**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

JCK 880 and Zoom Meeting, 4:00-6:00 pm

**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,

**Guests:** Lisa Ancelet, Jesse Backstrom, Nathan Pino, Justin Randolph, Karen Sigler, Lois Stickley

 The meeting started at 4:00 pm

**Academic Freedom Survey and Expressive Activities Policy – Nathan Pino, Chair of the Academic Freedom Committee**

An Academic Freedom Survey was administered to faculty in fall, 2022.  The survey gathered 203 responses, which were skewed somewhat towards older and tenured faculty compared to the university average.  On average, faculty were neutral to somewhat in agreement that they have academic freedom with regard to teaching.  Most were confident about their ability to assign/change their grades, and they generally agreed that their chairs support their approach to teaching. They were most concerned about being sanctioned for expressing their views or engaging in debate with others, especially if they were in disagreement with university policy or ideas (averaging “neither agree nor disagree” on these items).  They were neutral regarding whether they would be granted due process while under investigation.  Faculty averaged that they “somewhat agree” that they have academic freedom with regard to research.

Responses varied somewhat by demographic and field of study.  The following results were found related to academic freedom related to teaching: Age/seniority was positively correlated with the perception of having academic freedom.  Tenure-line faculty perceived that they had more academic freedom than non-tenure line faculty.  Liberal arts faculty perceived that they had less academic freedom compared to members of other colleges, while faculty in the college of science and engineering (COSE) perceived that they had more academic freedom than others.  Female faculty perceived slightly less academic freedom compared to male faculty, but this was a small effect.

Similar results were found related to research.   Seniority was positively correlated with the perception of academic freedom, and COSE faculty were more likely to express confidence in their academic freedom.  Notably, faculty of color and Latinx faculty perceived less academic freedom compared to white and non-Latinx faculty.

The survey concluded with a question about how the existence of academic freedom paved the way for academic accomplishments.  In general, faculty responded that they are able to be creative and engage in research on topics that they would otherwise be unable to explore.  This likewise applied to the ability to teach subjects as they see fit and to try different approaches in the classroom.  Others said that academic freedom was not an issue to them since their areas of teaching and research were not controversial.  Others replied that they avoided controversial topics to avoid potential academic freedom issues.

Following this survey, the Academic Freedom Committee developed action items to explore.  The committee is interested in increasing awareness of the topic, and the committee chair is planning a meeting with the Associate Provost to discuss Academic Freedom.  The committee is also planning to sponsor a speaker in the University Lecture Series.  A follow-up survey is being planned, likely ongoing every few years to measure the climate.  It was noted that one factor missing in the survey was the impact of senior colleagues (not chairs/administrators) on academic freedom.  The senate expressed its support for offering a similar survey periodically.  The senate will also share a condensed report of the committee’s findings to the administration.

The senate next discussed a draft policy regarding expressive activities such as public presentations/demonstrations and exhibits on campus.  This policy appears to be a reworking of other policies, including UPPS 07.04.07 (Demonstrations on University Property) and UPPS 07.04.05 (Assembly Activities Involving Amplified Sound, Exhibits, and Erecting Symbolic Structures).  It is not clear whether the new policy will replace these, or if it is designed to complement them.  Much of the language appears to be pulled directly from these other policies.

Faculty senators made several comments and asked questions regarding the policy.  In most cases, the answers were unclear.

* What guides the behavior of police during demonstrations?  Are they allowed to surveil participants?
* How could this policy impact the work of faculty who are teacher/scholar/activists, expressing political views?  Can they conduct their work on university owned computers/property?  If research is inherently political, what are the restrictions?
* The policy appears to overstep regarding prohibiting activities that “involve substantial disorder”.  A senator expressed that any implied activities should be clarified and included among other restricted activities, such as disrupting class activity or disrupting access across campus.
* It is stated in the policy that expressive structures must be disassembled each evening and reassembled the next day.  Why is this the case?
* Who is liable for injury or hazards due to expressive structures, and how can this be enforced?

These concerns were noted and will be shared as part of the internal review process.

**Discussion of Proposed Change to Faculty Development Leave (FDL) Policy AA/PPS 14.02.02**

There has been ongoing confusion about who is eligible to apply for Faculty Development Leave (FDL).  Our policy states that only tenured faculty may receive FDL, but it is unclear whether tenure track faculty may apply for FDL under the assumption that they will receive tenure prior to the start of their leave.  It was proposed that the FDL policy be updated by clarifying that a faculty member must be tenured *at the time of application for leave*, since only tenured faculty members are eligible for leave.  Senators objected to this idea and recommended that instead a clause be added that explains that nontenured faculty may apply, but FDL is *contingent on the faculty member being tenured at the time of the start of the FDL*.  The wording could change such that the policy spells out who is eligible to apply, and the conditions for receiving FDL.

Some senators added that other language should be clarified.  Specifically, faculty routinely ask about how the form should be filled out, especially regarding the supplemental award.  This will be considered as the form is updated.

**Discussion of Topics for February 1 President’s Academic Advisory Group (PAAG) meeting**

The following issues were discussed:

* The senate could request updates from task forces, specifically the Student Recruitment Task Force and the Administrative Burdens Task Force.  The recommendations are not (yet) being released, but President Damphousse is already acting upon some recommendations.  The senate could request a timeline and an overview of some of the highlights.
* Senators debated bringing up GPT-Chat, but decided this was not appropriate for PAAG
* There are continued widespread concerns about the equity study, salary compression, and salary inversion.  There appears to be distrust of the administration regarding how this will be handled.  The senate will continue to collect feedback as part of its subcommittee’s work, due to be presented at the end of the spring semester.
* University finance decisions were discussed.  The university has dipped into reserves to fund recent initiatives including scholarships and doctoral incentives.  Why were these initiatives selected for funding, but not salary equity (which is being funded by other means)?
* Understaffing is a huge problem.  Problems with accounting has been brought up by senators previously.  The university is losing staff due to noncompetitive wages, and there is concern that this is being resolved more slowly than necessary.
* The senate is interested in a legislative update that is not directly tied to funding.  What ongoing legislative actions will potentially impact the university?

A subset of these items was selected for discussion:

* Hiring and maintaining staff
* Updates from task forces
* Legislative update

**Announcements**

* The Committee Preference Survey will go out February 1.  Faculty are encouraged to fill it out.
* Chair and Dean Perception Surveys will be going out soon.
* A reminder regarding the University Lecture Series was sent 1/12/23, but no additional applications have been received.  The deadline is February 3.  Constituents are encouraged to apply.
* Faculty Senate Election Timeline:
* Feb 2: list of candidates is produced
* Feb 6: notify eligible candidates
* Feb 16: Deadline to decline
* Feb 20: Voting Opens
* Mar 06: Voting Closes
* Mace Bearers are still needed for the spring graduation ceremony
* The next Texas Council of Faculty Senates meeting will be held 2/24-2/25. Senator Pérez de Miles tentatively agreed to represent the senate at this meeting.

 The January 18 minutes were approved by vote.

The meeting ended at 5:55 pm

Minutes submitted by Ben Martin