**Faculty Senate Minutes**

Wednesday, April 07, 2021

Zoom Meeting, 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

**Attending Senators:** Taylor Acee, Rebecca Bell-Metereau, Stacey Bender, Janet Bezner, Dale Blasingame, Rachel Davenport, Jennifer Jensen, Lynn Ledbetter, Vincent Luizzi, Benjamin Martin, Stan McClellan, Roque Mendez, Andrew Ojede, Michael Supancic, Nicole Wesley

**Guests:** Tina Marie Cade (Senate Fellow), Jennifer Lamm, Ricardo Delgado (University Star), Nicholas Carter, William Chittenden, Scott Pope (Library), Mary Brennan, Erik Timmerman, Debbie Thorne, Christian Lieneck, Aimee Roundtree, Gene Bourgeois (Provost), Denise Trauth (President), Noel Anthony Fuller, Christine Sellers.

Meeting called to order at 4:01 p.m. by Senate Chair Bezner

**President’s Academic Advisory Group**

The PAAG responded to several items the senate inquired about including:

**Results from the Faculty Senate survey**

Based on feedback from the Faculty Senate survey, the senate recommended discontinuing the A/B model for classes beginning Fall 2021. President Trauth agreed with the need to discontinue the A/B model and Dr. Bourgeois confirmed that Fall 2021 registration did not include the A/B modality. He emphasized that the plan is to expect to be at 100% capacity in classrooms for the Fall 2021 semester.

**Online course offerings**

The senate recommended continuing to offer online courses once we are beyond the pandemic as it allows greater flexibility for students who must work and care for others. President Trauth explained the need to examine programs at the university that facilitate online course delivery. She described plans for systematic examination of programs moving forward, uncertainty about whether the examination needs to occur sooner or during the next planning cycle, and that there are considerations about taking programs online as opposed to individual courses. The Provost followed up by explaining that discussions about course and program delivery methods need to be initiated and approved at the department level by faculty involved in those courses/programs prior to moving recommendations up through the system for approval. Dr. Thorne explained that when 50% or more of a degree program is delivered online, it turns into a curriculum process and requires additional approval.

A senator asked about the face-to-face requirements for fall courses and how to convince students to attend in-person. President Trauth stated that the university is going back to in-person instruction and we are not doing the mixed modality of simultaneous in-person/online instruction any longer. The Provost reiterated that faculty expectations for attendance should be that students are physically present in the classroom.

**Recommendation to conduct surveys of faculty and students to guide decision making**

The senate urged the administration to conduct surveys of faculty and students and make decisions using these data as the Faculty Senate has modeled with their surveys of faculty. The Provost acknowledged that he does not always recognize/communicate from where he receives his information for decision making, but that he does consult with multiple sources of information, including surveys and data.

**Revised COVID safety protocol**

The senate inquired about the anticipated frequency for reviewing the COVID safety protocol, particularly as it relates to faculty travel. The Provost explained that at present, if a faculty member is planning to travel soon or during the Fall semester, he must approve the travel request. However, they are willing to change that requirement in the future. At present, the Cabinet has not said that routine local, regional, international travel will have blanket approval, but that most requests are approved quickly if the safety protocols are provided and appropriate. President Trauth explained that the safety protocols are revisited weekly, and the Cabinet will continue talking about and making revisions as warranted. A senator asked which metrics the Cabinet will use to guide safety protocol revisions. President Trauth stated the primary metric is vaccination rates and as more people are vaccinated, she foresees the ability to lift the travel restrictions as soon as this summer. The Provost followed up by explaining that orders from the Governor’s office ultimately influences what Texas State can or cannot implement.

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) visit and Quality Enhancement Program (QEP)**

The senate asked President Trauth for her opinion on how the SACSCOC visit went and how the QEP was received. President Trauth emphasized the need to take a moment and celebrate because the process could not have come out better than it did. They received no recommendations from the on-site team, which in her experience has never happened for any university under review by the SACSCOC. Moreover, during the exit meeting, the SACSCOC review group provided affirmations including positive remarks for the university having an inclusive culture, good faculty and staff relationships, and integration of the Round Rock and San Marcos campuses. Overall, the review and associated visit were well organized and executed. Dr. Trauth acknowledged the time and effort of the leadership, namely Dr. Beth Wuest, as well as the university’s faculty and staff for making the process go exceptionally well.

**Faculty morale**

The senate communicated that across the nation, faculty morale is low and inquired of PAAG how they think Texas State is doing in terms of faculty morale. Senator Bezner explained that the senate has gathered information from senate liaisons about faculty needs, pursuant to Dr. Bourgeois' suggestion that we provide input on what the administration could do to boost morale.

President Trauth explained that she recognized last summer/early fall that morale was low and as a result, organized the Faculty and Staff Morale Work Group. That work group found that the overwhelming need of faculty was for better communication and that supervisor-specific communication was a primary issue for staff morale. Actions over the past year to improve morale were based on surveys of faculty or staff and included an additional paid day off for staff and the 3% merit bonus suggested by the Faculty Senate. Dr. Trauth explained that she cannot control all issues that impact morale and their goal was to try and take direct actions that could improve the major issues. Both the President and Provost communicated that they know people are eager to have face-to-face meetings, receptions, etc. President Trauth stated the university intends to reinstate all receptions normally held pre-pandemic beginning this Fall 2021 semester.

Dr. Thorne described an upcoming survey regarding a faculty support system post-COVID and that programming will roll out before the Fall 2021 semester begins. Senator Bezner told PAAG that she will send PAAG recommendations from the senate for improving employee morale.

**Student retention**

The senate inquired about what the university is doing to improve student retention during the pandemic. President Trauth provided a number of actions and initiatives including:

* A thorough review of Drop, Fail, and Withdraw (DFW) rates in general education courses.
* Identifying the appropriate math course(s) for students for a given major.
* Student Affairs (SA) undertook a specific telephone calling campaign to check on students.
* SA increased promotion of therapy-assist online program.
* SA provided on demand fitness courses.
* SA provided a stress relief clinic.
* Continued audit of excess credit hours.
* Probation experience (especially in first year) has been enhanced for students.
* Projects for coming academic year
  + Expand living learning communities.
  + Increasing merit scholarship funding to make offers more competitive with other institutions.
  + Deploying CARES funding. $9.5 million has been allocated this spring semester ($300-$800 awards) and the plan is to distribute about $20 million in potential $500-$1,500 awards for the Fall semester.

**PAAG Debrief**

Senators discussed the PAAG meeting including:

* Positive news that students will receive additional CARES funding assistance.
* Concern about potential requests from students about online courses because online courses appear to remain popular as evidenced by the current Fall 2021 registration numbers. However, that may be a result of caution on behalf of students still concerned about whether in-person classes really will be conducted in the Fall semester.
* Lack of PAAG discussion on DFW rates and concern that the course drop date was not modified even though faculty modified their instructional schedules due to Winter Storm Uri.
* Continued discussion on improving morale and a way to provide recommendations for impactful actions. Senators Blasingame, Davenport, and Wesley volunteered to collate and prioritize suggestions provided from faculty liaisons.

**Academic Freedom Committee**

Senator Luizzi provided an update from the Academic Freedom Committee and senators discussed the draft academic freedom policy. The draft policy stresses that violations of academic freedom are grievable. Senators provided feedback including appreciation for how the policy breaks down differences between academic freedom and freedom of speech, concerns about the repeated reference to tenured faculty and how that language may not apply to NLF, and suggestions to add librarians to the policy. Senators were encouraged to send additional comments directly to Senator Luizzi.

**PPS 02.03.01, "Conduct & Planning of Courses"**

Senator Luizzi communicated concerns about how PPS 02.03.01, "Conduct & Planning of Courses" Section 13.01(f) may be interpreted. The policy states that a syllabus must include the “due date for major exams and other assignments” and that some department chairs/program directors are requiring all course assignment due dates be listed on course syllabi. Such a requirement is a major undertaking for many faculty members. Senator Luizzi suggested a revision to the policy to modify the language to state, “due date for major exams and major assignments”. Senator Bezner explained that since the revision is requested out of the review cycle for the policy, the senate could request that Dr. Thorne do a pen and ink change. Senators agreed with this solution.

**Approval of Minutes**

Senators will consider approving the minutes of the March 31, 2021 meeting during the April 14, 2021 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Jennifer Jensen