

5-8-2001

Faculty Senate Minutes - May 8, 2001

USM Faculty Senate

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Recommended Citation

USM Faculty Senate, "Faculty Senate Minutes - May 8, 2001" (2001). *Faculty Senate Minutes*. Paper 24.
http://aquila.usm.edu/faculty_senate_minutes/24

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Special Meeting of the Faculty Senate

May 8, 2001

SUMMARY

President Laughlin called the meeting to order at 5:20 p.m. President-elect Hubble established the existence of a quorum through a show of hands and circulation of an attendance roster.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed university budget with President Fleming and members of his cabinet. Representatives of the local print and electronic media were present. D. Cabana **moved** that the Senate go into executive session. J. Rachal **seconded** the motion. There was no discussion and the motion **passed** unanimously. The media representatives left the room. Pres. Laughlin invited faculty and administrators who are not members of the Senate to stay and engage in open discussion.

In attendance with Pres. Fleming were L. McFall, J. McGowan, D. Keith, R. Giannini, J. Paul, D. Cotten, A. Griffin, B. Kirkpatrick, C. Santell, and K. Reidenbach.

The format of discussion was question-and-answer. The first questions were posed formally by Pres. Laughlin, but the discussion quickly moved to a give-and-take of questions volunteered from the floor, with Pres. Fleming coordinating responses by the administration. The following summary is organized according to the main issues raised with responses following. Faculty members posing issues and questions are not identified, while in most instances administrators providing responses are identified. *It should be noted, however, that both questions and responses as they appear below are paraphrased*

and do not represent direct quotations.

Issue: Meaning and Accuracy of Budget Figures

The numbers represented on the budget reduction spreadsheet distributed by the administration remain unclear. Can the administration clarify the source and meaning of the spreadsheet figures? Specifically, is it accurate to show a cut in technology funding, given that the technology area is gaining revenue from student technology fees?

Response:

Pres. Fleming indicated that the numbers appearing on the spreadsheet ultimately derive from IHL. Following all the changes in the figures as we move through the budget process is indeed complex, but discussion can continue until the numbers are clear and faculty members are satisfied that they understand. The budget development process has been open and will remain so. The president emphasized that the figures that have been distributed represent the best efforts of everyone involved to depict fairly and accurately adjustments to all parts of the university made over 18 months. Unfortunately, the math is all too clear for next year's budget. Even with a tuition increase, USM expects to lose -- in the face of actual cuts, a requirement to hold money in reserve in anticipation of further cuts, and rising fixed costs -- over \$13 million.

L. McFall, D. Keith, and C. Santell offered explanations of various budget items at different points during the meeting, attempting to address a variety of specific questions. Questions principally concerned the size and distribution of cumulative cuts and the allocations to technology. In responding, administrative staff

consistently held that Academic Affairs has been protected from cuts to the greatest extent possible, and that funds allocated to technology are either restricted (e.g., designated student fees) or otherwise required to accomplish essential tasks. Everyone is exceptionally conscious of the bottom line in every decision that is made; we are, however, in the midst of a major system change that we can ill afford to back away from at this point.

Issue: Technology Funding

The faculty is concerned about the total amount going to technology, to the detriment of Academic Affairs. The principal issue is the apparent inversion of university priorities. We are losing faculty positions while pursuing improved technology. Last year over \$1 million was removed from the Academic Affairs budget, representing approximately 20 faculty positions. An additional cut of over \$4.7 million is proposed for next year, following 5% mid-year cuts earlier this year. The proposed cut represents 77.5% of the total reduction required, while the Academic Affairs share of the budget is less than 70%. There is concern that USM is buying into the concept of the "virtual university" while letting the standing of faculty and staff slip badly.

Response

Pres. Fleming argued that we have no choice but to upgrade technology at this time. The old system is dying and must be replaced. We are bringing in basic technology, and not moving toward a "virtual university." His intention is not to dismantle programs or otherwise weaken academics. We have, unfortunately, emerged as a strong university at an inopportune time, when money is scarce. Yet we must support the gains we've made with

effective infrastructure. The president indicated that he could indeed cut more from other areas, but the consequences would be intolerable -- missed payrolls, for example, or inability to meet reporting requirements. Already some vendors are unwilling to do business with USM because we do not have the personnel to turn payments around in a timely way.

The university has made reductions and taken cost-saving measures wherever possible. Moving to wireless technology, for example, has reduced anticipated costs tremendously. Cutting back further would undercut crucial changes underway and that must be made to support Academic Affairs as well as to execute essential business functions. Pulling back is not a viable option, and would cost us more in the long run.

The president emphasized that he does not want to make cuts to academics; he is aware of the damage involved. He has made proposals to IHL aimed at stabilizing budgets that would include a moratorium on new building construction, but he has not gotten support from the other universities. The president believes that his commitment to academics is evident in his decision to allow lapsed salary money to remain with the deans to use as they see fit. He has relied on the input of the provost, and the provost believes that Academic Affairs can manage with this budget, albeit uncomfortably. The greatest challenges to the university now are not in fact in academics but in business and finance, and in physical plant. In light of challenges in these areas, the faculty's concern over technology funding appears overblown.

As for the proportion of cuts allocated to Academic Affairs, the administration's figures show that reductions over 18 months in fact total around 60%; this is a more relevant and revealing figure than the 77.5% share of the current cut.

John McGowan underscored savings from wireless technology,

explaining that wireless installation is being funded primarily from the student technology fee, and not from the academic budget.

Issue: Protection of Academic Programs

A major rationale for technology improvements is the benefit to students they afford. But precious little of the technology improvements seem to be finding their way into classrooms. Moreover, students will suffer if class sections must close, class sizes increase, and program accreditations are jeopardized. Why not cut back on such projects as hardwiring of dorms? Is there a commitment on the part of the administration to ensure that students will be able to get the classes they need to complete their studies? Is there a commitment to protect accredited programs? Along the same lines, what is the commitment to implementing the revised academic core currently under development by Academic Council?

Response:

The president indicated that the administration is trying to distribute the reductions across as many areas as possible, precisely so that the heart of the university can be preserved. No doubt there are serious negative consequences of these cuts; it could not be otherwise. We need additional funding in many, many areas. At the same, we must remember that designated technology fee money must be spent on students, for example on wiring dorms.

K. Reidenbach added that over \$1 million of the OTR budget goes directly to instruction and research, for example the operation of the Interactive Video Network classrooms. Another very large chunk of the OTR budget goes to hardware and software maintenance that directly supports faculty in both the instructional

and research areas.

As to the academic core, the president suggested that the need for revision is as valid now as when the process first started. At the time it started, however, we did not know we would be in the budget fix we are in.

Provost Griffin added that the proposed core revision has a number of components that will require additional resources, e.g., additional seminars, writing components, assessments. At this point we have no idea where additional resources will come from.

The provost stated further that the administration is committed to protecting program accreditation, but here too it is unclear where financing to do so will come from. We also must take care not to protect accredited programs at the expense of non-accredited programs, which must maintain quality as well.

The president added that program accreditations are a two-edged sword; while desirable, they are costly to maintain. Again, he directed faculty members to talk to their deans about such issues. The deans still have \$5 million in reserves. The administration has chosen to put the money there; but doing so means that it is the deans, and not the central administration, that must be responsible for making the difficult choices about how to expend resources.

L. McFall underscored that academic programs have been a priority throughout the budgeting process; it is unfortunate that we have to make substantial commitments to fixing long-standing technology problems precisely when resources are scarce.

Provost Griffin acknowledged the pain involved in seeing the promise of what we could do slipping away. At this point we can only try to minimize the negative impact. The deans have worked together hard and closely to meet budget reduction requirements

with minimal detriment to instruction. No one feels good about it.

Issue: Budget Decision Making

How were the reduction figures arrived at to begin with? The Senate understands that no formal proposal or recommendation was made, and no vote by the cabinet was taken. What then was the decision making process involved? Whose budget is this? Representation of the faculty, in the form of attendance of the Faculty Senate president and president-elect at budget discussions, is inadequate according to guidelines of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

Response:

The president indicated that his participation in budget meetings was deliberately sporadic in order to make a strong statement about the pivotal role of the provost. He asked for the best outcome that everyone involved in the process could arrive at, and this budget proposal is it. The president stated that he was distressed that the Faculty Senate chose to condemn the proposal, given that the process is more open to faculty input than it has ever been. The president considers himself a faculty member first, and a strong supporter of AAUP principles of faculty inclusion. He asked that faculty not simply criticize, but put forward reasonable alternatives.

Provost Griffin outlined the process of budget discussion: Over three days, the vice-presidents, representatives of student government and of the Faculty Senate heard presentations related to various budget scenarios. There were statements of needs from the various university areas, discussions of priorities and forecasts regarding the impact of budget reduction. The process was open

and highly informative to everyone involved. The V.P. for Business and Finance advanced the actual budget proposal, to which the group reacted. While it would be incorrect to suggest that there was unanimous support for the proposal, all views were heard.

L. McFall indicated that the proposal aimed for the least negative impact, targeting designated funds, and keeping positions unfrozen so that the academic deans could use money flexibly. It is true that no vote on the proposal was taken. Even if there were no clear consensus in support of the proposed budget, at least there were no alternative figures advanced.

Issue: Compromise of Research

The research mission of the university, closely allied to academics, is being compromised by the budget reductions.

Response:

D. Cotton stated that USM's recent advancement in the Carnegie classification was a major milestone; this gain must be protected. It is true that the research area has taken some losses. Because of increased productivity, however, these losses are manageable.

Issue: Athletics Budget

There is a perception that athletics is not taking its share in cuts. There are, for example, published stories of coaches getting substantial raises.

Response:

The president stated that athletics is an auxiliary; by law it can receive a maximum of \$1 million from the E & G budget. Athletics indeed took its cut, which combined with the tuition increase will damage its recruiting capability substantially.

R. Giannini indicated that athletics is anticipating nearly a half million dollars in increased costs of scholarships, room and board, etc., in the face of flat revenues. As for raises, Dr. Giannini stated that many in athletics are going a 4th year without a raise. Some raises have been permitted where absolutely essential to remain competitive. A good deal of the money in such cases, however, derives from media contracts; there is no impact of these raises on academic programs.

Issue: Exceptions to No-Raise Policy

It appears that case-by-case exceptions are being made to the "no raise" policy in Academic

Affairs. Exceptions are demoralizing and an inducement for faculty to seek positions elsewhere, or to demand raises based on higher offers from other universities.

Response:

The president stated that he knows of no one getting a raise. It is true of positions all over campus that we are not competitive in salaries; faculty leaving cannot be replaced at current salary levels. The exodus of faculty due to the salary freeze is a major consequence of the budget crisis.

Issue: People Soft

There is a widespread perception that People Soft does not work well and is moreover a financial "black hole." Further, statements such as "we are building the modules" for People Soft spark questions about what we have actually bought, and how extensive and ongoing will be the financial commitment to maintaining the system.

Response:

J. Perkins stated emphatically that People Soft works. Making the change to a different system to do familiar tasks can be difficult, but we have training and training documentation available so that people can use the system effectively. As for costs: We have used consultants at a minimal rate. By moving to the web, we reduced expenses with STARS, including elimination of a contract for \$20,000.

As for the "building" language: What we are building are the parallels to the existing system, with all the imbued logic. This is what we need in order to function effectively.

President Fleming confirmed that there will be ongoing costs related to People Soft. What we are putting in place is a basic system. We must keep it functioning and improve it over time. K. Reidenbach amplified the president's remarks, indicating that we must pay licensing fees, secure upgrades, and maintain the entire system.

Issue: OTR Expansion

Aside from the budget allocation, there is concern about the increasing influence of John McGowan and OTR over academic matters, including the library and library resources. In order to ensure that decisions with significant academic ramifications

remain within the scope of Academic Affairs, perhaps Dr. McGowan should be placed under the authority of the provost.

Response:

Dr. Fleming indicated that most decisions regarding OTR's scope (for example, the expansion into media) were made for efficiency's sake. Even so, many persons were involved in discussions leading to those decisions. There is no plan to have OTR exercise control over the library. Previously, USM had no real coordination of efforts to improve technology; decision-making was overly complex and inefficient. We could not have made the progress we have with the old approach.

As for putting OTR under the provost or another vice-president, the president is willing to consider such a change sometime in the future, but not at present. The provost position is itself still new at USM, and needs to be given time to develop.

Issue: Future Funding

Whatever else we may disagree about, there is consensus that at the heart of USM's problem is chronic underfunding. How does USM improve its standing with IHL so that it can at least get its fair share of the higher education allocation?

Response:

The president indicated that we have been pressing our case for fair funding for some time now. He plans to speak very plainly and directly to the board when he undergoes his performance review in June. The "secrets" of IHL's chronic poor treatment of USM need to be exposed. It is critical that we on this campus remain clear about the source of our problems. We must not turn on one

another; this is not a matter of one against the other, academics vs. technology.

President Laughlin thanked President Fleming and members of the administrative team for their willingness to attend and dialogue with the Senate, and adjourned the meeting at 8 p.m.

Notes prepared by Michael Forster, Faculty Senate secretary