**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

Zoom Meeting, 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

**Attending Senators:** Taylor Acee, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Stacey Bender, Dale Blasingame, Rachel Davenport, Peter Dedek, Jennifer Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Ben Martin, Stan McClellan, Roque Mendez, Danette Myers, Andrew Ojede, Michael Supancic, Nicole Wesley

**Guests**: Sarah Angulo, Jesse Backstrom, Brianna Benitez (University Star), Janet Bezner, Valarie Fleming, Clarissa Jackson, Lindsey Menge, Omneya Nassar, Judy Oskam, Togay Ozbakkaloglu, Justin Randolph, Anadelia Romo, Aimee Roundtree, Karen Sigler, Jonathan Surovell

The meeting began at 4:00 pm

**Discussion on Faculty Senate Statement and Petition on Health and Safety**

The statement released by the faculty senate on August 20 had accrued 513 signatures at time of this meeting. There is an understanding that Texas State is unable to require masks at this time, but the senators agreed that other important measures within this statement should be addressed. The following concerns and observations were expressed by senators:

* There is concern that there is no specific threshold of COVID-related metrics that will result in a change in university operations. Administrators have described that the decision will be based on campus-wide activity of the disease. If this is deemed necessary, the plan is to go virtual for a couple of weeks.
* An acknowledgement form is being distributed for students to sign that states that they are aware of our safety guidelines. There is no plan to ensure that all students sign this form.
* It was mentioned at the August 24 Council of Academic Deans meeting that faculty are able to teach up to ‘four weeks’ of a face-to-face class online. It is unclear what this means, since prior presentations by the Provost on this issue indicated that up to 15% of a face-to-face course may be taught in alternate modalities without additional approval.
* There are some steps faculty may freely take to reduce contact, including holding office hours online. The administration is aware that many faculty are caretakers of children and high risk individuals, but no accommodations are generally available for these situations.
* The university has not done enough to prepare for this semester, and we should not accept this as something we cannot change.
* Switching online will be extremely disruptive to both faculty and students, especially if this is done suddenly in an unplanned manner. Faculty should be trusted to make decisions that are reasonable for their classes at a time of their choosing.
* Students have been resistant in putting on masks in buildings, even when asked by faculty. Some students are belligerent in their refusal. Mask adherence appears to be waning over time.
* Signage in JCK is much more direct regarding mask usage. Why is this not present everywhere on campus?
* How did our legal counsel interpret law to maximize our safety?
* Flexibility to change teaching modes is not equitable. There is a stigma for teaching online, and the most vulnerable faculty (nontenured) are also the population most likely to be impacted. This group is also more likely to teach the largest, highest exposure risk classes. The university need to better define guidelines to make the process of transitioning online equitable for nontenured faculty.
* Teaching now places extra burden on faculty including policing safety, maintaining seating charts, and following up on contact tracing. Faculty are doing this extra work without an active voice in determining the direction that the university is taking. Faculty morale is at its lowest point. We must emphasize that education includes the needs of faculty and staff.
* Female faculty are shouldering most of the burden for childcare, and there has been no support for this group.
* A senator expressed frustration at the poor infrastructure at this university. Some students are enrolled in 0 hours because there are no courses for them to enroll in. This problem was compounded by technical problems that prevented degree audits at a critical moment.
* The freshmen seem to especially neglectful of health and safety recommendations compared to more senior students. This is especially evident in the low mask usage in freshman classes (compared to others). This represents a failure to establish a culture of safety and responsibility in our freshmen.
* What would be the cost to Texas State if we were to defy the Executive Order prohibiting a mask mandate? Texas State should consider whether this is a viable path.
* Safety protocols are common in high-risk environments such as laboratories. Shouldn’t we act in an appropriate manner to mitigate risk in our current high-risk environment?
* The new faculty orientation breakfast set a poor standard. There was no contact tracing since seating was not tracked, and someone present tested positive shortly afterwards. This information was not well communicated to attendees.

**Questions for the President’s Academic Advisory Group (PAAG)**

The senate is developing questions for PAAG based on the petition and the previous discussion. COVID-related questions will be the primary topics of this week’s PAAG.

**Academic Freedom Co-sponsorship (request from Vincent Luizzi)**

The faculty senate agreed to co-sponsor the Philosophy Dialogue Series, Sept. 14 at 2:00 p.m. “Academic Freedom and the Pandemic”

**Guest Lecture on How Higher Education can Fight Racism**

The senate is supporting a lecture by Sirry Alang, Assoc. Prof. of Sociology and Health, Medicine & Society, Lehigh University on the topic: “How higher education can fight racism: Speak up when it’s hard.” This lecture will take place in February 2022. Ben Martin volunteered to serve as the faculty senate moderator for a Q&A session following the lecture. This event will be advertised in the Faculty Senate Bulletin and the Senate website.

**Around the Table** – Other Faculty Concerns

* There is an interest in exploring the evaluation process for tenure line faculty to ensure that feedback is provided at reasonable time intervals.
* There is again concern about how student evaluations will be used this year. Students are stressed and frustrated, and this may be reflected in negative comments directed at faculty. It may be necessary to continue de-weighting student evaluations in the annual review cycle.
* Updates were requested regarding policies that are currently in development:
  + Personnel committee guidelines
  + Faculty hiring procedures
* The status of the teaching faculty appointments policy was discussed. The impact of prior teaching experience is not currently well documented in the policy. Archived versions of this policy will be reviewed to ascertain whether any changes were to the policy regarding prior teaching experience.
* It was suggested that faculty senate inclusion in college council meetings be added to upcoming Council of Academic Deans (CAD) agenda. This will allow deans from colleges that already include senators to speak in support of this process.
* The university needs to foster a culture of respect among faculty, especially when we are dealing with divisive issues. Extreme anger was evident when the faculty senate petition was released.
* A senator expressed concern about rampant misinformation regarding COVID health and safety measures. They recommended that Texas State share factual information to counter this.
* The status of COVID testing on campus was discussed. The recommended testing rate is to have everyone test once every two weeks. This appears to have been proposed based on the number tests available, but a senator feared that this is not enough to accurately represent community transmission rates. Other options including home testing kits were discussed, but no feasible alternatives were identified.
* Criminal Justice adopted a set of guidelines to have students meet with the school director regarding difficult situations including classroom behaviors. This allows one voice to be communicated to students.

The senate took its second annual Zoom photo and moved to executive session for committee appointments.

Senators approved the minutes of the July 21, 2021 meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:58 pm.