**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

Zoom Meeting, 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

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

**Guests**: Madison Bendit (University Star), Sarah Angulo (Senate Fellow), Joaquin Palacios, Aimee Roundtree

Meeting began at 4:01 pm

**November 2 Council of Academic Deans/Council of Chairs/Faculty Senate Meeting Debrief**

The following items were discussed at the joint meeting on November 2: teaching faculty appointments, personnel committee (PC) guidelines, budget cuts and summer salaries, and funding of permanent nontenure line faculty (NLF) lines. The following comments were made regarding this meeting.

The PC guidelines continued to receive some pushback by chairs and deans. It was noted that the faculty handbook contains some of this information, and it is more easily updated than policies. The senate reminded the group that these were designed to be guidelines, and that departments would continue to have flexibility in designing their own policies.

A senator expressed thankfulness that the provost and associate provost were both vocally supportive of teaching faculty, as well as the need for guidelines for the personnel committee.

Another senator noted that administrators were somewhat cavalier when discussing the summer budget and pay for program coordinators. It was implied that summer salaries for administrative work can be wasteful. It was advised that faculty discuss requests with their chair or program director. However, this can be problematic as well, since Chairs are limited in the workload they can assign. It was noted that there is a large diversity in the workload of program directors since some programs have very large number of students compared to others. Dr. Thorne tied summer budgets (including budgets for program coordinators) to enrollment in degree plans. It was implied at the meeting that some faculty may be accruing summer salary for work done during the fall and spring semesters, but it was pointed out that work such as scheduling occurs year-round with much of the planning for the spring schedule occurring in the summer.

A senator asked for clarification on how many temporary NLF are truly covering temporary jobs. Dr. Thorne summarized in a handout that an average of 23-24%of NLF are on temporary funds, but some departments have a much higher ratio. It is not clear how many of these faculty are covering temporary needs such as faculty development leave. A senator strongly recommended that permanent positions be appropriately funded before the teaching faculty policy is implemented.

The provost provided an update on Bobcat Trace at this meeting and informed the group that some messages are going into the ‘junk’ email folder. This problem is being addressed.

Many budgetary factors are tied to student enrollment. However, a senator pointed out that even ‘flat’ enrollments are not equally distributed across departments, and in effect this may not result in a flat budget since some programs result in higher returns due to the state formula. Additionally, the cost of supporting students is not equal across departments.

**Academic Governance Committee (AGC) Charge (Senator Wesley)**

The AGC is interested in creating a database of policies housed under Faculty Senate. The purpose is to provide a resource for faculty for transparency and to help them understand how different units function when designing their own policies.

The AGC was interested in Faculty Senate’s definition of university governance. It was suggested that they consult the AAUP (America Association of University Professors) guidelines.

The AGC is initially focusing on policies at the department / school level. The AGC is concerned about pushback regarding requests for information. They asked that any requests for information come from the faculty senate. The Senate stated that the Academic Governance Committee is a Faculty Senate committee, and they can request information in this capacity. A draft request is being prepared.

Another committee on campus is currently collecting policies as part of the SACS review. The committee is initially focused on tenure and promotion policies, soon to be followed by merit and workload. The AGC is working to ensure there is not redundancy in the efforts.

A senator recommended that the AGC look carefully at college level policies since these are especially impactful. Another senator noted that the department / school level policies are often not easily visible to those outside of the department and creating a database of such policies is potentially more useful. The AGC will proceed with their plan of developing a department / school level policy database.

**Cyber Harassment Policy**

Several questions were raised regarding the policy. A senator expressed concern that the new policy may result in difficult judgement calls regarding what student behaviors may result in punitive action. A senator asked whether mal intent is required for an action to be considered harassment, and how this can be assessed. Another senator added that the honor council routinely faces a similar challenge in assessing intention. A senator questioned how widespread the problem is, and whether this policy is necessary. Multiple senators affirmed the need for this new policy to resolve ongoing and future problems.

In the Texas State System rules, harassment is defined as an unlawful action (including by electronic means) to knowingly or recklessly annoy or alarm the recipient. These rules are vetted by legal counsel, which legitimize the proposed policy.

Senators agreed that the policy must be limited in scope to affect only Texas State University members, and it should be based on communications using classroom technology or university media. The policy should define the line between harassment, bullying, and poor etiquette. The policy should be proactive to direct affected members to support.

The senate initially debated the potential of incorporating the Cyber Harassment Policy into an existing policy at the October 27 meeting. This conversation continued. The discrimination and harassment policy is one possible location, but portions of this policy are restricted to protected classes while cyber harassment may affect anyone. The Academic Freedom Committee recommended that this be a standalone policy.

The Senate voted to endorse this as a standalone policy. The next stage is to consult with Dr. Thorne to determine the next step.

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

The Senate previously discussed the possibility of discussing campus safety at the November 10 PAAG meeting. Specifically, the threat response and communication strategies have remained problematic. A senator recommended that Eric Algoe be invited to attend the meeting, since he has oversight over emergency management and the campus police department.

It was noted that we will likely receive a cursory answer from the administration due to the fact that we cannot legally share information on ongoing incidents. A senator explained that in some cases covering security issues may cause undue panic. However, several argued that despite these limitations, better communication and education is needed.

Senators proposed that trust is the problem. We need to understand what communications from Campus Police mean, and we need be able to better distinguish between dangerous situations and a situation that does not rise to that level. We need to understand how the police department is trained to respond to an event. The university needs to have a transparent safety enforcement process, and there needs to be follow up communication after events to lower fears and maintain a sense of trust.

Several senators recommended that this discussion should be framed as a long-term problem, not related to a single recent event. The goal of this discussion should be to ask how we can make the process more transparent under the current guidelines, respecting the need to protect individuals not yet convicted of a criminal offence. Senators agreed that this should be a topic for discussion.

A senator requested an update on vaccine requirements considering that federal and state orders on the matter are in conflict. Some university employees are paid through federal funds, and it is unclear which rules must be followed. Senators were divided regarding whether to bring this up for discussion. A draft question is being prepared for possible incorporation into the meeting.

A senator wanted to ask who authorized the director of athletics to send a letter to the community regarding recent athletic performance. This was perceived as a tone-deaf message. This topic also received mixed support from senators, but it is being prepared as a potential question.

**Policies**

There are no new policies to review currently.

**Minutes**

The October 27 minutes were approved by vote.

**Executive Session**

The senate entered executive session for committee approvals.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 pm

Minutes submitted by Ben Martin