Senate President Stretz: In the meetings with the chairs, we have been discussing the issues with the summer schedule. There are concerns about the overlap of dates between summer and the other semesters.

Response from President Oldham: There have already been some adjustments. Now the fall 2021 semester will start on Thursday 8/19 (this is accommodating the holiday days for Thanksgiving) with Commencement on 12/18. Lee Wray said that the Provost plans to bring the calendar to the senate once there is a final decision. President Oldham said that the spring 2022 semester will begin on 1/10, this will be a 3- or 4-week break, with Commencement on 5/6.

Senate President Stretz discussed the questions that faculty are having about required student attendance in class. We were asked not to penalize students for not attending lectures live, but this seems to be leading to students not attending at all and this will surely impact success. What are your thoughts on requiring attendance?

Response from President Oldham: I am not a fan of requiring attendance. To my knowledge our case count is low and there has been no spread traced to class attendance. The indications are that any spread on campus goes back to social interactions among students and living arrangements.

Response from Senate President Stretz: The students are not showing a strong discipline to the current situation and seem to be edging away from classes.

Question: One of the current goals is diversity on campus. Students are talking about it. What steps are being taken? Where are we on making progress?

Response from President Oldham: There is a lot of work happening, including structural changes. Progress is being made. We are currently working to hire a recruiter who will focus on underrepresented populations. We are also working on restructuring the diversity officers on campus. They are meeting with students on campus. I hope to see the numbers start to improve, but recruiting is very difficult right now. We are not getting the data that we usually get from the ACT testing. We want to send out recruiters, but many of the schools are not allowing guests due to the challenging environment. However, we are continuing to push for that.

Question: The event this Friday, what is that?

Response from Lee Wray: That is a Race to Tech event.

Response from President Oldham: We did a lot of work for the Preview Days. There was a task force that made recommendations. There is also the network of Diversity Champions. These are faculty or staff from each division/unit/department, creating a cross-cutting initiative. We are also planning to have a Chief Diversity Officer. We are making good progress.

Comment from a Senator: It doesn't help that there is no diversity in the Senate. Other issues include the need for students to work in order to remain in school. Adjunct pay is extremely low, almost like they are donating their time. It is discouraging to faculty to not have actual bodies in the classroom. I think we need to do what is best to promote success.

Response from President Oldham: I have not heard many complaints. There is always more to the story than the one side I tend to hear when there is a complaint. I won't just jump to conclusions. My plan is to get a complain into the hands of the people who are better equipped to evaluate the full situation and assess responsibility. As far as the diversity of the senate, I agree. This is why we need the diversity champions. We often miss the problems because there is no one focused on the issues. There are other things that we can do. I encourage you all to emphasize diversity during the hiring of new faculty.

Question: I really appreciate this discussion. We recently hired a deaf faculty. When I look at the reports from other schools, they are reporting the number in quarantine. Why aren't we reporting this?

Response from President Oldham: I have not seen that. The estimate is about 4 to 1 in quarantine versus active cases. We have about 40 to 60 active cases therefore the number in quarantine is in the upper 100's to low 200's. We could post it but is it more meaningful?

Question: What can you tell us about the decision made to come back to school after Thanksgiving?

Response from President Oldham: There was a lot of discussion about the fall calendar. The decisions were made fairly early. It was all guess work. Most of the assumptions that were being discussed at time have not come true. It was a collective decision to keep the calendar the same. So far, I believe that it was a good decision. Fall break was not a significant issue with cases, so maybe Thanksgiving will be ok.

Comment from Senate: Every department should be targeting diversity. Some departments have a diverse faculty, but we are not seeing the same trends among the graduates. We all need to be having these conversations.

Response from President Oldham: I agree, that is a large part of the Diversity Champions program. Diversity should be highlighted in the publications by Communications and Marketing. We need to be showing the level of diversity that we do have. We have been underselling that aspect of TTU. It will take a better job of interacting and working together. Lee Wray expressed concern in honoring individual's privacy. He will need to look into the steps that can be taken.

Question: Can you confirm that we are now permitted to do searches for tenure-track faculty for the 2021/2022 academic year?

Response from President Oldham: I do not know for sure.

Another Senator indicated that their department is currently searching for 2 positions.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

Approved: November 23, 2020