

12-3-2021

Faculty Senate Minutes--December 3, 2021

Faculty Senate

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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
Friday, December 3, 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
Anderson, Patsy
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
LaPierre, Brian (holds proxy for Louis Rackoff)
Martin, Whitney
Leaf, Robert
Lowrey, Alisa
McCardle, Emileigh
Mezzadri, Danilo
Nazarenko, Sergei
Olmi, Joe
Press, Bob
Rishel, Tom
Salyers, Candice
Scott, Jeremy (holds proxy for Leffi Cewe-Malloy)
Shin, Jae-Hwa
Stanback, Emily
Tesh, Timothy
Wang, Wei
Ward, Kimberly (holds proxy for Susan Mayfield-Johnson)
Wiesenburg, Denis

Members who were not in attendance:

Rouse, Sharon

Quorum: A quorum (22) was established and recognized. (40 members present).

Voting Membership Present: $\frac{2}{3}$ membership for voting on Bylaws and Resolutions (29) was established. (40 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 (November 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. Amy Chasteen attended to discuss enrollment management and retention.

Officer Reports

President: On November 16th, the President's Senior Leadership Team met in person to discuss a variety of issues. Among the items on the agenda, the one that received the most emphasis was enrollment. According to data disclosed at the session, the 2021 Fall enrollment has dropped to 14,146 students. Although the corresponding 2020 Fall enrollment was not mentioned at the meeting, data available from our Office of Institutional Research lists the Fall 2020 student headcount at 14,606. This suggests that the drop in enrollment from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 is in the range of 3 percent. Although this may sound like a small amount, it is not. Every percentage point and student lost represents a significant drop in resources and revenues for our campus. In his remarks on this subject, President Bennett was adamant that we "must turn enrollment around." He stated that enrollment declines were "not sustainable." He continued that if we do not "turn the corner on enrollment" that "very difficult decisions" would have to be made. He stressed that a future of declining enrollments would not mean "business as usual" for our university and that "programs may be at risk." The President stressed the importance of the upcoming hiring of an Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management – seeing this as a key in our institutional push to improve enrollments. In addition, President Bennett called on faculty members to help out in this area by taking every opportunity that they could to publicize their programs and recruit new students. He called on all of us to do what we can to get the message out and publicize our programs and university.

Dr. Amy Chasteen reminded the group that student retention was also an important part of protecting and increasing our enrollments. She noted that we lose approximately 30 percent of our freshmen each year. One reason that freshmen do not return is financial, but a second key driver is the perception of some students that they do not "fit" or belong in our campus community.

Faculty can play a role in reversing the latter cause of freshmen attrition by making sure that students feel supported and welcome in their classrooms. We need to show them that we care and are invested in their success. Through building those mentoring and nurturing personal relationships with our students, we can play our part to improve enrollments.

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee met yesterday (12/02) with President Bennett and Provost Moser for our monthly meeting. COVID-19, the rapid emergence of the Omicron variant, and our Spring COVID protocols were at the top of the agenda. Of course, all discussion of the impact of Omicron on our Spring semester is speculation at this stage. Much research needs to be done on the virulence, contagiousness, and vaccine breakthrough capabilities of this new variant

and will be forthcoming in the coming weeks. Given its suspected high levels of communicability and fears of blunted vaccine effectiveness, however, it is prudent to be prepared and to not get lax about common-sense disease control measures. The Executive Committee reminded President Bennett that the Faculty Senate stands behind its resolution of October 1st and still considers a vaccine requirement for faculty, staff, and students to be the most effective way to safeguard the health of our campus, our local communities, and our surrounding state. Given the political and institutional resistance to student vaccine requirements, however, the Executive Committee asked about mask mandates being continued into the Spring. President Bennett responded that he fully shared the Executive Committee's concern over the Omicron variant and stated his concern that the campus community not jeopardize a face-to-face Spring semester by getting too lax over the holiday break in the use of appropriate masking and social distancing behavior. He stated that all current anti-COVID measures would remain in place for the remainder of the Fall semester and that he – and the executive officers of our sister IHL institutions— would be meeting with Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the State Health Officer at the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH), on January 5th to discuss MSDH recommendations for universities during the Spring semester. President Bennett indicated that he intends to fully comply with MSDH recommendations and to communicate those to the Executive Committee and the campus community in a timely manner before the onset of the Spring term. On the topic of COVID, I want to make a quick statement about the ongoing vaccine requirement for faculty, staff, and student workers imposed by President Biden's mandate. Data shared with the Executive Committee shows that the vast majority of faculty have complied with that requirement and are fully immunized in accordance with the mandate. However, there is a small minority who have not complied with this executive order. I would like to take this opportunity to urge any unvaccinated faculty members to be good citizens of our university, of our local communities, and of our state by getting vaccinated. The best way that you can protect yourselves, your loved ones, and your colleagues is by getting inoculated. I hope that you will join me in spreading that message and fighting against vaccine misinformation.

At the same meeting, the topic of critical race theory (CRT) was also discussed. As I wrote in my previous report, we—and many of our colleagues—are concerned about the threat that the growing movement against so-called CRT poses both to academic freedom and to the education of our students. Recent news reports predict that action may be taken against so-called CRT in the upcoming fiscal year and there have been calls to ban CRT in classrooms. The rhetoric of these statements is broad enough that it poses a threat to both K-12 and public universities. As he did last meeting, President Bennett expressed his concern over this issue as well. Although he indicated that CRT has not emerged for discussion at the IHL level yet, President Bennett acknowledged the severity of this issue. To help monitor this issue, we decided to add CRT to the agenda of all future Spring meetings and to share information and early warnings on this important matter.

Lastly, the President wanted me to express to you his gratitude for your hard work in making this semester a successful one. At the beginning of the Fall term amid the spikes of the Delta wave, we returned to face-to-face instruction in the majority of our sections. Three months later, we are poised to end that semester successfully. Our journey to that end goal is a testament to your perseverance, effort, and grit. President Bennett applauds you for it and I do too. Service as a faculty senator is often under-recognized and strenuous. In my last report of this calendar year, I want to salute all of you and let you know that your service is vital, essential, and very much appreciated.

President-Elect: no report

Secretary: no report

Secretary-Elect: no report

Action Items

A vote on the draft Academic Integrity Policy (presented by Dr. Hugh Broome at the previous meeting) was held. A motion was made to vote. A second was given. The motion passed with a 29-3-4 vote (yay-nay-abstain).

Committee Reports

Academics: This committee would like a specific charge from the administration. The ability of students to attend face-to-face classes is creating an additional burden on faculty. There is concern about the ability of members of the university community to view Canvas course shells. There are still concerns about bookstore issues and the new questions on course evaluations pertaining to books.

Administrative Evaluation: No report

Awards: No report

Bylaws: No report

Elections: No report

Faculty Handbook Advisory: This committee was charged with reviewing sections related to tenure. Specifically, a suggestion is to add an additional paragraph to 5.2 Pre-Tenure Review explicitly stating how feedback will be given prior to tenure year, additional examples within each category of 5.3.2 Evaluation Criteria, and a description of how tenure benefits students within 5.4.2 Definition of Tenure.

Finance: The committee met with Allyson Easterwood on November 19 to provide updates on the number of vaccinated employees, current enrollment, and other information related to finances.

Governance: Faculty Handbook 4.3 states that workload is supposed to be documented, signed, and approved by the dean. This does not seem to be happening throughout the university. Jennifer Courts commented that this is in process already.

The Interim Vice President of Research has never been a faculty member at USM but will have the ability to vote on the tenure process. Concern was expressed. Executive committee will bring this up in a future meeting with President Bennett.

A document is available that thoroughly explains the best way to establish a new ombuds office. This will be reviewed by President LaPierre.

Term limits were discussed for administrative positions.

Changes to Section 3.4.1 of the Senate Bylaws were proposed in the November meeting that would allow for any member of Faculty Senate to be eligible for president and president-Elect rather than restricting the offices of president and president-elect to tenured senators only. A motion was made to vote to approve this amendment. It was seconded. The motion carried with a vote of 29-6-1 (yay-nay-abstain).

Gulf Coast: There will be a Coast Research Symposium on January 12 & 13. More details will follow.

Members of School of Coastal Resilience have yet to see or sign affiliate status letters that would make it clear what each faculty members' role is within both SoCR and their affiliate school (typically their former school). This has caused a great deal of concern.

There is also concern about enrollment trending down on GP campus.

University Relations and Communications: No report

Welfare and Environment: Subcommittees discussed progress being made in the area of destigmatizing mental health on our campuses and the formation of a new subcommittee on the topic of sexual assault.

Outside Committee Reports/Other University Advisory Committees' Reports- The AAUP is hosting a get-together next week. All are welcome.

Consent Items- none

Unfinished Business- none

New Business- none

Good of the Order- none

Announcements- LaPierre will be sending out emails about service opportunities.

Motion to Adjourn

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