

**Faculty Senate President's Meeting Notes**  
February 7, 2022

**Submitted by K. Craven**

**Members Present:**

Stephanie Adams, Douglas Airhart, Dan Allcott, Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Steve Canfield, Melissa Comer, April Crocket, Kris Craven, 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, 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, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Holly Stretz, Lenly Weathers, Robert Wilbanks, Russ Witcher, Laith Zuraikat

**Members Absent:**

Yun Ding, Dennis Duncan, Scott Smith, Dan Swartling, Kimberly Winkle (excused)

**Guests Present:** Lee Wray – Chief of Staff, Jeff Shaeffer – Water Center Director, Ying Zhang – Manufacturing Center Director

**Call to Order**

Call to order 3:33 p.m.

**Updates from President Luna**

1. Senate Roster Updates – Welcome Dr. Mustafa Rajabali (Physics, Administrative Council) and Dr. Denis Ulybyshev (Computer Science, Academic Council)

2. Custodial Insurance Update

There was a clarification as to the changeover from the old custodial service company to the new. The new company moved up the time for employees to earn sick leave and paid holidays. They will have to work for 90 days before they will qualify. They are eligible to receive health insurance on April 1 and they have been given information on the COBRA options during the gap in coverage.

3. Policy 205, 206, 207 Update

The ad hoc committees are thanked for their efforts so far. Progress is continuing on all policy updates.

**Remarks from President Oldham**

1. Governor's Budget (announced on January 31st)

2. Upcoming Capital Projects

3. Salary Increases

4. Other remarks

President Oldham added his thanks to the ad hoc committees and is please to hear there is progress on these policies. He had just returned from a legislative meeting in Nashville and reported that it went well in his opinion. His big take away this morning was that the legislature is in a good position and there was no obvious resistance to the Governor's Budget proposal. This proposal contains historic numbers, which is good. These include both one-time and recurring funds and said that Tennessee Tech will be a significant benefactor. Included in the proposal is approximately \$2.5M of strategic improvements, \$1M in rural reimagined funds, \$1.2M in the area of cyber security. However, the Governor is firm on not increasing tuition this year. At this point it is prudent to expect no increase in enrollment, but President Oldham is hoping for an increase in the freshman class. The proposal also gives 55% of a 4% increase in salaries. This means that the university must find approximately \$1.6M to cover the remaining 45%. He also pointed out that this means the university must come up with approximately \$2M out of a total annual budget of approximately \$170M.

Comment: This is nothing but positive. Happy to hear you say that we don't budget on recruitment. Prospective students who recently visited campus from Trousdale county were thrilled that President Oldham came and visited their school. The new scholarship program and the increased efforts in visiting areas around the state along with advertisements is going to benefit all of the departments on campus.

Response: President Oldham gave most of the credit to VP Johnson and his staff. He said that everyone has stepped up and are representing the university in a very positive way. He also said that the message being sent out resonates with us as we are as an institution and highlights the personal values and beliefs of the campus. As for the new scholarship program, there was a lot of analysis and comparison to competitors to see what works. The key is to eliminate uncertainty. The incoming students want to be where they are wanted and we need to show them that they are wanted here. He is hopeful that it is working and appreciates the comments.

### **Office of Research and Economic Development Questions**

1. Why is hiring bookkeepers taking so long? How can we remove the barriers to getting more bookkeeping support?
2. Some bookkeepers and support staff are going above and beyond their current job descriptions. Are salaries being adjusted accordingly so those employees are fairly compensated?
3. No official ORED 'reorganization plan' has been provided (no powerpoint, summary document, etc.). Can this be provided to faculty?
4. Why is Indirect Cost money generated through Centers not released to Centers as support?
5. Other questions from Senators

### Comments:

It has been a very long journey to get where things are today. Several years ago, there were 5 bookkeepers in 3 centers. Now there are only a total of two. Some positions remain vacant, so

that it seems like they have been eliminated. There appears to be a disconnect between HR and ORED. There have been no new hires.

Director Shaeffer discussed the situation in the Water Center. The research dollars and number of grants has increased, this is expected to continue. The center now has a single bookkeeper who is practically a project manager due to the tasks that are required of the position under the current conditions. Therefore, he feels that the center is not in a position to accept any new grant proposals at this time. They have now also lost an office manager which is causing additional issues. He has not been able to achieve any resolution to these problems. There has been paperwork submitted to hire an office manager and two project managers. But there has been no action taken or response resolution to the process. Director Shaeffer said he does not know what is the holdup.

Senate President Luna thinks that the reorganization of the Office of Research is clouding the ability for the centers to hire new personnel.

Another issue is that the remaining personnel are overwhelmed, which has caused a few to leave the university. This could continue if the positions are not filled. There are grants ready to be activated and there is no one activating them.

Some faculty are needing to do the bookkeeping themselves, out of desperation.

Senate President Luna was pleased to have had the recent Town Hall meeting and it was well attended. She would like to request that the Senate receive a document and/or presentation on the plans for the reorganization and the timeline for implementation. She hopes that this will reduce the fear that many research faculty members are feeling.

President Oldham agreed that the Senate can request this and he understands that there is a lot of frustration around this topic. He is anxious to move toward a conclusion and find avenues to better serve the faculty.

Another concern is how this will affect the faculty members on the tenure track. Their tenure and promotion will be contingent on being successful in their research endeavors. It would be inappropriate to hold them accountable for issues related to a lack of personnel in the Office of Research and the Centers.

We have now been in the new Carnegie classification for 3 or 4 years. During this time, the funding and support of the library has steadily decreased. Also, the new budget is promising, but it addresses mainly capital projects and does not have any support for the library or other research activity funding.

President Oldham said that the Provost is looking into this. There is no new money as you say. The expectations in this area have changed dramatically. There is more need for electronic

sources and fewer paper resources, etc. Unfortunately, it is a zero-sum game. If we give to one place, we must take it away from another. There needs to be some leadership involved in making strategic decisions and setting priorities.

Senate President Luna recognized that under the current short-handed state, some employees are going above and beyond and they should be recognized and compensated. It would not be good for them to leave because they do not feel supported in this effort. It sounds like there is a definite need to grow the staff in order to support research on campus.

President Oldham talked about how, in the past, there was a model where some projects were run through a center even though the research was not directly tied to the center. This had been working, but as the research grows, the model breaks down. It is time for the university to adapt to a more coherent model. Unfortunately, this can also vary significantly from year to year.

Whatever approach is chosen, it is not good to take it to zero and then try to build it back. President Oldham stated that he does not disagree.

### **Graduate Student Support Questions (Dr. Ojo)**

1. What are the barriers keeping us from offering health insurance to our graduate students? What is the administration doing to remove these barriers? This is impacting our ability to recruit grad students.
2. Other questions from Senators

The issue is with graduate TA's and RA's. There is no support for health insurance for them. Many other universities offer health insurance for these students. Many can't afford medical care. Can the university offer health insurance to graduate students?

President Oldham remembers that this has been a long-standing question, not just on this campus. It has been considered but he does not recall the last conversations. He would like nothing better but he is fairly sure it is a question of money. How to pay for it and where the money comes from is at the heart of the issue. He can find out what was determined in the previous consideration of this topic. Senate President Luna recommended to involve VP Vetter and President Oldham agreed. She also posed the idea of writing the cost into grant proposals. The concern with this strategy is that it would only help those graduate students on research projects. President Oldham feels that if it is offered, it should be available to all. A final thought was to consider increasing the stipend for the students by an amount equivalent and let the students decide how to spend the money.

### **Professors of Practice (Dr. Stretz)**

1. Could TTU have Professors of Practice? These may be helpful in engineering, business, music, etc.
2. Other questions from Senators

Senator Stretz is interested in this in her department. The idea is different everywhere. Persons who are out in industry who have a Master's degree could be brought in to teach labs and other classes where their experience in industry could be very valuable. This could be similar to the clinical positions in Nursing. This would require a new designation be created. There could be other departments who could benefit, say accountants or lawyers could bring valuable experience to the classroom.

Senator Allcott said that some places have a rotating position that is somewhat similar. The person would be on a one- or two-year appointment. This gets the latest information and expertise into the classroom. In these cases, it is typically generational so that each graduating class gets to take advantage.

President Oldham said that there is no reason why it can't be done. There would need to be a defined reason for doing it. We do have positions of instructor, which are non-tenure track but permanent positions. There are also visiting positions which are more flexible. He recommended that Senator Stretz lay out a proposal for the Provost. She could even propose that her department implement it as a pilot and see what happens.

### **Other Questions**

Senator O'Connor asked about the request he made at the last meeting to modify the wings-up way to include specific language. He said that he had sent the formal request via e-mail on 12/1/2021, but had not received any acknowledgement. President Oldham said he knows that it has been implemented in several locations and believes that it is fully incorporated. Senator O'Connor is pleased.

Senator Howard relayed some information and suggested that TTU consider a degree in surveying. ETSU has a technology degree in surveying and a similar degree would fit nicely in the Civil and Environmental Engineering program. President Oldham agreed to pass this on to Ben Mohr, the department chairman, and Dean Slater, dean of the college of engineering.

Senator Airhart has two observations regarding speakers at public events. He discussed being at the Lighting of the Quad, but on the other end of the quad. He had difficulty hearing the presentation and suggested that additional speakers near the Memorial Gym would be beneficial. He was at another event in the Multipurpose Room in the RUC and had a similar problem with hearing the presentation. There the problem is the pillars throughout the room. Here again, more speakers to be placed strategically would be beneficial. Senator Airhart also observed that there are no signs about the location of the restrooms within the multipurpose room. Senator Allcott spoke of the expertise of personnel in the music department who could help in this and mentioned their new program in sound engineering.

Senator Stretz asked if there has been any consideration of having a memorial for COVID-19 victims located on campus. President Oldham said that it was an interesting idea, but no one had yet suggested it. Please pass along any thought on this idea.

**Adjourned** at 4:57 p.m.

**Approved:** February 21, 2022