Faculty Senate Minutes

February 7, 2024

JCK 880

4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

**Members Present**: Vaughn Baltzly, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Stacey Bender, Dale Blasingame, William Chittenden, Rachel Davenport, Peter Dedek, Dave Donnelly, Farzan Irani, William Kelemen, Lynn Ledbetter, Jo Beth Oestreich, Adetty Pérez de Miles, Michael Supancic, and Alex White.

Member Absent: Dave Donnelly

**Guests**: Amy Benton, Matthew Brooks, Shannon Duffy, Lauren Goodley, Samantha Krause, Scott Kruse, Arlene Salazar, Piyush Shroff, Karen Sigler, Lois Stickley, Sheila Torres-Blank and Kelly Visnak.

Chair Ledbetter opened the meeting at 4:02 p.m.

The first agenda item discussed the **Faculty and Staff Service Awards (AA/PPS No. 02.04.01 and UPPS No. 04.04.54).** The university currently recognizes faculty and staff for their years of service at ten, fifteen, twenty-year intervals, and so on. However, this recognition only includes full-time employment (FTE) years of service, leaving out part-time years. The Nontenure Line Faculty Committee (NLFC) has proposed an update to the policy to include all years of service, regardless of full-time or part-time status. Although the item was mentioned in the May 1, 2023, President’s Cabinet Meeting minutes, it was not voted on. However, Eric Algoe, CFO, indicated that there was mutual agreement to revise these policies. Progressing this initiative requires coordination with Carol Clerie, Associate Vice President for Human Resources (HR), Eric Algoe, CFO, and Faculty Records. The process involves navigating administrative procedures and addressing concerns regarding record-keeping and workload. Vice Chair Davenport will assemble a small team to determine the following steps to advance these policy changes for voting and approval for implementation in the 2024-2025 academic year.

**MOTION** to recommend a small team address the recommendation to change the policy to read all eligible time served. **PASS**

The next item on the agenda was an update about the **Faculty Senate Election and Committee Preference Survey**. The Chair encourages Senators to remind their colleagues to participate in the survey. Another reminder will be sent out on the day the survey closes on February 9 for all colleges except the College of Liberal Arts (CoLA), whose survey closes on February 14. **Faculty Senate** election dates are February 19 through March 4, 2024. Information on these items is available on the Faculty Senate Election page. The Faculty Senate is seeking candidates to fill several vacancies.

These vacancies are for a full term in Applied Arts, Fine Arts and Communication, Science and Engineering, and two full terms in Liberal Arts, as well as a two-year term in McCoy College and a one-year term in Liberal Arts. The deadline for candidates to decline to have their name on the election ballot is February 16, 2024.

Chair surveys close on February 14, 2024; the Dean surveys will be sent out after the former surveys end. A Senator stated he sent out a reminder to his liaisons to remind them to encourage faculty participation in the Faculty Senate. The Chair suggested posting Faculty Senator service responsibilities clearly and making them available beyond just one link.

**AI in Education** **Update** by Piyush Shroff, Faculty Senate Fellow. Shroff provided an update on his AI Survey progress to the Faculty Senate. He shared that he had engaged with various campus entities, including eight to ten faculty members, the Academic Freedom Committee, Honors College, and Student Government, co-hosted a Faculty Development workshop, and will soon meet with Staff Council, and Matt Hall, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer. A Senator inquired about the response from the student government. Shroff shared comments from the Student Government, including that AI is used for research and understanding the learning process, helps them with their writing, and is useful. Shroff plans to distribute the survey using Qualtrics in early March. A Senator shared an AI survey designed by the University of Iowa for students and faculty that may offer some assistance in refining Shroff’s survey questions. A Senator encouraged Shroff to also include his open-ended questions in the survey. Shroff aims to provide recommendations based on his research findings, focusing on faculty perspectives. The discussion emphasized the importance of feedback in shaping recommendations for faculty development, with suggestions to tailor questions for targeted insights and acknowledge the challenges of open responses in his survey design. Once Shroff completes his survey and analysis of the data, a Senator proposed he forward his findings to Hall for consideration. A Senator noted the survey could provide opportunities for future professional development.

The next agenda item was **Around the Table** shares. Several Senators discussed the Bobcat Online Scholarship System (BOSS) and its communication with the recommendation writers. They felt the system needed to be revisited to clarify the directions and deadlines. One of the Senators suggested that scholarship applicants be allowed to complete the process without recommendation letters. Chair Ledbetter suggested visiting Financial Aid and Scholarships, which oversees BOSS, to explore potential modifications to the application process.

A Senator stated she would email Dr. Thorne to ask how the Instructional Faculty Line will be funded.

A Senator raised concerns about the university's plan to address the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) changes. The Chair stated that there was optimism in two areas: students continuing to rely on FAFSA will be informed in advance, and there is an ongoing discussion to adjust the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) threshold. Merit offers will be distributed from October 1, which is earlier than usual, but every university faces similar challenges, and administrative issues may prolong the process. One such issue is the Department of Education's failure to incorporate the appropriate inflation index, resulting in delays. A Senator asked how this will be funded and structured to meet the needs of these students. The Chair suggested this could be a question for the President's Academic Advisory Group (PAAG).

The Senate discussed the issue of communication within the university. Former President Trauth's task force recommendations were never shared with the university, and there are concerns about the accuracy of information communicated under the new administration; additionally, communication was identified as a significant issue during the full Faculty Senate meeting with liaisons in the fall. The university has focused on a more extensive marketing and social media presence, but accurate information sharing is crucial. The Bobcat Back event was not well-communicated to students or organizations willing to assist. The upcoming Presidential debate was also discussed, and questions about the university's plans for marketing and handling the event were raised.

A Senator was concerned about the faculty members involved in the study abroad program. They feared that current programs may be defunded, and the office may be in disarray. TXST Global's takeover may be the cause. The Senator will gather more details and report to the Faculty Senate in an upcoming meeting.

A Senator wanted to remind everyone about two topics that they feel need attention within the following year. The first topic concerns a proposed shared governance policy, which was supposed to be published within a year, but that time frame has passed, and the policy has not yet been published. The second topic concerns revisiting the university’s family leave policy. A Senator noted that President Damphousse is willing to strengthen our family leave policy, but it must remain aligned with state law. Next steps are to benchmark what other Texas Universities are doing to see if they have more robust policies that we can aim for.

A senator inquired about the progress of the conduct policy committee that was to be developed by Debbie Thorne, Senior Vice Provost. The Chair noted that the responsibility for this task was given to Matt Brooks, Assistant Provost. The Senator mentioned that the committee would focus on addressing the recent audit findings by the Texas Workforce Commission, which revealed that the university had been penalized in this area. The Chair agreed to check if the Texas Workforce Commission has set a deadline for the university to comply with this requirement.

A Senator emphasized the importance of effective communication in shared governance. The Senator expressed concerns about the lack of communication between the administration and the faculty before making decisions.

The Chair shared highlights from the recent **AAC meeting**. The new provost shared that weekly ACC meetings will continue, and monthly meetings will be held with only the deans and the provost for more candid conversations. There was discussion about conducting a thorough examination of curricular programs and course offerings to ensure efficiency, address any duplicate courses, and assess the effectiveness of existing programs. The President was interested in reviewing programs that are in development or have recently been implemented but are not meeting expected outcomes.

A Senator reported that academic deans will use a software tool called Consortium to identify courses that may hinder students from graduating successfully. The aim is to gather data and determine barriers across all degree programs, focusing on college-wide assessment. A Senator stated there was a discussion about creating a comprehensive list of courses offered each semester to improve planning for students and advisors.

A Senator shared an issue that his dean communicated in a recent meeting regarding hiring. There was concern that new departments may not be able to hire the specialized faculty member needed but a specialized individual who might advance the program. The Chair emphasized seeking and incorporating faculty input into department-level programs through a long-range plan.

A Senator shared that the Graduate Council met and stated starting with the next round of graduate merit scholarships (Fall 2024), graduate merit scholarships will only be awarded to students in in-person or hybrid programs. Students in fully online graduate programs will not be eligible for graduate merit scholarships, per the decision by the President’s Cabinet. This change does not affect the regular Graduate College scholarships, only the Graduate College Merit Fellowships. The Chair stated it was important for faculty to participate in decision-making.

A Senator proposed that the Faculty Senate consider allocating time within its meetings for the President to ask questions of its members. Another Senator reminded everyone that the President had previously expressed interest in attending the Faculty Senate to discuss ideas. To facilitate this, a Senator suggested modifying the meeting agenda to allow the president to ask the Faculty Senate questions.

A Senator wanted to know the status of the Environment and Sustainability Committee. The Senator would like to coordinate with this group and others to learn and support events for Earth Day. The Chair stated that names were forwarded to Emma Parsley, Sustainability Coordinator, to revitalize the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Still, the Chair has not heard more about them or whether the committee was resurrected. The Senator will check with Parsley on the status of this committee. A Senator stated that TXST could make a film about sustainability protocols.

**MOTION** to approve January 31, 2024, Minutes. **APPROVED**.

Chair Ledbetter adjourned the meeting at 5.29 p.m.

The next Faculty Senate meeting is February 14, 2024.

The next President's Academic Advisory Group (PAAG) meeting has been rescheduled for February 28, 2024.