

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President  
September 24, 2018

**Members Present:**

Douglas Airhart, Michael Best, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Andrew Callender, Corinne Darvennes, Ahmed ElSawy, Steven Frye, Stuart Gaetjens, Melissa Geist, Mark Groundland, David Hajdik, Jeremy Hansen, Ann Hellman, Paula Hinton, Shelia Hurley, Barbara Jared, Christy Killman, Seth King, David Larimore, Regina Lee, Lori Maxwell, Christine Miller, Holly Mills, Lachelle Norris, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Sally Pardue, Richard Rand, Mohan Rao, Jeff Roberts, Leeann Shipley, Cara Sisk, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Zac Wilcox, Kim Winkle, Jeanette Wolak

**Members Absent:**

Ismet Anitsal, Deborah Ballou, Jeremy Blair, Tammy Boles, Ben Mohr, Joseph Ojo

**Guests:**

President Oldham, Provost Bruce

**Call to Order**

Senate President Smith called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m.

**Announcements by Faculty Senate President**

Senate President Smith sent an e-mail earlier today for discussion at the next Senate business meeting. He shared that Board member Stites would like to attend a Senate meeting in the future and suggested he attend as a guest of the President.

**President Oldham's Opening Comments**

President Oldham welcomed the Senators back and hoped that everyone has had a good start. The energy on campus is good. Construction continues to move forward. At the board meeting last week, President Oldham highlighted the approval of two new degree programs: a Masters in Engineering Management and a Ph.D. in Counseling and Supervision. President Oldham desires to work with the Faculty Senate moving forward. The role of the Faculty Senate is a body to advise and provide counsel to the President and the administration on matters affecting Tennessee Tech University. He is delighted to work with the Faculty Senate and wants feedback. He looks forward to a productive relationship. While having received the discussion points for today's meeting, he prefers a conversation format on these topics and any other matters.

**Discussion Topics**

1. Status of the Fitzgerald situation
  - President Oldham has recused himself, so he cannot comment.
  - He prefers, however, that the company name not be included when referencing the investigation because the company is not being charged. The investigation is an internal matter on research misconduct and is being handled according to university policy. We should refer to it as an allegation of research misconduct.

## 2. Overload situation

- Faculty in general are concerned that overload courses will not be available when needed. Senators raised the following more specific concerns:
  - A. The departmental overload budget might revert to the Provost's office
  - B. The Provost's office might make important departmental decisions (such as course overloads) without considering the experience of Chairs and Deans
  - C. Those with release time cannot teach an overload class
  - D. Chairs are not permitted to teach overloads
- Provost Bruce noted that she began to review the overload question because faculty and Chairs had complained about having to teach overloads. She has been looking at overloads, but has not told anyone that they cannot offer them. The Deans and Chairs need to assess their teaching needs strategically to determine whether overloads are necessary or not. The Provost approved every overload that was requested. Summing up, Provost Bruce noted that there is no overload teaching policy, but rather she is acting on guidelines. Many of the concerns seem to be rooted in rumor, not in reality. When asked about the removal of overload courses from two new graduate programs in the College of Business by 2020, the Provost replied that these programs have overloads in them by design, which is problematic. She has communicated her concern with the Dean, who has prepared a transition plan to get off the overloads. Ultimately, the Provost has left decisions on overloads to the College Deans.
- President Oldham supported the Provost's communication with Deans and Department Chairs with the goal of working out of the necessity of using overloads. Overloads should not be the norm. He asked the Senators to convey that there is no edict on removing overloads; it is just a matter of using them for the right reasons.

## 3. Tennessee Tech University Board

Senators expressed concerns about some Board members, such as their statement needing to be educated about higher education, their viewpoints regarding faculty evaluation, and their points of view on tenure, post-tenure review, and the university as a uniform, "one size fits all," institution.

- The President and his cabinet have been educating members of the Board consistently since inception. He noted that after one annual cycle, board members now know more, see what they do not fully understand, and desire to be more fully informed. This is a good thing. The committee structure of the Board has facilitated learning about matters relevant to Tennessee Tech; however, now the amount of requested information is such that other avenues, in addition to committee work and board meetings, are being used. Board members are asking for more information on enrollment, recruitment, financial matters, academic programs (modalities of instruction), and the structure and importance of tenure, for example.

## 4. Use of adjuncts

- Both the President and the Provost agree that adjuncts are vitally important to the university structure. The President sees the value of adjuncts in specialty areas of instruction where they have expertise. If, however, adjuncts are used inappropriately (to too much extent or for the wrong reasons), then they are not

helpful to the academic units. Departments need to ask, what is the purpose of using adjuncts from an instructional standpoint? If they are over utilized, then this may be indicative of a need for a full-time faculty member. The Provost sees value in adjuncts if they are filling a need that cannot be met by tenure-track faculty, such as a high voltage power expert. If the need becomes long term, then we need to hire someone full time. If we become too dependent on adjuncts, then it erodes the traditional tenured faculty structure. Adjuncts should have a temporary role in a department when teaching demands arise or they can fill a niche need that is not available in the academic unit. We need to be careful not to be too dependent on adjuncts, but they can be very beneficial.

- A follow-up question arose asking about the likelihood of hiring someone full time in a specialty area when this need becomes apparent due to the continuous use of an adjunct. The President replied that this would be a priority, yes, but within the competing interests at Tennessee Tech. If it were an issue, then a plan would emerge to meet this demand.

#### 5. Post-tenure review

- Senators asked for clarification regarding post-tenure review. Tenure offers job security to the teacher-scholars of the university who instruct without having to worry about being sensitive to competing political viewpoints on their subject matter, such as climate change. Furthermore, the lengthy annual reports already assess the research, teaching, service, and administration of tenured faculty members. Is a post-tenure review process necessary?
- The President asserted that the Board does understand the value of tenure and academic freedom. Their perspective on job protection may be different from what academics strive for in earning tenure. There are many protections, according to President Oldham, to ensure academic freedom in teaching. Senate President Smith shared how he has talked to some board members about tenure and academic freedom and plans on talking with others about these important matters.
- Some senators expressed how tenure-track professors, lecturers, and instructors are often cautious when teaching their subject matter, as well as when selecting their committee assignments. The President asked in response, why are untenured faculty members hesitant to speak up? It is not because of the administration or external sources, but rather their uneasiness stems from their colleagues.
- The Provost added that it is important that departments have very clear performance expectations of faculty and instructors. The decision to grant tenure should be based on performance, not on collegiality.
- The President continued that post-tenure review has been around higher education for at least 20 years. University policy does not currently address degradation of performance of tenured faculty, whether due to health or personal reasons. Students are negatively affected. Most faculty are evaluated appropriately and continue to do a great job. How do we deal with some outliers in a reasonable way? The post-tenure review process can identify areas for improvement for the benefit of faculty members. This process is not meant to be punitive in nature.
- A Senator replied how he has heard that a board member wants a post-tenure review policy to make it easier to fire faculty. President Oldham clarified that he

was describing what has transpired throughout the United States in the last 20 to 30 years. Another Senator noted the important distinction between fitness for duty and post-tenure review. Furthermore, if, as the President specified, post-tenure review is meant for only a few faculty members, why put the entire tenured faculty through this process? Perhaps a certain set of circumstances could trigger a post-tenure review. President Oldham responded that this is exactly what he has proposed. The Provost added that she has composed a committee to look into a post-tenure review policy for Tennessee Tech University.

- What would post-tenure review do that Policy 205 does not already address? Perhaps the Senate could collaborate with the Board to improve the ambiguous language of this policy that already addresses removal of tenured faculty or add something to it. President Oldham agreed and noted that he calls this post-tenure review.
- A Senator asked about the current policy of remediation for a faculty member who received three years of “unacceptable” ratings. The President responded that if one needs to wait three years to address the situation, then assigning an unacceptable rating would not help, but rather exacerbate the situation. Often, for this reason, Chairs do not give unacceptable ratings.

#### 6. IDEA system

- Student evaluations have increased in importance, now affecting salaries. Were they designed to award raises? Is there a committee looking into how to evaluate faculty? The President responded that student evaluations are important, but not definitive. Departments may weigh them differently, depending on the department. He would never advocate for student evaluations as the sole tool for evaluation. They are certainly useful for identifying excellent instructors and poor instructors, but not those in the middle. It is his understanding that it is up to the academic unit to determine how student evaluations are used in the annual evaluation.
- The Provost asked, what happens to the comments? Students think that they are officially reporting their feedback to the university. If these comments are not reviewed, the university could be on shaky legal ground (title 9). Some discussion ensued about departmental and individual practices.

#### 7. Merit pay

- The legislature slated 2.5% for merit raises, though Chairs were told that the average received would be 1.8%. Senators asked for clarification
- The President explained that promotion dollars also came out of the 2.5% pool. All of the 2.5% went to faculty salary increases. A Senator clarified that prior to the last two years; the funds for promotion had come from the general university budget. The President replied that over the last 8 years, faculty salary increases (promotion money) came out of the total raise pool. He then asked whether we should consider separating these two monies.
- The Provost commented that there is a committee looking at the budget over a 5-year period to see, for example, how much money is needed to possibly budget for promotions and plan for this goal accordingly. Senators recommended that 1.) this committee consider the promotion raises for lecturers and instructors coming

soon and 2.) a better, more specific explanation of the pay increases be shared with faculty and the public at large.

8. \$750,000 Carnegie funds
  - The President indicated that these funds are going to many initiatives, such as supporting the new Ph.D. program in Counseling and Supervision, new faculty in computer science, and the d&p in Nursing.
9. \$3 million for the College of Engineering
  - The President first gave credit to and acknowledged the tremendous support of Representative Ryan Williams to secure these funds.
  - The money is in the works. There is an ongoing process between the Provost and the Dean. 1.9 million dollars has been committed for immediate utilization. These funds must be spent strategically and in ways that will make lasting impacts on Tech's ability to produce engineers.
  - Senator ElSawy has created new programs in his department, but has not seen an increase in faculty to support this initiative. President Oldham stressed the importance for Colleges to set priorities.

The meeting adjourned at 4:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Groundland