**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, March 8, 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, Jenn Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Ben Martin, Roque Mendez, Andrew Ojede, Adetty Pérez de Miles, Michael Supancic, Alex White

**Guests:** Lisa Ancelet, Jesse Backstrom, Andrew Behnke, Eugene Bourgeois, Matt Brooks, President Damphousse, Kristy Daniel, Laura Ellis-Lai, Noel Anthony Fuller, Kristopher Infante, Doug Morrish, Aimee Roundtree, Karen Sigler, Lois Stickley, Debbie Thorne, Bob Vásquez

The meeting started at 4:01 pm

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

The senate shared continuing concerns about problems related to hiring and maintaining staff.  Salaries continue to be uncompetitive, resulting in high turnover and low applicant pools.

President Damphousse explained that in total, the university is down 180 staff positions compared to pre-Covid levels.  University salaries have always been somewhat low, but positions offered excellent benefits.  Benefits appear to no longer be valued as much by workers, so a different philosophy is needed.

While it is tempting to simply raise wages to improve hiring and retention, this is not a simple process.  The university has a set pay range for each position.  If we raise a starting wage closer to the max wage for a position, it inadvertently causes a ripple effect as staff members move around for increased pay.  To overcome this, Academic Affairs now has standardized salary rates that are higher than other divisions can post (funded through salary savings).

We have tried other ways to assist workers.  Flat bonuses like the one given in December especially helped low wage earners.  Permanent raises were given to 1400 faculty and staff members (including 400 Academic Affairs staff) that were identified by supervisors as being underpaid.  Salaries for some positions were increased for all workers, including hall managers and peer mentors.  These increases were funded using salary savings (resulting from high salary positions being replaced by a new hire at a lower pay rate) and reserves.

A senator noted that these ideas seemed to be geared toward long term solutions, but they do address the immediate problem.  We are not advertising at competitive rates for many positions, including needed skilled workers.  Our applicant pools are poor, resulting in wasted time and unfilled positions.  What can be done in the short term?

For immediate issues, strategic decisions may be made to provide raises to people in key positions.  This of course will not solve the broader problem.  To do more we need increased revenue.  Texas State is currently lobbying for $50 million from the state legislature.  We will know in May if we are successful.  We are also working on increasing the number of students paying tuition by improving international recruiting, increasing online offerings, and expanding Round Rock offerings.

A senator inquired about what students we are targeting to come to Round Rock.  The provost responded that courses at all levels from developmental to graduate are possible.  At this time, Texas State is petitioning colleges and departments to explore opportunities that make sense for the regional market. For example, degrees in business and psychology are in high demand, and may be viable in Round Rock.  There is no current plan to open lab facilities.  Ultimately, full degree programs should be offered at Round Rock, including general education courses.  These programs should complement (but not replicate) what is offered at the San Marcos Campus.

A senator expressed concern that no quality/needs assessment has been completed, and Round Rock is missing many student support services that will be necessary if programs are expanded.  The provost explained that a space needs analysis is underway to drive program direction for the Esperanza building.  For example, two large teaching theaters are underused.

The president offered a brief enrollment update. As of March 6, we have received 38,000 freshman applications, up 22% compared to 2022 at this time.  We have admitted 25,000, up 13%.  Our acceptance of top 25% students is up 12%, demonstrating that increases are across the board.

A senator asked why Texas State has little to no cable and radio programming.  This is unusual for a university this size, and we are even behind ACC in this regard.  A discussion followed, with general agreement that we can and should do more with media.  We have the facilities to do so, but we need the leadership and mentorship to get it going again.  Quality control has been an issue, and student work would need oversight.

The president presented a quick legislative update.  The state has $34 billion in surplus, with a great deal formally designated to higher education.  The situation is tenuous for Texas State; the funds could easily be designated for other institutions.  There are also several bills that are of concern for higher education.  The president is managing this to the best of his ability while working to protect the university.

Strategic planning is continuing, but there is a pause in official planning in part due to unresolved questions regarding our legislative funding.  Departments and units can and should continue to define their own plans.  Lisa Lloyd is now overseeing the strategic planning process.

**University Lecturers Committee Report (Kristy Daniel, Chair)**

Sixteen proposals were reviewed with 10 recommended for funding, including proposals from six different colleges.  The committee made recommendations to improve the application process.  The committee is concerned about the continued lack of student representation despite attempts to include students on the committee.  The student government typically appoints a student to the committee, but most of the time the nominated student is not responsive.  There may be a better way to identify a student who is interested in serving, but the committee is concerned about the appearance of bypassing the Student Government.

**Report for Texas Council of Faculty Senates (Andrew Ojede/ Adetty Pérez de Miles)**

The primary topic of discussion at the meeting was the role of shared governance in the current climate.  There is a need to educate faculty, administrators, and also the legislature on this issue.  A key issue under discussion was the role of faculty in the process.  Some thought that faculty should ‘stay in their lane’ since administrators ultimately make decisions.  Others thought that faculty need to be more vocal to enact change.

There is general concern about senate bills being discussed that target women’s sports, critical race theory, and tenure.  Faculty need to be careful when advocating for a political position to do this as a private citizen, not as an employee of the state.  There was a disagreement about how best to respond.  Some thought that it was important to make a statement, while others thought it would be counterproductive.  Some think that good work is being done behind the scenes, while others think that this is time to act.  This legislative cycle is different than campaign promises, since bills are going through review.  Some with knowledge of the process are optimistic that many of the bills will have little chance of passing the House.

**Feedback on Senate Liaisons Meeting**

Senators generally agreed that the conversation was productive resulting in lots of ideas.  Some colleges may have benefited from a more focused discussion.  The question is, what will the senate do with the resulting notes?

Some themes emerged.  Staffing is a problem across the university.  Concerns about the scaling of online instruction was a topic that the senate has not previously addressed.  Senators will review the compiled list to identify common themes.

The March 1 minutes were approved by vote.

The senate entered executive session at 5:51 pm.

During the executive session, the senate voted to endorse the University Lecture Committee recommendations.

The meeting ended at 6:03 pm.

Minutes submitted by Ben Martin