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Faculty Senate Minutes--April 1, 2022

Faculty Senate

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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
Friday, April 1, 2022, 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
Anderson, Patsy
Bomhold, Catharine
Bradley, Gregory
Brannock, Jennifer (position currently held by Michele Frasier-Robinson)
Burnett, Joanne
Conlin-Maxwell, Lindsey
Davis, Micheal
Donahue, Paul "Tyler"
Franke, Damon
Funk, Mary
Greer, Tammy
Harbaugh, Bonnie
Hill, Lilian
Hurst, Tamara
Jeanfreau, Michelle
Johnson, Wes
Kanuri, Srinidhi
Karim, Shahid
Lamey, Kalyn (holds proxy for Lin Agler)
LaPierre, Brian
Lowrey, Alisa (holds proxy for Sharon Rouse)
Martin, Whitney
Mayfield-Johnson, Susan
McCardle, Emileigh
Mezzadri, Danilo (holds proxy for Timothy Tesh)
Nazarenko, Sergei
Press, Bob
Rackoff, Louis
Rishel, Tom
Salyers, Candice
Scott, Jeremy (holds proxy for Leffi Cewe-Malloy)
Shin, Jae-Hwa
Stanback, Emily
Wang, Wei
Wiesenburg, Denis

Members who were not in attendance:

Green, Lisa
Leaf, Robert
Olmi, Joe
Ward, Kimberly

Quorum: A quorum (22) was established and recognized. (36 members present).

Voting Membership Present: $\frac{2}{3}$ membership for voting on Bylaws and Resolutions (29) was established. (36 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 (March 2022)

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

Program None

Officer Reports

President:

On March 28th, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee met with President Bennett, Provost Moser, and incoming interim Provost Gordan Cannon. The agenda was dominated by the anti-CRT law. Since the last time we met in early March, the state legislature has passed SB 2113 and Governor Reeves has signed the bill into law. What this means for educators remains uncertain and unsettled.

At our meeting with the upper administration, the Executive Committee was informed that a process of legal analysis, review, and interpretation will be conducted on the new law. This process will include the Offices of General Counsel of the IHL institutions and the IHL itself. We will need to be patient and allow this process to play itself out before we rush into assumptions on how this new law will affect our instructional and scholarly activities. The vague and opaque nature of the law's language underlines the necessity of such a careful and considered approach. When the legal review and interpretive process concludes—and the timeline isn't clear for that—I would like to invite a representative from the Office of the General Counsel to our body for a briefing on the new law and its implications.

Until then, we are left with the unknown. Perhaps, I am exaggerating or fear-mongering in my concerns about the anti-CRT law and the impact it may have on our academic freedom. On the surface, the language of the law seems not to apply to what we—or other educators to my knowledge—are doing in the classroom. None of us is advocating or forcing students to affirm the superiority or inferiority of one racial or ethnonational group over another.

I would argue, however, that we do ourselves a disservice by focusing or fixating solely on the language of the law. Aside from its legal language and reach, this law can threaten our classrooms in other ways. It can undermine the essential culture of civility, tolerance, and respect that is the cornerstone of effective and supportive education. In its place, it could create a classroom environment marked by suspicion, harassment, denunciation, and fear. Around the country, we are hearing stories of educators being threatened, harassed, and intimidated. Some are even reported to be receiving death threats. Websites have emerged that identify and harass professors whose scholarship and teaching are deemed offensive.

We need to protect faculty not only from infringements on their academic freedom. We need to safeguard them from harassment, intimidation, and online stalking. As we move into this new period of uncertainty and anxiety, we need to make sure that faculty feel safe and supported in their primary working environment: the classroom.

If we fail to do this, some faculty may begin protecting themselves and hedging against the risks of the unknown through self-censorship. This is another hidden danger of the new law against which we must fight. Our Vice-President Denis Wiesenburg has spoken often and eloquently of the danger of self-censorship. Self-censorship would be a clear disservice to the academy in general and to our students in particular. Our students deserve an education that is free from political interference and partisanship. If we react to the uncertainties of this law by silencing ourselves on issues of discrimination, tolerance, and prejudice or by cutting these topics from our syllabi, we defeat ourselves.

During its December 3rd meeting, the Faculty Senate voted on an amendment to section 3.4.1 of our bylaws. That section of the bylaws deals with eligibility requirements for senate leadership positions. Although teaching track faculty are eligible to be elected to the USM Faculty Senate, they are denied the possibility for election to the offices of Faculty Senate president and president-elect. This is distinctly unlike other governing bodies at USM such as Academic Council and the University Faculty Handbook Committee where teaching track faculty can hold all elected offices. To open officer posts to our teaching track colleagues and to promote their full and equal inclusion into our body, the Faculty Senate approved an amendment to remove the language from section 3.4.1 that stipulates that only tenured senators are eligible for the positions of president and president-elect. This amendment was adopted by the Senate by a vote of 29-6-1 (yay, nay, abstain). This week, the President and the Provost approved those changes to the bylaws. I have forwarded that approval document to the Chair of our Bylaws Committee, Sharon Rouse. In conclusion, the amendment to Faculty Senate Bylaws Section 3.4.1 was approved by the Senate with two-thirds vote of its total voting membership without proxies, by the Provost, and by the President. It is now the part of the bylaws.

President-Elect: No report

Secretary: No report

Secretary-Elect: No report

Committee Reports

Academics: Faculty affiliate status was discussed in the latest School of Coastal Resilience meeting, where Dean Winstead was in attendance. Members of the school are going to provide a list of questions that are not currently answered (fully or at all) by the template of the letter to the dean by next week.

Administrative Evaluation: No report

Awards: First round of awards is complete, and the second round is about to begin.

Bylaws: The amendment to Section 3.4.1 will be changed based on the voted-upon language from a previous meeting, which was then approved by the provost and president.

Elections: Schools are currently electing new senators for next year.

Faculty Handbook Advisory: Changes were proposed to Sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.1 of the faculty handbook to elaborate on the importance of tenure and to provide more detailed examples of faculty meeting teaching, service, and research expectations. A vote was called for and the changes passed by a vote of 27-3-3 (yay-nay-abstain).

Finance: No report

Governance: No report

Gulf Coast: Faculty affiliate status was reiterated.

University Relations and Communications: No report

Welfare and Environment:

Our focus has been on following up with Dr. Greer's findings on inequities; looking at possible linkages between sexual assault and suicide; a related focus on trying to re-connect the disparate elements of staff and other attention to mental health issues; and a preliminary look at how to provide students with more mentoring.

Inequities Follow-Up

What are the barriers and facilitators that they have experienced with regard to hiring and retaining minority and first nations faculty? If we have exit interviews from HR, maybe we can get access to those and look for themes that may become action items to address in the future.

This would require the development of an amended HR questionnaire for graduating students. I will look around for a model questionnaire and work with HR. I will cc the Faculty Senate officers the suggested model questionnaire. I can research questions about barriers and facilitators for hiring and retaining Minority and First Nations folk.

Sexual Assaults and Suicides

I connected with Nicole Caulfield (Graduate Student in Psychology) about her work exploring the intersection between sexual assault on college campuses and suicide risk. Although some of her data reflects nation-wide trends, some is specific to USM (and both are relevant for our university). Because she has not yet officially published the results, I have asked if there is a form in which she would be willing to share her research and data with Faculty Senate. I will coordinate with Wes Johnson and Joe Olmi to consider the best ways to proceed with this work at the intersection of our two subcommittees. I have not yet received an update from students about changes to the sexual assault policy, so I am reaching out to the Title IX office to see if there are any updates that they can share with us.

Mental Health

We are continuing to try to connect the various and still somewhat unconnected elements of staff, faculty, and student issues around mental health. We have made progress, but communications remain less than inclusive in some instances. Working on re-establishing a previously little-known USM committee on these issues; also working with SGA to get them (and Faculty Senate) in touch with each other on these issues.

[Note from one student: ‘Many students have always suffered from mental health stress, but we did so quietly and to ourselves. Now we are more open about it.’

There have also been several suicides on campus which were not noticed by most; but at least in once case, we know staff mental health specialists went to the student’s classroom to hold supportive conversations.]

Mentoring

The head of the University Advising Center is meeting with Directors to discuss their role. But their work with first year students does lighten the faculty load.

However, it is assumed that many faculty advising may not include career discussions. Question: Could UAC do more mentoring in addition to class scheduling? There have been at least a few complaints that the first year students they are advising are not getting the best career options information from UAC. (There have been some complaints they are not doing a good job on career advising, however.)

Question for Senators: About 46% of our students fail to graduate in six years. Key issues: finances, including cost of cars. The Administration is trying to get more to live on campus.

Mentoring (not just class scheduling) can help with retention, studies show. Who should be doing the mentoring?

Outside Committee Reports/Other University Advisory Committees’ Reports None

Consent Items None

Unfinished Business None

New Business None

Good of the Order

Center for Faculty Development’s Faculty First Fridays, Glory Bound, April 1st from 4-6PM
USM Student Counseling Services and Center for Faculty Development, “Mental Health First Aid Training”

Announcements

Next Faculty Senate Meeting on May 6, 2022 via Zoom

Motion to Adjourn

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