**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, November 4, 2020

Zoom Meeting, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

**Attending Senators:** Gwynne Ellen Ash, Stacey Bender, Janet Bezner, Dale Blasingame, Rachel Davenport, Peter Dedek, Jennifer Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Vincent Luizzi, Benjamin Martin, Stan McClellan, Roque Mendez, Andrew Ojede, Michael Supancic, Nicole Wesley

**Guests:** Aimee Roundtree, Alessandro De Nadai, Chris Russian, Cristian Lieneck, David Nolan, Debbie Thorne, Denise Trauth (President), Erik Timmerman, Gene Bourgeois (Provost), Gene Brenek, Joni S J Charles, Judy Oskam, Karen Sigler, Lorna Stafford, Lucia Summers Rodriguez, Mary Brennan, Michel Haigh, Nancy Wilson, Ricardo Delgado Ahumada (University Star), Sean Roche, Tina Marie Cade (Senate Fellow), Tom Grimes, William Chittenden

Meeting called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Senate Chair Bezner

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

**Update on pursuit of R1 status**The senate asked the PAAG for an update on the university’s pursuit of R1 status considering budget reductions and increased teaching responsibilities that impact research productivity. Additionally, the senate inquired about how resources are currently being allocated to continue to work toward achieving R1 status.

President Trauth explained that the Cabinet reviews the metrics that will enable the university to become a recognized research university in Texas and thus have access to National Research University funds. In addition to the metrics, the university also needs to satisfy criteria for overall research productivity for all faculty as well as research expenditures. Although the pandemic has slowed some indicators of progress toward R1 status, becoming a member of the Association of Research Libraries was a major metric the university recently met.

Both President Trauth and Dr. Bourgeois provided information about resource allocations. Specific measures being taken to continue the course to R1 designation include:

* Successful discussions with the system office to allow for a third opportunity to toll the tenure clock for faculty that needed to toll the clock due to COVID-19-related interruptions.
* Maintaining funding for research infrastructure and research coordinators.
* Continued work by the Normandy Group, the university’s lobbying group in Washington, D.C., which has resulted in grant funding for the university
* Maintaining pre-existing levels of indirect cost recovery for PIs with externally funded research
* Recent launch of two new centers: The Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Center for Translational Research as well as plans to turn the other four Big Ideas into centers in the future.
* Continued funding for the Research Enhancement Program, although the funding has declined due to lack of matching TRIP funds.
* Continuing to fund start-up packages or related research facilities.
* Expanding NIH and/or NSF funding by leveraging the Comparative Research Laboratory.
* Facilitating and funding faculty development leaves that were delayed because of the pandemic.

The President and Provost also acknowledged that they are cognizant of fatigue faculty are experiencing and are resolved to support faculty in any way they can. They also reported that the university had a record number of research proposal submissions this past year (663 submissions) and that external funding increased from $175 million to $211 million.

A senator observed that an overall shift to research has been facilitated by instructional faculty and that the university needs to make sure we keep enough instructional faculty to enable researchers to continue doing research. The PAAG acknowledged the senator’s observation.

A senator asked which optional criteria are on the scorecard and the Provost explained that producing 200 PhDs a year is an option, though not likely to happen. They plan to approach the coordinating board to potentially initiate a formal process of reviewing five doctoral programs in lieu of completing 200 PhDs per year. Additionally, a critical mass of Nobel Prize or Academy members is an optional criteria, but they will ask for a review of high-quality faculty instead. The university will continue to work on recruiting and enrolling the requisite number of high school graduates from the top 10% of their class. The university has achieved the metric of enrolling enough students from the top 10% of their graduating class many times in the past, but, the university must meet the enrollment requirements for two consecutive years, which is largely dependent on the ability to fund and award scholarships. Finally, the university will continue to strive for the required $400 million in endowment funds received annually. Currently, the university is at roughly $225 million.

The President and Provost explained the decisions to approve new undergraduate programs vs creating new PhD programs and how the decision has to be guided by enrollment, where undergraduate programs typically carry larger enrollments.

**Budget cuts to IT**   
President Trauth conveyed information from Ken Pierce that long wait times for IT support were partly due to the internal structure of routing support calls as well as some issues with external support providers. According to Mr. Pierce, the key to restoring service levels and returning to where we were in terms of personnel is not dependent on the budget; IT is fully budgeted for all the personnel they need, the division simply has not been able to hire enough qualified people for the vacant positions. According to Mr. Pierce, it is a people issue, not a budget issue.

Classroom technology is a function of the budget and he has also received specific requests from or heard feedback from faculty. The Provost explained that the budget for classroom upgrades has been restored and that they are trying to find time to do as many renovations as possible.

A senator explained that faculty, many who are teaching remotely, simply do not have the equipment they need to provide high quality remote instruction. They pointed out that some universities provide institutionally funded equipment (e.g., laptop, iPad, cameras, lights). Dr. Bourgeois suggested such items were low cost purchases that could be sustained by departmental operating budgets since faculty are not traveling anywhere. The senator pointed out that some department travel budgets were decimated. Dr. Bourgeois acknowledged that operating budgets were dependent on how departments chose to deal with the recent budget cuts.

**Fall commencement**   
The senate asked how the faculty/staff/student survey data were considered in the decision-making process regarding fall commencement.  The Senate believed there may have been discrepancies in the timing of the decision vs. the availability of the survey data, which is inconsistent with shared governance and thus a concern.  The senate wanted to know what the role of faculty and staff will be in the in-person ceremonies and that as a whole, the senate believes faculty and staff should have a choice about attending an in-person ceremony.

President Trauth explained that their decision to have an in-person ceremony was guided by the survey results that indicated a vast majority of students wanted an in-person commencement. The Provost followed up with an explanation that although the survey was not complete when the announcement about an in-person commencement was sent to the university community, the number of survey responses received after the announcement was negligible and consistent with the data that had been received by the time the decision was announced. Faculty and staff participation are voluntary, except for staff whose primary job responsibilities include graduation/commencement. Overall, the PAAG anticipates fewer staff members needed because of substantial modifications to the commencement program.

A senator asked specifically when the Cabinet decided to have an in-person commencement and whether it was before or after the Commencement Workgroup recommendations were made. The Provost said it was after hearing the workgroup recommendations. The senator pointed out that they felt the announcement about commencement mischaracterized recommendations by the Commencement Workgroup.

**Spring break 2021**The university currently has no intentions to alter the spring schedule or cancel spring break.

**Fall town hall and receptions**President Trauth announced that she and the Provost plan to hold a town hall on Monday, November 23 to provide an update and answer questions from employees, as well as two socially distanced receptions scheduled for the afternoons of Monday, November 23 on the San Marcos campus and Tuesday, November 24 on the Round Rock campus. The town hall is an opportunity for faculty and staff to hear an update on COVID, plans for the spring semester, and budget updates. Overall, the events are being conceptualized as a week of appreciation for faculty and staff.

**Wastewater surveillance for COVID**  
The senate inquired about updates on testing wastewater for COVID at Texas State since local municipalities and other universities are currently doing so. The President said they are studying and considering the possibility, but that one thing they have found is that universities are monitoring wastewater with a focus on research instead of as a means to mitigate spread. In sum, there are too many unknowns at present, they are paying attention to it, but have no current plans to implement wastewater testing. The current practice of contact tracing has served the university well thus far.

**Executive Session**Senators reviewed and ranked FDL applications.   
Three senators were appointed to the committee for review of supplemental awards.

**Adoption of minutes**Senators adopted the minutes of the of October 28, 2020 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm

Minutes submitted by Jennifer Jensen