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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes November 2023

Faculty Senate

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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 3, 2023

2:00p.m. Via Zoom

Call to Order

President Jennifer Courts called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Roll Call

Quorum: A quorum was established and recognized.

Voting Membership Present: $\frac{2}{3}$ membership for voting on Bylaws and Resolutions was established.

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 members.

Approval of the Minutes (PREVIOUS MONTH)

The October 2023 meeting minutes were approved.

Program

Discussion with SGA:

Alyson Gonzales, Senior VP of SGA & Aaron Morgan, SGA Representative to Faculty Senate
In light of recent events on campus, SGA and Faculty Senate have both issued legislation and/or recommendations for barriers to be erected in the parking garage. This past semester, SGA began an initiative called the “Speak-Up Campaign” in which students are invited to fill out a form linked to SGA Instagram and website so that SGA can directly hear from and respond to students needs. Through this submission form, students have requested mental health days and/or excused absences for mental health reasons. Alyson Gonzales has spoken about this issue with VPSA Dr. Kristi Motter and plans to discuss it with Provost Nail as well to consider how these excused absences could be recognized and described in faculty syllabi (one absence per student per course per semester). Senators express concern about limitations that will need to be put in place, especially if students attempted to use these absences during exams. SGA has already acknowledged that these absences cannot be used on test or exam days. Dr. Courts recommends that the Academics Committee can meet with SGA to have further conversation and to work on crafting a solution.

Officer Reports

President:

The Executive Committee was not able to meet with Dr. Paul and Dr. Nail last week as planned, and our meeting has been rescheduled for next Tuesday, November 7. The Provost and Christa McLeod responded to the questions sent in place of last week’s meeting.

1. In response to our Recommendation to install a physical barrier to the 4th Street parking garage, I learned that Dr. Paul has charged Brian Hauff, AVP for Facilities, and Rusty Keyes, UPD Chief, with collaborating to develop a potential barrier design and quote as soon as possible.

2. The Department of Education accepted the IHL request for relief and we are no longer on heightened cash monitoring.

3. Institutional Research and the Provost's office have collected comparative salary data for peer-institutions. More on this in the President-Elect Repro

4. The university is committing to a halftime FTE independent ombuds that reports directly to the president. This will include a small operating budget. The home college of the ombuds will be offered sufficient funds to cover the teaching load of the faculty member reassigned for ombuds duties. If the duties of the ombuds grow beyond the half-time capacity in the future, then it can expand.

Senators express concern about half-time ombudsperson also having teaching responsibilities.

The Senior Leadership team met on October 31. David Sliman spoke on cybersecurity at USM, and significantly reinforced the importance of everybody completing the cybersecurity training module. President Paul spoke about his goal for students at USM to graduate "ready for life." The impression was that USM should embrace our status as what he called a "unicorn" and be "distinct, different, better." This would involve not only providing vocational training but also producing graduates who understand and apply critical thinking. Also mentioned briefly was a change happening to how Carnegie R1 classifications are made starting in 2025. This change would allow more institutions to reach R1 status and should not impact our status. It may involve tracking the social and economic mobility of our students post-graduation.

Lastly, the Provost is seeking input from the Faculty Senate regarding the continuation of our Zoom contract. The university was able to acquire a multi-year site license for Zoom during the pandemic with one-time HERFF funds. That license will expire in a few weeks and currently there is no budget or plan for renewal. The university could renew the license for approximately \$54,000 a year, but it would mean making cuts elsewhere since there is no budget. Without Zoom, Teams would continue to serve as our sole remote platform.

Senators' comments on Zoom: Senators who teach online express concerns for students in remote locations (specifically the Delta) with lower-speed access. Teams requires more bandwidth and makes it difficult for them to connect, upload, download. Zoom seems to function well. Some schools use Zoom recordings for significant purposes. Senators express concern about number of participants that can join and the duration of meetings allowed on individual accounts. Senators propose online fees could pay for Zoom. David Sliman proposes that he will do a comparative analysis of Teams, Zoom, and Webex.

President-Elect:

1) Faculty Salaries Update.

a. Rallies will be held at Shoemaker Square on the Hattiesburg Campus and the Shoefly free speech area (between the FEC and TCC) on the Gulf Park Campus. All faculty, staff, grad workers, and their supporters are invited and encouraged to attend. Please feel free to share the flyer with your constituents.

b. The Provost's Office has sent the FSEC salary data for eight peer institutions, and we will discuss that next Tuesday with the Provost and President Paul. As part of FS's shared commitment, we'd like to send out a link to a Mach form where faculty, staff, and others can reply with suggestions on how to improve our retention of first-time freshmen. Perhaps those

responses can be shared with the proposed welfare subcommittee on retention, as well as the FEC and university leadership.

2) College FS Meetings. Please come to the college FS meetings. These are crucial places for interfacing with the administration, voicing concerns, advocating, and representing constituents. If you need to come and go, that's fine, but please do your best to attend these.

Senators suggest moving meetings to common lunch hour when they are not teaching and/or to have a rotation for senators to attend once per year. Senators in Nursing and Education and Human Performance need assistance to schedule FS meetings with Deans.

3) Strategic Plan. Committees have been assigned, and we're currently in the discovery phase (formulating questions about the university and what data to seek). There have been some concerns raised about ensuring that the process is collaborative and reflective of shared governance. But it does appear the Coast is well-represented on each committee and that faculty are assigned to each committee, as well. Furthermore, the committees do seem representative of the array of USM stakeholders and disciplines. If anyone has concerns or questions about the strategic plan, they can reach out to me directly, or to Mike Madson or Eric Powell.

4) Faculty Senate Statewide (UFSAM) has formed a taskforce to advocate for parental leave. Brianna Jahn Malinowski has offered to be our USM rep on this committee. They will make a recommendation to the UFSAM for recommendation to the IHL, ideally by December. The UFSAM is also discussing the state auditor report, and we have a proposed resolution drafted if needed.

5) Staff Council Update. At the Oct. and Nov. meetings, I updated Staff Council on our activities, as did Dannetta Winters, their rep. We're glad to see they're partnering with us on the rally and in advocating for fair salaries for employees. I've updated them on the ombuds situation and explained that FS would support their request for an ombud that also covers staff, as FS initially requested. The Staff Council explained, on the issue of mental health, that we as faculty can urge students to seek counseling services (which are available, including after-hours), not just behavioral services (which often have waiting list). There's a common misconception that counseling services are full, and that's only true in most cases of behavioral services. There are also counseling services available on the Gulf Park Campus (which a staff member asked about).

6) Added contract language. Dan Durkin (the head of the statewide FS) and I met with a lawyer regarding the added contract language, and he thought that while the new language was probably designed to weaken employee protections, the language of the employee and faculty handbooks is probably still applicable in most cases, unless it is specifically overridden by language in the IHL policies and bylaws. The lawyer also noted that the IHL policies currently require IHL universities to follow the language of their handbooks.

7) International Student and Family welfare. Two recurrent issues are: 1) how to provide or improve transportation between campuses, especially for international student employees and their dependents on the Coast who apparently require referrals from the Moffett Health Center in Hattiesburg for further care. One continued suggestion is to allow internationals to purchase Bidencare and their own repatriation insurance, as peer universities reportedly do, and which would greatly reduce costs and increase coverage, but so far, the idea hasn't gained traction here; 2) how to improve play-space and communal areas, such as playgrounds, for internationals. One idea is to open the DuBard playground afterhours if they're amenable, or to perhaps repurpose existing space on campuses. Both issues have been raised with USM's leadership

Secretary:

The anonymous comment form is now working on the Faculty Senate website. Please encourage your colleagues to contact us with their concerns. If they would like for the FSEC to contact them in response or to have a conversation with them, they are welcome to include their contact details as well.

<https://www.usm.edu/faculty-senate/internalportal/submit-your-anonymous-comments-faculty-senate.php>

Secretary-Elect:

No report.

Discussion, Decision, Action Items:

FACULTY SENATE ENDORSEMENT #1, 2023-2024

Authored by: Faculty Senate University Welfare and Environment Committee

A FACULTY SENATE Endorsement of PayMyTuition for International Students 3 November 2023 In response to a request from Dr. Leah McSorley, Director of International Student and Scholars Services at The University of Southern Mississippi, the Faculty Senate endorses that PayMyTuition, or a comparable system, be used to facilitate USM Business Services in accepting more types of currency as payment for tuition from international students. The Senate supports that this change is a positive step toward ensuring that our students from all countries can easily pay their university bills and enroll in classes with the least number of barriers possible, leading to greater retention, student welfare, and satisfaction as our international population continues to grow.

A vote is taken on endorsing the PayMyTuition system:

33 Yes, 4 abstaining, 0 no

Committee Reports

Academics:

The Academics Committee discussed the following in our last meeting:

- Further evaluation of faculty workload including having directors submit workload allocations in Watermark each year as required in the faculty handbook. We know this is an item Dr. Nail is working on, and we plan to meet with him next month to discuss this.
- There was a discussion on the hiring calendar being too late into the academic year to hire the best faculty candidates. WE recommend shifting the timeline and requests to earlier in the academic year. We feel that good candidates are being lost to other positions due to them accepting positions at other universities who hire earlier in the academic year.
- Emileigh McCardle poke with Doug Masterson regarding emphasis areas for programs to gather more information. Doug reported:
 - The link for adding an emphasis area has been removed from the website so no more emphasis areas can be added.
 - The problem for reporting is that the information and coding that the University turns in to the Department of Education is different than what is reported to SACS.
 - There are two potential solutions:
 - Eliminate the parentheses included for the emphasis area and make that emphasis a program. The downside is the program would have to meet enrollment numbers required by IHL.
 - Combine multiple emphasis areas into one umbrella degree program with different tracks.
 - Dr. McCardle asked if the website could still reflect the different old emphasis areas as tracks, and Doug said the website could still outline the different tracks for the program.

- The cip codes do not currently distinguish between emphasis areas. For most websites that search for academic programs to help students find schools that offer certain degree areas, they are using cip codes. This means it is not accurately reflecting all the degree programs that we offer. The first link on this website shows the current cip codes for USM programs and emphasis areas: <https://www.usm.edu/institutional-research/resources.php>
- It became clear that this would need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis with each program.
- Dr. McCardle also recommended that each program really emphasize the need in their discussions to keep information on the website if they decide to move to tracks instead of turning an emphasis area into a program.

Administrative Evaluation:

We completed the admin evals and sent them to the administrators and supervisors with the final batch going out last week. That should conclude our duties for this semester, and we will begin updating and preparing the spring survey in January.

Awards:

Faculty Award deadline is upcoming. Please encourage your colleagues to apply.

Bylaws:

The Bylaws Committee welcomed a new member, Dr. Jon Beedle. We are grateful to have an experienced Faculty Senator and former member of the Bylaws Committee join us for 2023-24.

Elections:

The Faculty Senate Bylaws state that the election process initiates at the beginning of the calendar year, and the Elections Committee will reconvene in January to:

1. Officially review school representation and reapportion as needed.
2. Establish a list of eligible candidates.
3. Design a system for balloting that follows the FS Bylaws (format plus email list)

No change to the Faculty Senate Bylaws is needed to include a target for Gulf Coast membership as the bylaws already include a provision that we “provide broad geographic representation approximately fitting the geographic distribution of the faculty” (FS Bylaws 2.1.3.7a).

Faculty Handbook Advisory:

No report. Faculty Handbook Committee will meet next week.

Faculty Welfare & Success:

No report. The committee had been hoping that more faculty representatives would be put onto the university’s Thrive Committee, but that has been denied. Jennifer Courts & Max Grivno met with one of the co-chairs of the committee to discuss how this FS committee can best work with Thrive Committee.

Finance:

Committee will meet with Alyson Easterwood next Friday for next bi-monthly meeting. Please send any questions about university finance to Fan, Bob, or Srinidi.

Governance:

The Governance Committee discussed the following in our last meeting:

- The survey info has been compiled, but since it is such a large amount of data, we will need one more month to be able to deliver more on that.
- In the interest of shared governance, it is worth noting that each strategic planning subcommittee has a representative from Gulf Coast on it. Additionally, Kemal Cambazoglu, a member of the Faculty Senate Academics Committee, is also on the Academics Enterprise Subcommittee.
- We are looking into further outlining what shared governance looks like for the Faculty Handbook and potentially School Documents.

Gulf Coast:

1. There is concern about how academic programs are existing in a limbo state and the ways in which the strategic planning process may impact those programs.
2. Some issues have surfaced for faculty in Coastal Resilience in terms of parking fees for guests on campus. These fees are causing challenges for those who run community outreach and conference programs. Parking enforcement happens until 10 p.m. on GP campus but only until 4:30 p.m. on Hattiesburg campus, and consistency is desired. Jennifer Courts serves on the Parking & Transportation Committee and will bring these concerns to the committee. Dr. Franke also has received complaints from students about moving violations for minor offences or no clear offence.
3. There are concerns about the ways in which the GP and Stennis are not represented on the university's website. GP faculty are not appearing in faculty directory searches with their affiliate programs. Jennifer Courts acknowledges that FSEC will bring this issue to President and Provost to ensure that it is updated. (Jae-Hwa Shin recommends contacting Nicole Ruhnke, Interim Chief Communication Officer, Nicole.Ruhnke@usm.edu)
4. Please let Dr. Franke know about any concerns you want him to bring to Space & Design Committee next month.

University Relations and Communications:

No report. There is a plan to share the survey at the December meeting.

Welfare and Environment:

Summary of Activities:

The Welfare and Environment Committee at the University of Southern Mississippi convened on October 20, 2023, and Oct 20, 2023, to address critical issues related to the welfare of students, faculty, and staff, as well as initiatives to promote a sustainable campus environment.

· Areas of Focus:

· Campus Sanitation

The committee discussed the effects that the shortage of custodial staff has had on campus environment and sanitation. The concern is that the physical plant doesn't have the team needed to clean buildings, offices, etc, subsequently leading to the threat of a resurgence of COVID. The committee recommends that the Senate approve the timely purchase, installation and maintenance of the items below to improve campus sanitation and help fight covid.

- a) Provide disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer in the classrooms.
- b) Provide up to two Lysol disinfectant aerosols in each bathroom.
- c) Install automatic paper towels and soap dispensers in bathrooms to avoid direct hand touch.
- d) Install foot hooks to bathroom doors to provide an alternative way to open the door without using handles.
- e) Install automatic doors in heavy-traffic buildings, such as the library, Student Union, the gym, etc.
- f) Install HEPA filters in buildings to filter out air-borne pathogens and allergens.

International Students

· 24-Month OPT Extension

The committee discussed the 24-month OPT extension for international students in STEM programs. The Experimental Psychology program (CIP code 42.2704 Experimental Psychology) is classified as a STEM program, but at USM, the CIP code for the program is for general psychology (42.0101), which is not a STEM program. Therefore, international students who graduated from the USM program can't get an extension for OPT, which impacts their ability to secure a job after graduation and the recruitment of new PhD students in this program.

Leah McSorley, director of International Student and Scholar Services, and Sara Jordan, director of the School of Psychology, were brought into the conversation. The committee has found that it is possible to change the program's CIP code, but the problem is that experimental psychology is not an independent program. The school of psychology has ONE parent Ph.D. program (42.0101) in Psychology with four different emphasis areas, including clinical, counseling, experimental, and school psychology. A CIP code change for experimental psychology would result in becoming disconnected from the parent program and creating a separate Experimental Psychology PhD program. This also impacts assessment practices and potentially affects salaries or raises, as some salary metrics are based on the CIP code.

· Custodial Staff Shortage

The committee discussed the ongoing shortage of custodial staff. Employees are challenging the report by the Physical Plant Director that there is only a small shortage of custodians. One point of contention is the cleaning of the Stadium. Many of the custodial staff have health issues (vertigo, obesity, etc) that make climbing steps hard. The committee discussed the use of student workers or the service of non-violent offenders as solutions for the stadium cleanup.

· Structural integrity

The committee discussed the structural integrity of buildings on campus, specifically the Walker Science Building.

A licensed structural engineer, Mr. Jerry Montgomery visited Walker Science Center with Mr. John Jones from the Physical Plant.

Mr. Montgomery was shown areas of cracking within the building. John explained that the building has a piling base with a crawl space. The bottom of the building has been exposed to

elements. Years after construction, walls and slabs were built under the structure without piling. New walls and slabs touch piling-supported structure but, walls/slabs move yet the piling-supported structure does not. Due to differential movement between old and new walls, the walls are breaking. The walls are not original. A structural report is expected.

- University Retention

The committee discussed the exploration of retention measures that feature ‘connections,’ with someone – staff, faculty, or administration – as a way to reduce the high rate of dropouts before the third year. This is not the same as existing programs that spot failing students and send them information, etc. Mr. Cullum will take an initial look at these efforts on behalf of the committee. Anyone who would like to participate in this subcommittee, please let Terry or Bob know.

Ongoing Focus Area:

- International Students

ISAB has endorsed Ms. Jenna Dittman as the official liaison to the Faculty Senate and Welfare and Environment Committee. ISAB has voted to prioritize outside scholarship/funding sources, transportation, and halal food options for international students.

The Sub-committee chair, Dr. Fan Zhang, met with Shannon Campbell, Senior Associate Vice President for Coastal Ops, through Zoom on October 9th on the student transit issue. Mrs. Campbell reported on the progress of the following problems.

a) The School of Ocean Science and Engineering is working with Coast Transit Authority to establish a pilot transit service between Long Beach, John C. Stennis Space Center, and Friendship Oak Village, where students live. Kristina Mojica is taking the lead in this effort. USM legal counsel has reviewed the MOU, and there are a few other things that need to be worked out before the transit service can be provided. The School of Ocean Science and Engineering is paying for this transit service. Fan contacted the director of the School of Leadership and found that they had convened an International Student Recruitment Committee. Dr. Carsten Schmidtke is serving as the Chair of the committee. Transportation issues are part of the discussions but not the committee's focus.

b) There are discussions in the School of Leadership about looking for a grant to support transit service between Ocean Springs, Long Beach, and Hattiesburg. Fan met Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang, an assistant professor at the School of Leadership, whose research background is in transportation. She mentioned that there are federal grants to support campus transit that we can apply for if the university wants to establish transit service between Hattiesburg and the Gulf Park campus.

Recommendations:

Based on our discussions, the Welfare and Environment Committee recommends the following actions in addition to Faculty Senate approval noted above regarding anti-Covid protection:

- (For FS officers) The committee recommends that if there is no discernable movement on the custodial shortage, face-to-face meetings be held with the necessary parties, to not only express concerns by the committee but also with suggested remedies.
- (For FS officers) The committee recommends that USM Human Resources should meet with custodial staff apart from their supervisors so that they can speak freely without the fear of reprisals.

- (for FS officers) The committee recommends the Faculty Senate officers ask the Director of Human Resources to send Physical Plant employees a confidential form or link to express concerns, especially among custodians, hoping that changes can be made.
- (for FS officers) The committee strongly recommends for administration the purchase list of equipment our committee identified to help be better prepared for COVID.
- (for International Student Services) The committee strongly recommends that ISSS send one staff member to the Gulf Park campus to meet international students periodically. This is more efficient than letting international students go to Hattiesburg individually to the ISSS office for appointments.
- (For Faculty Senate or FS officers) The committee strongly recommends endorsing a formal memo by Dr. Leah McSorley to implement PayMyTuition and would like the faculty senate to endorse it using the following suggested language: “The faculty senate endorses implementing the PayMyTuition program to accept payments from international students in their home currency by July 2024 or as soon as possible.

Next Steps:

The committee recommends that these findings and recommendations be presented to the university administration for further consideration. Additionally, we propose ongoing collaboration with relevant stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives.

John Lambert: I am concerned that our faculty might not be adequately trained in suicide intervention. I train about every two years with the Regional Counterdrug Training Academy at NAS Meridian. They offer LEAPS training (Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support). I trained with the Camp Shelby Suicide Intervention Office when they sponsored an ASIST program (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). Both were in a military and police setting, and were incredibly intense; far more intense than anything I have experienced at USM. I strongly recommend that all faculty, not just supervisors, take the most intensive suicide intervention training possible. This should be face to face, with real people who contemplated suicide there speaking with us. They need to see and hear from people who engaged, or who almost ended their own lives. Just last week, a student told me how she grabbed a loaded pistol from her father’s hand as he was about to blow his brains out. Her father was a veteran. When I spoke with the student, she did not know how to access VA help for her dad.

I had a situation in the Spring Semester on a Saturday in which a student described his thoughts of ending his life. He had disclosed that he worked at Camp Shelby. None of the USM resources were available. It took some effort, but I was able to reach the base Chaplain who got to the young man’s unit chaplain. I was able to know where to maneuver, as I served as a Chaplain in the MS State Guard and serve at this time as a volunteer chaplain at a veterans home. I doubt that many of our faculty could stomach police or military level suicide intervention training, but we should explore more intense options. Should the university administration task me to do this, I am willing to reach out to the Camp Shelby Suicide Intervention Office as well as to RCTA and see if they can assist us. I can make no guarantees.

Outside Committee Reports/Other University Advisory Committees’ Reports

AAUP encourages attending the rally on Nov.13.

Consent Items

None.

Unfinished Business

None.

New Business

None.

Good of the Order

Announcements

Our next FS meeting is December 1, 2023.

Spring Retreat at GCRL on January 12, 2024.

Motion to Adjourn

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