Faculty Senate Minutes

March 20, 2024

JCK 880

4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

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

Member Absent: Lynn Ledbetter

**Guests**: Lori Assaf, Shannon Duffy, Lauren Goodley, Cristian Lieneck, Russell Moses, Arlene Salazar, Piyush Shroff, Lois Stickley, and Toni Watt.

**Vice Chair (VC) Davenport opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m.**

The first agenda item was to discuss concerns related to **shared governance** and develop questions for the upcoming meeting with the President’s Academic Advisory Group (PAAG). Five preliminary topics identified for PAAG to address how faculty voices have been implemented with shared governance and strategic planning concerning the **new doctoral programs that went forward last summer, the new doctoral programs being contemplated in the future, the new Responsibility Center Management (RCM) model being considered, the UPPS policy on SB17, and BookSmart.** Nathan Pino, Chair of the Academic Freedom Committee, and Cristian Lieneck, Chair of the Academic Governance Committee, were invited to share issues raised by faculty in their committee. Pino could not attend the meeting but forwarded topics discussed to VC Davenport to share with the Faculty Senate. The first concern discussed was related to the new doctoral programs from the summer of 2023. VC Davenport shared questions and comments from Nathan Pino. The committee questioned how faculty were selected to develop the program proposals, specifically if faculty volunteered or were handpicked. The committee stated that this issue could affect shared governance dynamics at various levels within the institution. A Senator stated it was a quick turnaround to develop the program proposals, and many units scrambled to identify faculty to participate in developing these program proposals, with some faculty volunteering to get in on the process. Another Senator stated that the writing team in their unit comprised the most experienced faculty members in the field for the proposed program. Additionally, one Senator noted a Ph.D. program that was in the development process was bumped for another suggested proposal. Several Senators from the units involved in the fast-tracked summer program proposals felt the work was mandated by the new Vice President (VP) Sivakumaran for TXST Global rather than asking the faculty if these were proposals they would like to develop within their departments. Pino and other Senators pointed out that these proposals did not align with the university’s strategic plan. A Senator stated that the online programs were suggested by VP Sivakumaran, and the President’s Cabinet selected the face-to-face programs.

Lieneck shared comments from his committee regarding suggested PAAG topics and other issues. Lieneck shared the first concern related to the academic freedom of faculty to have the prerogative to choose an e-book or hardback text for their course through BookSmart. Continuing with academic freedom concerns, some faculty members have been directed by chairs to reduce the number of assignments and readings and reconsider how faculty grade students work. The Academic Governance Committee discussed that chairs should undergo additional training on academic freedom. A Senator asked Lieneck if he was provided other examples of interference affecting faculty academic freedom. Lieneck stated some students were advised to take a large class load giving an appearance of rushing them through the program. These changes impact student performance. Lieneck stated if faculty had to reduce 20-30% of their content, it would affect what and how faculty would teach. Regarding academic governance, Lieneck stated that some were delegating too much authority to their department administrators, affecting academic decisions such as incomplete grades or when to issue an incomplete grade. Some of these administrative changes may be due to budget restraints but led to faculty confusion and unnecessary extra work. Another issue related to individual faculty assessments in the Personnel Committees (PC). VC Davenport stated that a new shared governance policy concerning PC guidelines was being developed. The last item Lieneck discussed was the lack of transparency with regard to rapidly implementing new policies or programs, which was concerning faculty.

VC Davenport returned to comments from Pino. Pino expressed concerns about the fact that 65% of faculty members were nontenure line. He suggested that due process should be in place to give tenured faculty a significant role in reviewing contingent faculty who might be threatened with dismissal. He also mentioned that the shared governance policy has some guidelines that allow nontenure line faculty to serve on PCs, but it's up to the departments to decide. Pino's concern was protecting nontenured faculty who participated in the PC, especially if they had differing views in a PC meeting, as they could be dismissed without cause. VC Davenport stated this would be an issue the Faculty Senate should address in the future after the shared governance policy is published. The next shared issue concerns TXST Global using private companies to market graduate programs and graders for some online programs. A Senator noted that external contractors could potentially be hired to supervise doctoral dissertations. A Senator stated these dissertation coaches were to help with the mechanical aspects of their dissertation, but the faculty would handle the supervision of the doctoral students. A Senator noted that the concern of graders not being associated with the university was odd.

VC Davenport stated that TXST Global programs could be a subitem to add to the original concerns under the new doctoral programs for PAAG. A Senator noted that TXST Global has reached out to many departments and programs, encouraging these units to develop online programs, but it was unclear how the programs would be supported financially. A Senator noted the challenges of delivering so many programs, which were developed quickly, and added the recent announcement by President Damphousse of the partnership with Collin College. A Senator noted there were more questions regarding these online programs' expanded programming, funding, and faculty responsibility. The Senator noted that the new programs appeared to be market-driven, but these programming decisions impacted minimal input from faculty. A Senator stated that if the normal process for program change has changed, it was important for the administration to provide the new rules for these newly created program opportunities. A strategic plan was recently completed, but recent changes have not aligned with this planning tool, and faculty members are not certain what the new vision will be for the university. A Senator stated that the recent announcement regarding changes to the Optional Retirement Program (ORP) concerned many faculty members. The Texas State University Systems (TSUS) recently selected TIAA as the lead recordkeeper and consolidated to four vendors. VC Davenport will add the ORP question to the preliminary list of questions to ask Eric Algoe, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), why faculty and staff were not consulted about this prospective change. The five preliminary items identified for PAAG will be sent forward, including a sub-topic under the new doctoral programs from last summer regarding TXST Global programs and a sixth topic concerning the optional ORP and to inquire how CFO Eric Algoe consulted faculty on this change.

The next agenda item was to **discuss topics for the joint meeting of the Faculty Senate, Council of Chairs, and the Academic Affairs Council**, which are due by March 22. VC Davenport shared this meeting happens once a semester and provided examples of past topics. She stated two topics could be an update on the timeline for the shared governance policy with PC guidelines and the Faculty of Instruction policy. A Senator asked about the new hiring process. The Provost recently stated that under the new RCM model, faculty lines could be reallocated from one department to another. This will require a policy change in UPPS 03.02.01. A Senator asked what training and resources were needed to meet these new responsibilities for deans and chairs. A Senator inquired if the opt-in date had been extended for the Nontenure faculty to be considered for advancement under the Faculty of Instruction policy. VC Davenport said, “No.”

The next item on the **agenda entailed deliberating topics for the Senate Fellow to concentrate on in the forthcoming year.** The call for Senate Fellow applications will be sent out on March 22. The Faculty Senate will send forth the following topic: The Fellow’s research project should broadly support the Faculty Senate’s efforts to determine best practices in teaching evaluation and its equitable use in performance, merit, and promotion decisions. Other topics of broad interest will also be considered.

**MOTION** to approve the March 6, 2024, Minutes. **PASSED.**

The Faculty Senate moved into an Executive Session to identify a faculty member to replace a retiring ombudsperson and identify three faculty members to serve on the Ombuds Committee.

**Vice Chair Davenport adjourned the meeting at 5:45 p.m.**

The next Faculty Senate meeting is March 27, 2024.