**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

Zoom Meeting, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

**Attending Senators:** Taylor Acee, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Stacey Bender, Janet Bezner, Dale Blasingame, Rachel Davenport, Jennifer Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Vincent Luizzi, Benjamin Martin, Stan McClellan, Roque Mendez, Andrew Ojede, Michael Supancic, Nicole Wesley

**Guests:** Micky Autrey, Gene Bourgeois (Provost), Mary Brennan, Kiana Burks (University Star), Kristy Daniel, Tina Marie Cade (Senate Fellow), Gloria Martinez, David Nolan, Judy Oskam, Scott Pope (Library), Sean Rose, Aimee Roundtree, Joni S J Charles, Christine Sellers, Karen Sigler, Carolyn Swearingen, Debbie Thorne, Erik Timmerman, Denise Trauth (President), Kathy Ybanez-Llorente

Meeting called to order at 4:01 p.m. by Senate Chair Bezner

The Faculty Senate took a few moments to acknowledge Ms. Micky Autrey, former Director of Curriculum Services, for her 26-year commitment to Texas State and to express a deep and sincere appreciation for her years of exemplary work in program planning and curriculum development.

**President’s Academic Advisory Group (PAAG)**

**Vaccine distribution**
The senate asked PAAG about the status of vaccine distribution on our campuses and whether the Cabinet had exhausted every resource to have Texas State designated as a vaccine hub. President Trauth explained that as of late Fall semester, the Cabinet believed that the university would receive doses immediately since the university was approved at that time. However, after the approval, the state changed their philosophy regarding distribution and moved to a county hub model. Dr. Trauth believes that at some point, they will distribute vaccines to universities because when the bottleneck of vaccine distribution opens up, the county will need the university’s help with distribution. In the meantime, Dr. Carranco continues to work with county staff to foster collaboration moving forward.

**KN95 masks for classroom teaching**
The senate asked if the university will supply KN95 masks for faculty teaching in person given that new virus strains are highly transmissible. The Provost explained that the university has an ample supply of surgical masks, which according to Dr. Carranco are sufficient to mitigate transmission in the classroom. A senator followed up to ask whether the Provost envisions a future recommendation for double masking. He responded that they do not have plans to make that recommendation. At this point, the most important focus is for everyone to wear their masks properly.

**Faculty choice for teaching modality**
The senate reiterated their ongoing position that faculty should be given choice on how to best determine how they will deliver courses, at least on a temporary basis until the surge in COVID cases and hospitalizations decreases. Faculty have been told that students want to attend in-person classes, yet we have not seen these data and faculty experience is that students do not want to be in class and prefer to be on Zoom (perhaps even more so after receiving higher grades in the fall). The Provost explained that the university’s stance is that faculty teaching in spring had a choice on teaching modality for most cases, there has still been no evidence of classroom, lab, office, etc. transmission, and that students want classes to be conducted in the classroom. Additionally, Student Government recently voted in favor of returning to face-to-face instruction. Dr. Trauth explained that her Cabinet meets weekly with Dr. Carranco to receive benchmarked data and to make decisions based on those data. Dr. Carranco recently reported there is a steady, downward trend in cases, hospitalizations, etc. The Cabinet was concerned about surges and bringing students back to campuses and the community, so they agreed to have a two-week online period before returning to classroom-based instruction. However, after the first five weeks of the year, they are confident the university is back to what they planned for.

A senator asked if the Provost has compared the proportions of teaching modalities offered this semester with Fall 2020. The Provost responded that the proportions are very close.

A senator asked whether Bobcat Trace has found zero cases of classroom, lab, or office transmission or just very few? President Trauth said Dr. Carranco reports that Bobcat Trace has found zero cases. The senator asked if there is a breakdown in Bobcat Trace, who would they report that concern to? The Provost directed concerns for that situation to Dr. Carranco and added that the university never expected zero cases, they were simply unsure about how many cases would warrant a local or campus-wide change in scenarios.

A senator stressed that in a recent meeting with senate liaisons, faculty were adamant that faculty choice should prevail and while it may seem that way in most cases, there is evidence of faculty whose choice was not honored (i.e., their choice had no impact on their teaching assignment). The senator emphasized that faculty choice should be written into university policy. The Provost responded by explaining that students signed up for a specific course modality, that course modality should be honored, and that most faculty who requested a specific modality from their chair were granted that request.

**Mental health needs of students**The senate asked PAAG what the university’s plan is to better support the mental health needs of students. Dr. Trauth explained that they are adding two counselors to the Student Counseling Center (SCC). Those positions will be funded initially with CARES Act money, but the university will find money to fund the positions permanently. She also explained that the 15-session limit for mental health appointments is based on best practices and is far more than most universities offer and clarified that the SCC is not designed to provide long-term therapy. Students needing such care should find a long-term provider. The Provost encouraged faculty to review the best practices and guidelines for faculty available on the Provost’s website. [Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty to Support Students Facing Mental Health Challenges: Final Report from the Faculty Workgroup for Supporting Students Facing Mental Health Challenges](https://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/jcr%3A39bb91ab-b0be-4c6e-9997-2d1f19fb07fa/Faculty%20Workgroup%20Roles%20and%20Responsibilities%20for%20Faculty%20to%20Support%20Students.pdf) .

A senator pointed out that type of student served by our university is not the typical college student (e.g., high minority, high Pell grant, high first-generation students) and faculty support of those students already involves a large investment of faculty time and resources. They pointed out that we cannot compare our students’ mental health needs to students at other universities, but only among student needs at similar institutions. President Trauth agreed with the senator and explained that pre-pandemic they had already promised to add counselors. In sum, the Cabinet understands the myriad stressors (financial, pandemic, etc.) and they are going to convene a task force to benchmark nationwide health survey data Texas State students participated in.

A senator suggested the Cabinet consider thinking outside the box and working toward making the university a leader among universities and that fifteen counseling sessions given our unique population is insufficient to address critical needs of students on campus.

**CARES Act funding**

The senate wanted to know how any residual funds, after student assistance, would be spent. Specifically, the senate inquired about the possibility of using a portion of the funding to restore summer budgets. The Provost said that much of the discussion across academic units involves payment for summer work being based on a stipend and not a percentage of salary for administrative tasks. In terms of CARES funding, the electronic course fees generated through shifts in summer teaching modality as a result of the pandemic could be replaced by CARES funding, thus freeing up those funds to be redistributed to other areas. The Provost did not say that the funds would be redistributed to replenishing summer budgets other than they would find money if additional instructors needed to be hired because of increased enrollments. The President explained that $51 million sounds like a lot, but the university has already spent a tremendous amount on COVID mitigation and that some residual funds need to be directed toward Housing and Residential Life, the Child Development Center, and Study Abroad, to account for lost revenue in those areas.

A senator asked if student fees can be redistributed to provide resources students need right now. The Provost explained that statutory fees are hardwired and that Athletics fees are routed through athletics but then returned to the general fund through tuition and fees.

A senator asked for clarification about who is eligible for the three percent bonus. The President explained that if a person is considered merit eligible, they will receive a one-time, three percent bonus.

**Miscellaneous**
A senator pointed out that the university generally acknowledges the deaths of students, faculty, staff on an in-memoriam page, yet President Trauth sent out an email specifically to acknowledge the death of an athlete. The senator asked the President to please be more thoughtful about the deaths for which university-wide announcements are sent, since some may interpret that she cares more about some people in the campus community than others. The President explained that her email was a special situation and that it ultimately comes down to a judgement on her behalf.

A senator asked if PAAG has seen any trajectories of change in undergraduate/graduate enrollment. The Provost summarized that graduate enrollment has been stronger and growing more rapidly than undergraduate enrollment. The senator followed up to explain that many graduate students want more online and hybrid courses.

A senator voiced that they have heard vaccines will be shipped to pharmacies and asked how this affects the university’s plans for distribution? The President explained that she did not have information about which pharmacies are going to receive doses but that university personnel continue to have conversations with county officials.

A senator asked about evidence on metrics of graduate enrollment and if the increases observed were due to new programs in McCoy and Social Work? The Provost explained that those programs are part of the increase, but that Liberal Arts and Education have rebounded after showing declining numbers the past few years.

**PAAG Debrief**Senators discussed information presented at the PAAG meeting including their concerns about lack of forward thinking in terms of counseling resources and that an undue burden is placed on faculty to serve as front line quasi-therapists for students needing mental health assistance. Senators also discussed that faculty choice should be general policy. Senate Chair Bezner will follow up with PAAG to clarify that Faculty Senate’s position is faculty choice going forward in future semesters. Additionally, senators will ask liaisons to collect data on how many students are attending class in person to help determine if there are discrepancies between how many students say they want face-to-face classes versus how many students actually show up in face-to-face classes.

**Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) meeting**Senator Blasingame volunteered to attend portions of the virtual meeting scheduled for February 19-20, 2021.

**Senate photo**
Senators discussed the logistics for capturing a group Zoom picture during the next meeting.

**Approval of minutes**Senators voted to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2021 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm

Minutes submitted by Jennifer Jensen