

**Faculty Senate President's Meeting Notes**  
November 29, 2021

**Submitted by K. Craven**

**Members Present:**

Stephanie Adams, Douglas Airhart, Dan Allcott, Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Troy Brachey, Debra Bryant, Steve Canfield, Melissa Comer, April Crocket, Kris Craven, Dennis Duncan, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steven Garner, Scott Hagarty, David Hajdik, Syed Rafay Hasan, Tammy Howard, Samantha Hutson, Christy Killman, Matt Langford, Emily Lee, Jane Liu, Mark Loftis, Jeanette Luna, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Jennifer Meadows, Holly Mills, 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, Laith Zuraikat

**Members Absent:**

Chris Brown, Yun Ding, Katherine Hermann-Turner, Janet Isbell, David Larimore, Chad Luke, Russ Witcher

**Guests Present:** Simone McKelvey (LaunchPad, Director), Brandon Johnson (Enrollment Management, Vice President), Jennifer Taylor (Research and Economic Development, Vice President)

**Call to Order**

Call to order 3:35 p.m.

**Remarks from President Oldham**

1. Reminder: Upcoming Board of Trustees Meeting on Dec. 2, 2021
2. Other remarks

This is a busy week on campus with the Lighting of the Quad on Tuesday and the Board of Trustees meeting on Thursday. The BOT has a solid agenda and Senators are encouraged to pay attention, you can attend in person or watch the streaming. This has been a very active recruiting season with a number of good school visits recently. I am encouraged by the changes in the scholarship program and increased communication efforts. Things are going well.

Question: One Senator noted a lack in the Wings Up Way to explicitly support the promise to do well by our students. Should it be stated more explicitly that our goal is a high-quality education. The closest part is #4, however it is suggested to add the commitment for the students to graduate having received a high-quality education.

Answer: There is no harm in that. President felt that it was implied, but he appreciates the comments and will see that it is added in.

Question: In terms of recruiting, there have been a number of ads in the paper by other universities which would seem like potential students are being poached.

Answer: TTU has been placing ads in the paper for a while. We are also advertising heavily in Murfreesboro and have billboards in many areas of the state. Recruiting is highly competitive.

Question: The students are expressing confusion about the end of the semester and timing of final exams. Can we do some communication to help them understand the changes.

Answer: Sure.

Senate President Luna said that she would discuss this with the Provost.

### **Discussion about Launchpad (~40 minutes)**

**Guests: VP Johnson, Simone McKelvey**

1. Results from the first year of Launchpad – What worked? What changes expected for the next semester?
2. Spring advising and CPOS – What’s working? What needs improvement?
3. Other questions from Senators

VP Johnson gave a summary of the Launchpad project so far, including the disruption caused by the pandemic. Currently the Launchpad is fully staffed. They are responsible for the pre-enrollment of all new freshman students prior to SOAR. There have been some issues with procedures and staffing. They are working through the issues and much of the loss in staff was due to people who left for personal reasons and not due to problems with the unit. They are continuing to meet with the departments and chairs and Director McKelvey has been added on the curriculum committee. There is also work with the Learning Services and some effort with student success through some new classes. It is important to understand that the Launchpad is not just responsible for academic advising but they are also tasked with helping students navigate the other transitions to college, such as personality conflicts and financial concerns, as well as career options. Director McKelvey has developed some training and restructured procedures to better serve the students. Early indication is that the freshman students have on average increases the number of credit hours being taken by 0.5 hours. VP Johnson feels that the Launchpad is building strong relationships with the students, which is good and appreciates Simone and her team for their efforts. The pre-enrollment for spring is good and the first real data point won’t come until we can measure the fall to spring retention.

Director McKelvey reiterated some of the information given by VP Johnson. She said that although the staffing issues were primarily due to personal reasons on the part of the employee, it was still difficult to deal with. Some positive early data shows that 95% of the students being advised in the Launchpad made advising appointments and 92% of those appointments were kept. She discussed the partnership with Career Services so that more of the freshman students are using the career readiness certificate. They are also sponsoring a number of events and are

encouraging the colleges and departments to consider working with them in this effort. They have also expanded the hours two days a week and they are staggering their lunch to be open through the lunch hour for more convenience for students. Advisors are continuing to offer different options for appointments including online. She wants the advisors to work with the departments to assure accuracy in academic advising and Simone often follows up if there is a need to clear up confusion or to fix any errors.

Question: Since TTU already had the second highest retention rate of the schools in Tennessee, how will we know what metric to use to judge success? When will we know we have succeeded?

Response: VP Johnson said that the goal for the Launchpad is to have an 82% fall to fall retention rate for first-year students. There are a number of components being tracked including credit hours and level of engagement. The advisors are also using the attendance tracking to identify issues early and trying to change or eliminate unwanted behaviors. There are co-curricular activities, the career readiness program, internships and co-ops, travel abroad. They are looking to grow all of these. They are interested in collaboration to help engage the students in a career path, which is more than just the major they have chosen.

Director McKelvey discussed the situation with the pre-professional health program transitioning to a track. They wanted to make sure there was still engagement with these students. In TechConnect you can do a search to identify student groups to reach out and target for programs and events you are planning. Also, notify the Launchpad and they will help spread the word among their advisees. This is also a way to reach out to the undecided students who have not settled on a major. The students need to realize that choosing a major does not lock them into one path, there are still lots of choices and options within majors.

Question: There was discussion of the initial issue with turnover in the staff. Do you expect that to continue?

Answer: No. We've now hired new people. We needed to fill a number of positions over a short period of time. We also wanted to assure that we hire the right person for each position. It takes time to find the right fit and also to properly train them. Director McKelvey is very pleased with the results. There may be a few moves, to even out the loads among the advisors.

Suggestion: About the need for interaction with the departments. Suggest a formal meeting with the appropriate advisors and department chairs to generate ideas and discuss ways to interact.

Question: Why are the students being advised by the Launchpad for three terms? Some transfer students have a lot of credit hours coming into the university. Shouldn't they be advised by the department/college sooner?

Answer: VP Johnson said that this process is about more than academic schedules, although that is a major component. They are attempting to holistically engage the students. They are looking at how best to support them. How do we best serve those who are farther along at entry? We must be mindful of this more holistic approach to advising. This sounds like a good topic for future discussions. Director McKelvey clarified that the students are released from the Launchpad when the May grades post and then they are moved to the college advising system. This means that they are there in their third term.

### **Office of Research and Economic Development Discussion (~4:15pm)**

#### **Guest: VP Taylor**

1. Updates from ORED – What working? What changes are coming down the pipeline?
2. Other questions from Senators

VP Taylor thanked the Senate for the opportunity to update them and stated that this is part of her listening tour to receive feedback and enhance continuous improvement. She explained that it is not unique to have some turnover in positions with research administrative professionals, however it is at an unexpectedly high level right now. She also discussed some of the recent employment changes in the unit, but stated that these were not anticipated to be permanent changes. There has been some discussion with the Center Directors about the plans for the reorganization of the office and so far, they are in favor of them. The strategy is to centralize the office responsibilities to take advantage of the expertise of each staff member, that is to go from having several jacks-of-all-trades to individual specialists. Responsibility for the contract will remain in the Business Office. This will first require the need to standardize the processes utilizing best practices.

Question: Many of the TTU faculty rely on the Faculty Research Grants. What is the status of this program?

Answer: There is a meeting about that this week. There was work over the summer to revamp the program, but the final approval will be at the meeting. There will definitely still be a program, however.

Question: Many faculty members are concerned about the transition. We have lost a number of great specialists which has left holes causing issues with getting grants submitted. Do you think this will minimize the people moving on?

Answer: This is definitely a process that will take time, and we are working on that. There will always be some of that, but we are trying to minimize it. The goal is to centralize the functions so that things can be more standardized. There may need to be some adjustments. If we plan to continue to grow, then there will be a need to change.

Question: Is there a vision for where this is going? Do you know how the parts will fit together?

Answer: The vision is to create an infrastructure so that the faculty members can focus on the science to help the university reach the goal of \$40M in research dollars. However, there is a need to stay compliant and make the office run more smoothly. Currently the Center Directors report to the Dean of the College they are in, but those that are interdisciplinary report to VP Taylor.

Question: You talked about some new hires. Where will the money come from?

Answer: The details are not finalized, but it is a matter of moving existing money around. There is no new money being spent. President Oldham said the plan is to reorganize things to leverage them for more benefit. Unfortunately, as it is organized now, this is not an easy thing to accomplish. VP Taylor is working on a model that will satisfy all of the groups to provide the same level of service and create a partnership that will benefit the university as a whole.

Question: Faculty members are already feeling the pressure and it seems to be reaching a critical level. What is the timeframe for complete of this process?

Answer: VP Taylor said the desire is finalize things next semester so that we start the next academic year with everything in place. However, we are still working on many details, including space which is a significant issue.

President Oldham: I hear concern that faculty members are not being served. Is there evidence to support that?

VP Taylor says that she is not aware of any. She has looked at the rate of incompleteness for submissions and it has gone down recently. As far as submitting proposals, we are 10 behind this time last year, but the submission this year are larger than last year. We are ahead of last year on new money.

Suggestion: You say this is part of your listening tour, but many faculty members say they have not seen you. You should move around more. – VP Taylor is happy to do that.

Concerns: In Engineering the young faculty members are struggling. There is a need for concrete plans to help them to be successful. There is a need for a means for faculty to connect with funding agencies, information that can be used.

Comment: President Oldham talked about the legal standpoint of who controls the money brought into the university for research. The primary authority is with the university president. However, he can and has delegated appropriate grant money to the Center Directors. This means that it is possible to re-direct funds, but within their intended purpose. He is reluctant to do this in a heavy-handed way. There has been considerable time spent trying to find a model that works for everyone. Currently, the true potential of the grant money is not being realized, that is

it is underleveraged. VP Taylor is working with the Center Directors on how to best utilize the funds and to invest in the research growth that is the goal.

VP Taylor said that President Oldham stated it well. She is working with the Centers to create an infrastructure that works for everyone so they are supported as they need. She welcomes conversations with everyone, please just reach out to her.

### **Additional Questions (time permitting)**

#### **Anonymous Questions from Online Form**

1. In general, I would like to know how TTU is utilizing the property resources that have been gifted or purchased by the University. This might include such information as the properties (i.e. Golf course, Foundation Hall, Oakley/ShIPLEY Farm, etc.). Are we being good stewards of the trust placed with us to treat the properties with respect and generate either revenue or student opportunities in line with the donor's expectations? Is this information transparent and if so, where can it be found?
2. Can the OVC room be made available for lunch time dining? The cafeteria is too crowded, and there's too much possibility of COVID transmission.
3. When can we expect the national search for the new Associate Provost for faculty engagement? We have two administrative positions whose missions are about faculty engagement. One, Director for the CITL, was filled during a brief search in the summer when most faculty were not on campus. Will faculty have a voice in selection of the individual responsible for faculty excellence?

Senate President Luna suggested that we start with #3 first. President Oldham's answers.

Answer: He does not know the timeline, but he believes it will be quick. This is a question for the Provost Office.

#### #2

Answer: This was first discussed in the summer. However, the SGA disagreed because the room is used for a number of events regularly. So, they looked for a different approach to the issue. The current plan is to relocate the offices for the Chartwells personnel. Then we will be able to open the entire back section of the cafeteria. There is also a plan for a major expansion of the RUC which could start this summer and help to optimize space.

#### #1

Answer: Yes, we are leveraging these well. The Oakley farm is fulfilling the vision of a working farm with many improvements and the ability to provide research opportunities to students. Both the golf course and the farm are currently cash flowing.

Senate President Luna concluded this part of the meeting and stated that there was one other piece of business to conduct after President Oldham signed out. She discussed the evaluation of the President that is being conducted and encouraged the Senators to complete the survey.

**Adjourned** at 5:40 p.m.

**Approved:** January 24, 2022