

11-5-2021

Faculty Senate Minutes--November 5, 2021

Faculty Senate

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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
Friday, November 5, 2021, 2:00p.m.
Via Zoom

Call to Order

President Brian LaPierre called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Roll Call

Members present:

Adkins, Nell
Agler, Lin
Bomhold, Catharine
Bradley, Gregory
Brannock, Jennifer
Burnette, Joanne
Conlin-Maxwell, Lindsey
Davis, Micheal
Donahue, Paul "Tyler"
Franke, Damon
Funk, Mary
Green, Lisa
Greer, Tammy
Harbaugh, Bonnie
Hill, Lilian
Hurst, Tamara
Jeanfreau, Michelle
Johnson, Wes
Kanuri, Srinidhi
Karim, Shahid
Lamey, Kalyn (hold proxy for Robert Leaf)
LaPierre, Brian
Lowrey, Alisa
Mayfield-Johnson, Susan
McCardle, Emileigh
Mezzadri, Danilo
Nazarenko, Sergei
Olmi, Joe
Press, Bob
Rackoff, Louis
Rishel, Tom
Rouse, Sharon
Salyers, Candice
Scott, Jeremy (holds proxy for Leffi Cewe-Malloy)
Shin, Jae-Hwa
Stanback, Emily
Tesh, Timothy
Ward, Kimberly
Wiesenburg, Denis

Members who were not in attendance:

Anderson, Patsy
Martin, Whitney
Wang, Wei

Quorum: A quorum (22) was established and recognized. (39 members present).

Voting Membership Present: $\frac{2}{3}$ membership for voting on Bylaws and Resolutions (29) was established. (39 members present).

Adoption of Agenda

A motion to accept the agenda was made. The motion was seconded. The motion to accept the agenda was approved by the majority of the members.

Approval of the Minutes (October 2021)

A motion to accept the minutes was made. The motion was seconded. The motion to accept the April meeting minutes was approved by the majority of the members.

Program

Dr. Hugh Broome, Academic Integrity Officer for the University, presented the newly proposed Academic Integrity Policy, seeking feedback from Senate. The largest changes being proposed are to now allow a faculty-resolved case (which will allow reporting of academic integrity violations without needing to make use of facilitation) and to expand the representation on the appeals board to include more faculty members (it currently includes three). Senators will vote on the draft of the new policy in the next regularly scheduled Faculty Senate Meeting.

Doug Masterson, Senior Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness, attended to discuss the need for a new definition of programs within the University to be in compliance with SACS. A new definition has been proposed and was presented.

Officer Reports

President: On October 8th, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee met with President Bennett and Provost Moser. I will give the brief highlights of our discussion. After being briefed about the Governance Committee's proposal to redefine the function of the ombudsman at USM (a redefinition that would put it in line with the standards of the International Ombudsman Association and other R1 institutions), the President expressed his support for such an endeavor. He mentioned his eagerness to see more concrete proposals on this topic when those are available. Given the President's approval of these preliminary ideas for re-envisioning the ombudsman's position on our campus, I hope that the Governance Committee will continue to pursue this matter.

COVID-19 was high on the agenda of discussion items as well. Given that the COVID-19 vaccine incentive program targeted toward increasing student immunizations was scheduled to end on October 15th, the Executive Committee asked about any plans for continuing an incentive program past that expiration date. We were told that there were currently no plans to continue the student vaccine incentive program – although educational, outreach, and anti-misinformation efforts would still be pursued. It was assumed that we had reached a point of diminishing returns in the incentive campaign and in our institutional investments in it. At a later meeting of the Provost's Council that followed the expiration of the incentive program, we were informed that the final total number of students who had uploaded proof of full immunization over the course of the incentive campaign was 6,005.

Before our October meeting, the President also gave his official response to our resolution of October 1st "On COVID-19 Vaccination." Since our resolution called on the IHL to reverse its

system-wide ban on vaccine requirements, the President -- as he had at a previous meeting -- asked us to forward our resolution to the IHL Commissioner. Subsequently, I sent our resolution and a brief accompanying note to Commissioner Rankins and to the IHL Board of Trustees. Commissioner Rankins responded and confirmed receipt of the resolution. Shortly after that, I was contacted by a variety of journalists who had received copies of our resolution. Over the course of the next days and weeks, I gave a series of interviews and statements to Allen Brewer and Will Polston of WDAM, Courtney Ann Jackson of WLBT Jackson, the staff at WLOX Biloxi. I also spoke with Ashton Pittman of the *Mississippi Free Press*, Molly Minta of *Mississippi Today*, and Garret Grove of the *Student Printz*. Media interest, articles, and news reports show that our resolution did not fall on deaf ears. A fact that is also confirmed by several telephone calls that I received from concerned citizens -- many of whom were vociferously opposed to our measure.

On the same day that we passed our COVID resolution, a group of concerned students held their first protest concerning sexual violence of our campus and calling for a zero-tolerance policy toward offenders. These protests and the importance of this issue attracted the attention of faculty members in the campus community and on the Faculty Senate. On October 15th, members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and members of our Welfare and Environment Committee met with several of the student leaders of this movement to hear about their concerns and proposals. We walked away from the meeting deeply appreciative of the students' efforts to publicize and address an issue whose importance and scale are often wrongly minimized. Although the Faculty Senate will not play the lead role in this effort -- because the students have proven that they have the skills, energy, and ideas to spearhead this effort -- we can play a supporting role. Broadly, we can support and reinforce their call for making USM a safer campus that is free from sexual violence. In addition, we can encourage, applaud, and support the dialogue that has developed between the students and the administration on this crucial issue. In line with this supportive role and agenda, the Executive Committee raised the issue of the student protests and sexual violence with the President at his meeting with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee yesterday. At this session, we reiterated our support for the students' broad goal of creating a safer campus and expressed our support for continued dialogue between the students and the administration on resolving issues related to sexual violence on campus. In addition to helping to mediate and facilitate discussions between the students and the administration, several senators have also volunteered to help the students create a survey tool that will allow us to generate more data on this issue and on student concerns and attitudes related to it.

At yesterday's meeting with the President, the Executive Committee raised an issue that I would like to highlight because of their importance to academic life on this campus: the politicized culture war over critical race theory. Earlier last month, the Mississippi Center for Public Policy issued a report condemning the teaching of "critical race theory" in our state's K-12 and higher education institutions. The report attacked "critical race theory" for promoting racial division and for indoctrinating children with "unpatriotic" ideas about American history and society. The Center urged that the state defund schools and academic programs that teach "critical race theory" and discipline instructors who fail to purge their pedagogy of this concept. Governor Reeves and the Speaker of the State House have also made the attack on the teaching of "critical race theory" a standard part of their stump speeches and have promised political action on it in 2022. If you are confused about what "critical race theory" is, you are not alone. Although it is a theory that is used in some disciplines, the critics of "critical race theory" have an expansive, malleable, and nebulous view of the meaning of this term. The ambiguity in their conceptualization and use of the term has made it a perfectly flexible catchall category for denouncing and silencing any historical narrative, academic concept, or institutional practice with which they disagree. Some critics of "critical race theory" have used it to attack narratives of American history that focus on the persistence of racism and especially structural racism in our society and legal system. Others have used it to attack anti-bias and diversity training. Still more have attacked the teaching of slavery and -- among other things -- its role in the economic development of our country. As a historian, I find this new political witch hunt and culture war brouhaha to be deeply disturbing. I

cannot imagine how a competent survey class can be taught on American history without focusing on the enduring issues of race and racism.

I am happy to report that President Bennett shares our concerns with this issue and its potential impact on our academic freedom and on the education that we offer our students. The President stated that he has – at present -- heard nothing at the IHL level or in the upper administration about policing or punishing the teaching of “critical race theory” at USM. The President also promised to give the Executive Committee an early warning if he sees evidence of this issue or practice emerging at the IHL or institutional level so that we can organize, prepare, and fight back against it. At present, I agree with President Bennett that we need to be vigilant about this issue in our state. The success that Republicans have had running with this issue in states such as Virginia suggests that we may see more and more politicians adopting similar campaign tactics in our deep-red state. I do not think that we need to respond directly to the report from the Mississippi Center for Public Policy at this stage. That would be giving this fringe group the publicity, attention, and validation that they seek and which I do not want to give them. But, we do need to be watchful of this issue and its evolution over the forthcoming political season. To this end, I want to charge the Academics Committee with keeping tabs on the issue of “critical race theory” and its threat to our academic speech.

President-Elect: When the Faculty Senate Executive Committee met yesterday (November 4) with President Bennett and Provost Moser, Denis Wiesenburg asked whether the administration would commit to only including policies that affect faculty in the Faculty Handbook and not the Employee Handbook as had been done before without faculty consultation. Provost Moser stated that there was a lot of opinion on this and would not commit to this request. He said that it may be a question that the next Provost could answer.

Secretary: The secretary has been trained on updating the webpage and should have access to that in the next few weeks. This will allow quicker turnover in making changes to the webpage.

Secretary-Elect: The GA task force is going to make final recommendations re. GA stipends and health insurance subsidies in November so that when offers are made to incoming graduate students the offers represent accurate updated numbers.

Committee Reports

Academics: There are people with access to Canvas course shells without the knowledge of the teacher for the course.

Concern still exists around the bookstore and new textbook policy.

Modifications to the course evaluation question list were suggested, particularly including a positively worded question to parallel the question asking to list three areas of improvement in the course.

Administrative Evaluation: The evaluation results have been sent out to the administrators and to their supervisors. This committee might possibility team up with AAUP to share the results of a satisfaction survey conducted by AAUP.

Awards: No report

Bylaws: The responsibility of the bylaws committee is to house the bylaws and to review any proposed alterations. The bylaws committee does not create proposals for changes to bylaws.

Elections: No report

Faculty Handbook Advisory: No report

Finance: No report

Governance: A proposal concerning allowing teaching track faculty members to serve as Faculty Senate President will be circulated to faculty senate before the next meeting where a vote will be held.

Gulf Coast: School of Coastal Resilience has received permission to plan both a BA in Sustainability Studies and a BS in Sustainability Sciences (though these may not become the official names of these degrees should they be put on the books).

Shannon Campbell attended the latest meeting of the Gulf Coast Faculty Council to give an overview of the current state of coastal operations.

Letters of affiliation for faculty members within the School of Coastal Resilience are in the process of being written that will give those faculty members a formal association with another school (typically each faculty member's former school).

University Relations and Communications: No report

Welfare and Environment: Students have expressed concern with teachers not acknowledging or allowing time in class to discuss the recent death of a student and how that may impact other students.

Sexual assault and a safer campus are topics of conversations within this committee, which is supporting the students seeking changes in penalties related to sexual assault. A proposed statement to release from Faculty Senate is as follows: "The Faculty Senate supports the initiative of USM students to call attention to sexual violence on campus and urges the administration to support student efforts to work towards a safer campus." A motion was made to make this a Statement of Concern. It was seconded. The results of the vote were 24 yeas, 1 nay, and no abstentions.

This committee is working with SGA to create a campaign to destigmatize mental health issues.

Outside Committee Reports/Other University Advisory Committees' Reports- none

Consent Items- none

Unfinished Business- none

New Business- none

Good of the Order- We have shown support to our students on a very important issue.

Announcements- A volunteer is needed for a representative for the Parking Committee.

Nominees are needed for search committees for the Associate Vice President of Finance and Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management.

Motion to Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made. The motion was seconded. The motion passed by a majority of the Faculty Senate.