Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

April 3, 2024

4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

JCK 880

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

Member Absent: Adetty Pérez de Miles

**Guests**: Eric Algoe, Pranesh Aswath, Kelly Damphousse, Shreekanth Mandayam, Thillainatarajan Sivakumaran, Debbie Thorne, Erin Dorrell, Carla Ellard, Lauren Goodley, Lauren Ibarra, Samantha Krause, Yongmei Lu, Aimee Roundtree, Piyush Shroff, Lois Stickley, Sheila Torres-Blank and Toni Watt.

**Chair Ledbetter opened the meeting at 4:01 p.m**.

**The first item on the agenda was the response to shared governance concerns** sent from the Faculty Senate to the President’s Academic Advisory Group (PAAG). President Damphousse reiterated the importance of being inclusive in shared governance by receiving input from students, faculty, staff, and alumni. President Damphousse responded to the first issue related to the new doctoral programs that went forward last summer, as he took the time to revisit and update the Faculty Senate on this issue. The university had an opportunity in the late spring of 2023 to develop eleven Ph.D. program proposals, doubling current Ph.D. offerings at TXST. The University Curriculum Committee (UCC) and faculty writing teams worked quickly to respond to this opportunity. The next program development phase will come directly from the strategic plan, prioritizing implementing a Ph.D. program in the humanities. The next proposal process will not have the same pressing timeline as last summer but will be like previous processes used before. Provost Aswath stated that the programs from Civil Engineering, Mathematics, Biophysical Chemistry, and McCoy College of Business Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) received virtual site visits from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and positive comments about the proposed programs. Vice President of TXST Global Sivakumaran stated the TXST Global programs use Instructional Connection if online programs need graders for large courses. All faculty at TXST will vet and ensure there will be qualified individuals to help the instructors. Faculty here can join the Instructional Connection if they desire extra income. A Senator stated that not all programs had been working on creating a doctoral program. The nursing program was further along in the development of their proposal more than the other ten programs. The faculty felt the timing and short timeframe were problematic. The faculty did not select most of the five face-to-face programs. The Senator stated that TXST Global used an online program management tool to identify prospective high generation need programs, particularly for online programs. Sivakumaran stated that the online work was based on market research and the viability of having success online. The programs impact the run to R1 and TUF funding and make TXST more competitive and better aligned with other institutions seeking TUF funding.

The second issue related to how **new doctoral programs will be considered**. Provost Aswath stated that future online programs will work with Sivakumaran in TXST Global to ensure programs are properly vetted. A Senator stated that the Dean's report would identify prospective programs based on faculty input and send it to the provost for consideration. Sivakumaran stated that the deans have been asked to prioritize proposed undergraduate and graduate programs and allow the administration an opportunity to curate these requests to determine future program development. A Senator asked when the approved list will be available to faculty to prepare for the 2025, 2027, etc., new program development cycles. The provost stated the approved and still-in-process programs were sent to the deans. A Senator noted that the list sent to the deans needed to be prioritized and then submitted back to Jeff Housman, Assistant Vice Provost of Curricular and Academic Programs, so they could be added to a large spreadsheet to help the administration with the final iteration of the list. There has been poor communication about this process.

The President addressed the next item**, the Responsibility Centered Management (RCM) budget model.** This continues to be an ongoing process. Eric Algoe, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), stated it was unclear which model TXST would adopt. A committee was formed, and faculty will be invited to serve on this committee. A draft timeline for implementing this model was developed. Algoe stated discussions on how to designate funds for various programs will commence next fall. By fall 2025, TXST will have a model that runs in the background with the current budget process to inform everyone how the models work and track both models to determine which model works best for the university. By the fall of 2026, decisions will be made on how to approach the implementation of the model and how funds will be distributed. Enrollment numbers will factor into the decision-making process. If the data gathered proves positive, the RCM model will run in the fall of 2027. A Senator stated there was a Faculty Senate Budget Subcommittee, and it would be great to ask faculty to participate in this process. Algoe will send out committee requests to serve on this program soon. There will also be a technical subcommittee to help build the model.

The next item discussed was the **UPPS on SB17**. President Damphousse stated two things about this bill. The university cannot have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) division or require a diversity statement for hiring, and no scholarships could be awarded based on race. The President did not see a purpose for a task force on this issue. The Texas State University System (TSUS) has been working to prepare a written policy in response to SB17.

The next item discussed was the **implementation of the BookSmart program**. Algoe noted there were problems, and many have been addressed and corrected. New issues arose, especially related to accessing exam codes. The administration anticipates the students will have a portal for a seamless process to get their textbooks in the fall. Faculty will also receive an email confirming textbook adoptions.

The next item discussed concerns the **Optional Retirement Plan (ORP) changes**. It was determined that the TSUS institutions were not exercising their fiduciary duties on the retirement plans of affected personnel. Every institution had its own contract with optional programs, i.e., TIAA, which included each provider's fees, benefits, and investment choices. TSUS owns these contracts, and TXST has not renegotiated the terms for at least twenty years. TSUS implemented a competitive process to vet all providers from every institution. Once this process began, the CFOs from each institution were selected to serve on this committee. They signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) and could not share any information about the decision-making process. TSUS determined only five options would be allowed to provide the best investments and lower fees for affected personnel. All current contributors would be grandfathered into the existing offerings. Beginning in October 2024, new employees will enter the new plan. A third-party administrator will provide independent financial advice for staff and faculty.

The discussion continued with issues shared by Senators on different topics. A Senator shared that some faculty members had concerns about how to address actions by administrators they were uncomfortable with. The President does not want anyone to feel pressured into making decisions. The President hosts monthly *Coffee with Kelly* and provides a forum for faculty and staff to speak freely and share concerns or praises about work life at TXST. He also stated that faculty and staff could email him their concerns at President@txst.edu. Faculty can contact the Ombudsperson, Human Resources, the Office of General Counsel, or the Office of Internal Audit website. Additionally, TSUS hosts an Ethics Hotline from the system office. The faculty can refer to the Ethics Policy **UPPS No. 01.04.02 No. 9 for additional information.**

The President asked if there were other issues the Faculty Senate would like to address. A Senator shared a positive comment related to the March 22 UCC meeting. Without additional documents, the committee could not vote to approve Collin College's consideration in the consent agenda. The Senator met with Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Sriraman and Sivakumaran to identify the documents needed for the UCC to make an informed decision. Sriraman and Sivakumaran were gracious and amicable regarding the committee’s request. Sivakumaran stated he desires to ask programs if they would like to offer online classes; if not, maybe later.

The President stated building trust and openly providing information were important to shared governance at TXST. He desires to create opportunities for more communication to improve trust and morale on campus. He stated recent changes occurred quickly, but it is important to maintain and sustain the momentum to reach R1 by 2027. The RCM process will not be rushed. TXST budget depends on enrollment. TXST saw a 6% increase in student credit hours this spring versus last spring. We want to continue this growth pattern at the Round Rock (RR) campus, our online offerings, Collin College, international offerings online, and those attending in person. TXST saw a 42% increase in international students in the past two years. The President desires to increase salaries, and with growth comes the opportunity to expand investment in the TXST community. The President stated the retention rate of our freshmen from fall 2023 to spring 2024 hit a record of nearly 94%. If this occurs from spring to fall (2024), TXST will be close to the goal of 85% retention of attending students.

A Senator stated the importance of protecting Spring Lake from invasive blue-green algae and ensuring this area will be maintained as environmentally friendly. Riverfest will be returning next week. The students will have a clean-up after the event. Algoe has gathered feedback from 1600 people on the master plan. The vision will be transformational for TXST to create an ecological, archaeological, and cultural opportunity. A new Lifestyle branding was introduced by athletics and marketing called *River State*.

A Senator stated the Hathi Trust database at the library would be discontinued, impacting researchers in social sciences, historians, and others at TXST. The provost stated there was some confusion and plans to meet with Mary Brennan, Dean of Liberal Arts, Kelly Visnak, Vice Provost and University Librarian, and other faculty concerning this issue.

A Senator asked for an update on the Instructional Faculty Appointment Policy. The Provost and Senior Vice Provost, Debbie Thorne, continue working on converting 624 faculty members and will announce raises soon. Thorne’s team will email information to departments and colleges with explanations regarding the policy. There was consideration to push back the ‘opt-in’ date for faculty interested in the new policy.

**The next agenda item was a debrief of PAAG and the joint meeting of the Academic Affairs Council (AAC)/Council of Chairs and the Faculty Senate**. Senators discussed how Thorne mentioned the potential to push back the ‘opt-in’ deadline for Nontenure-Line Faculty because some units have not submitted their guidelines, and the Provost’s Office has not completed the review and approval for those that have been submitted. Raises will not be announced until more information can be clarified by the CFO.

A Senator noted that the Ph.D. from McCoy College had been changed to a DBA with no faculty input. A Senator stated that a BookSmart committee will provide information related to this program's fall and spring implementation. A Senator noted that historically, the library liaisons would communicate any changes to library services, but now it appears the library administration makes changes without notice to faculty or staff.

Chair Ledbetter stated that Vice President Sivakumaran of TXST Global will be the Faculty Senate guest for the April 10th meeting, and the RR Vice President Julie Lessiter will be the guest for the April 17th meeting.

**MOTION** to approve the March 27, 2024, Minutes. **PASSED**.

The Chair stated that the Vice President and Chief of Staff, Lisa Lloyd, requested two Senators to serve on the Academic Subcommittee. There was discussion about waiting until the new Senate was seated in May. The Chair will post the Subcommittee information for review. A Senator stated Thorne wants Faculty Senate, CoC, AAC members to serve on the Shared Governance Policy Committee.

The Nontenure Line Faculty Round Rock Appreciation Reception will be held Wednesday, April 10, from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at the RR campus.

**Chair Ledbetter adjourned the meeting at 6:00 p.m.**

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be April 10, 2024.