**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes**

**January 18, 2023**

**4-6 p.m.**

**Attending senators:** Taylor Acee, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Stacey Bender, Dale Blasingame, Rachel Davenport, Peter Dedek, Farzan Irani, Jennifer Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Ben Martin, Roque Mendez, Andrew Ojede, Adetty Pérez de Miles, Michael Supancic, Alex White

**Attending guests:** Eric Algoe, Lisa Ancelet, Isabelle Antes, Jesse Backstrom, Tricia Boucher, Valarie Fleming, Jyothi Narasimha Sai Nite Kamisetty, Stephanie Larrison, Francis Mendez, Sherri Mora, Scott Pope, Paivi Rentz, John Root, Aimee Roundtree, Arlene Salazar, Karen Sigler, Vedaraman Sriraman, Lois Stickley, Stephanie Towery, Kristin Van Diest, Laura Waugh, Dana Willett, Xuan Zhou

The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

**Concerns Regarding Managing Textbook Costs, OERs and Follet Access Program**

The Senate invited Vedaraman Sriraman, associate vice president for Academic Affairs; Dana Willett, assistant vice president of the Office of Distance and Extended Learning (ODEL); and John Root, director of Auxiliary Services, to discuss concerns shared with the Managing Textbook Costs Committee about the upcoming Follett Access Program at Texas State.

Sriraman started by thanking the Senate for being an early supporter of the Managing Textbook Costs Committee, which has been in existence for four years now. In that time, the committee has focused its efforts on open education resources, or OER; and digital direct access, or DDA. He said this issue is a very important student success issue – and one that must be fought on several fronts. Because of the upcoming Follet Access Program, he believes the committee can now focus more on helping faculty with OER development and grant submissions.

A senator asked the guests about House Bill 1027, which requires that universities in Texas disclose in the course registration system the costs of course materials for each section and whether the section has been identified as adopting affordable learning materials. Sriraman said they have worked with the Registrar’s Office to make this happen by the mandated 2022 deadline. Willett said the university will continue to push with HB 1027, particularly in terms of awareness of communication from faculty to students about affordability since the goal of HB1027 is that students, at the point of registration, have a clear idea about the total cost of their instructional materials. Now, when course sections are set up in the system, they can be flagged or checked as using OERs, DDA or materials that cost less than $50. There’s also a description field where faculty can communicate more information with students at the point of registration.

Willett said adoption of direct digital access has shown the most results in saving students money over the past several years. Root said DDA is a course-by-course choice by the faculty, but the new Follett Access Program – where students will automatically be opted in to a $249 fee each semester for all their course materials – opens it up to where all course materials will be treated the same way. Root said if digital textbooks or materials are available in a course, it’s preferred that digital be used because it will obviously be cheaper. If there’s a compelling reason to not use digital or a faculty member can’t use digital, students will receive a hard copy of the book that is theirs to keep. (There will be no more rentals or book buybacks at the end of the semester.) Students will be allowed to opt-out of this fee, and that may make sense for students in some situations. They will have until the 12th class day to decide to opt out.

A senator asked if it applies to all courses if a student opts out. Root said it would apply to all courses. He said they made the program as opt-out because it will facilitate more students having course materials on the first day.

A senator raised a question from the political science department about a fee from Follett, the company that manages the bookstore, with previous DDA adoption. Root said Follett coordinates the behind-the-scenes work for programs like this, and the fee covers that work.

A senator asked how this program is being advertised to incoming students. The program is starting in fall 2023, and Root said the university will be notifying students in the coming weeks before registration opens. Root said nothing will change from a faculty perspective. Whatever choices a faculty member makes in terms of course materials will be included in the program.

A senator asked if this applies to graduate courses, as well. It’s just for undergraduate courses right now.

A senator asked if chapters available for free through the library would be counted as required texts. Willett said, in that case, a faculty member could include that information in the description of the course in the system and check it off as an affordable learning materials course. They wouldn’t be considered as OER, since the library pays for access to those chapters – but they would count as affordable learning materials.

A senator said he’s had issues with DDA in the past where publishers increase the cost of materials over time. Root said Follett is working with all publishers and will go to bat for the university. In addition, the university will annually review with Follett all the materials that were adopted and their costs. If more OER is adopted, he believes the cost to students for this program will go down, as well. He said the publishers are getting a great advantage by being part of programs like this, so they have every incentive to make sure the programs are successful.

A senator said some students who have a few classes with no textbooks might be disadvantaged under this new program. Root said this is the type of hypothetical student who may consider opting out, but even 1-2 classes may result in more than $249 in learning materials.

A senator asked if there was an upper limit in the price of textbooks a faculty member can request under this program. Root said if they need it, no. However, there is historical data to show what’s been requested in the past – so a major change like that may result in a conversation to see why this change is needed.

A senator asked if this is a done deal with a signed contract. Root said the contract is not signed, but it’s very close. It will be a one-year contract. The senator said he’s heard stories from other universities who have adopted this program that it turned into faculty often being told non-digital resources weren’t available. Root said he honestly believes this program should be invisible to faculty and not change how they handle learning materials at all. Eric Algoe, vice president of Finance and Support Services, added that he would personally assure faculty that Follett will be fired if they ever push back on learning material adoption. He said there is a 100% guarantee of academic freedom in terms of the course learning materials. The university has been looking at a program like this since 2017, but Follett couldn’t guarantee academic freedom at the time. It’s taken five years of negotiations for them to accept any request with no questions asked. In addition, Follett used to also say “digital only.” Texas State’s program is not digital only – it’s “digital first.” If the material is available digitally, it will be provided digitally.

Regarding the $249 fee, Algoe said they looked at what faculty selected for course materials last year to come up with that specific number. The university found about 90% of students are going to save money under this program. The 10% who will not save money will be reminded frequently of the ability to opt out of the program. This past fall, 62% of all course materials were already digital – and 78% of all course materials were available in digital format, meaning there’s only a 16% gap of those who will be asked to do digital versions of material instead of physical copies. The remaining 22% will continue to be selected in whatever format the faculty requests.

Algoe also said the price will be negotiated every year, but there will be ongoing pressure each year to keep the price down and ideally make it less expensive for students. Adoption of more OER and library resources will help make that happen. Algoe said the university will go in with its eyes open, realizing there will be inflationary pressures and Follett may try to raise the price. Because it’s an annual contract, the university can always back out when it doesn’t agree with the price being offered.

A senator asked if physical books are included in the fee. Root said yes – and physical books are not rented. They will be given to students to keep.

A senator asked how long students will get to keep digital copies of learning materials. Root said this depends on the publisher. Many publishers are now allowing students to keep digital copies for a year or a couple of years. Algoe said the notion of how long students will be able to maintain access to digital copies is one of the reasons the contract isn’t signed just yet. He said there’s a strong push to ensure a student will maintain access to digital learning materials at least until they graduate. These are individual negotiations with publishers, however.

A senator asked if this program would affect the amount of investment in digital books from the library. Algoe said there has never been any discussion of cutting the library’s book acquisition or journal budget. The senator then asked if all requested materials are going through the library, does a faculty member still need to report it to Follett? Algoe said this goes back to the law. Faculty members are required by HB1027 to list course materials in the course registration system. He said that is a legal issue – not a Follett/contractual issue. Willett said he is not a lawyer, but his interpretation of the law is it says faculty members have to disclose any costs that the student might see for instructional materials and any OER faculty members are using. In the hypothetical case the senator described, Willett said he assumes the faculty member would be good with the learning material being described in the syllabus. He also encouraged him to check the check box that notes the class is using affordable learning materials. He could also include a note in the description box that all learning materials are available at the library.

A senator asked how the $249 fee is divided up. Root said the entire fee goes to Follett, which it then uses to pay the publishers.

Sriraman said the committee will regroup in the coming weeks to look at how it can best continue its efforts and complement the Follett Access Program.

**Texas Council of Faculty Senates Meeting Update**

The Texas Council of Faculty Senates is set to meet February 24-25 in San Antonio. This gathering is attended by up to two members of each faculty senate of each Texas university and includes “Roundup Reports” for each. There are also candid conversations on the legislative session and other issues facing state universities. The Senate needs 1-2 representatives to attend.

A senator who attended in the past said attending and hearing horror stories from other universities makes you feel good about the situation at Texas State.

**Other Business**

Spring 2023 commencement mace bearer slots are now available for senators to sign up.

President Damphousse’s travel schedule has forced some PAAG meeting dates to shuffle.

There is an update regarding the policy around dean summative reviews. The provost has agreed to the Senate’s recommendation that a senator serve as an outside observer – and not as chair of the review committee.

There has been a change of time for the university’s Run to R1 event with the executive director of the Carnegie Classification System. It’s now scheduled for 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. on Thursday, January 26.

Open forums with four candidates for the vice president of Institutional Inclusive Excellence position will be held in February.

Minutes from the December 7, 2022 meeting were approved.

The Senate then went into Executive Session to discuss committee replacements.

The meeting adjourned at 5:33 p.m.