

Minutes from the May 29th Special Called Meeting of the Faculty Senate

A special meeting of the Faculty Senate was meeting called on May 29, 2020 at 11:00 am to meet with President McPhee regarding the university's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for next year. The meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom.

Attendance

2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Senators were invited to attend.

Present:

Sanjay Asthana, Jacob Avila, Emily Baran, Sal Barbosa, Vaughn Barry, Nita Brooks, Larry Burriss, Lando Carter, Laura Cochrane, Claire Cook, Rick Cottle, Trevor de Clercq, Andrew Dix, Rudy Dunlap, Latoya Eaves, Kathryn Fenton, Stuart Fowler, Andrienne Friedli, Justin Gardner, Bob Gordon, Michael Hein, Christina Hiers, Seth Jones, Rachel Kirk, Ryan Korstange, Darren Levin, Melissa Lobegeier, Alfred Lutz, Suzanne Mangrum, Lei Liao, Preston MacDougall, Dan Morrell, John Mullane, Kari Neely, Sharon Parente, Alicia Pence, Deana, Raffo, Joan Raines, Patrick Richey, Brian Robertson, Garrett Salmon, Stephen Salter, Scott Seipel, Nat Smith, Rajesh Srivastava, Dennis Walsh, Zhen Wang, Elizabeth Wright, Andrew Wyatt

Absent: Song Cui, Rebekka King, Brian Parsons

Speakers:

Dr. Sidney McPhee, President

Dr. Mark Byrnes, University Provost

Mr. Joe Bales, Vice President for University Advancement

Mr. Andrew Oppmann, Vice President for Marketing and Communications

Mr. Bruce Petryshak, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer

Dr. Debra Sells, Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost for Student Enrollment and Academic Services

Mr. Alan Thomas, Vice President for Business and Finance

Guests:

Kimberly Edgar/Presidents Office Chief of Staff, Nancy Caukin, Chong Chen, Shannon Harmon, Paul Kline, Pam Morris, Susan Myers-Shirk, Amy Sayward, Mary Ellen Sloane

Faculty Senate President Justin Gardner called the meeting to order at 11:00am. He asked President McPhee to give an update to the Senate regarding the university's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for the fall.

President McPhee

McPhee complimented Gardner for his leadership and collaboration during these unprecedented times.

McPhee shared that he has worked hard to communicate and be transparent during this process. The administration and crisis management council and executive leadership team have been meeting often.

McPhee wants to share highlights from the task force report and said that he also wanted to get the Senate's feedback on the plan to reopen the university. He emphasized that nothing is set in stone

and that flexibility is important. The administration is making the best decisions they can with the information they have today. Projections are 10-25% drop in enrollment in some universities across the state. Fortunately, we are not seeing a significant drop. Governor Lee has asked that all state agencies, including higher education, to prepare for a 12% reduction in the current year budget. That is about \$14M for us.

Provost Byrnes

Provost Mark Byrnes shared that the task force work was divided into 3 committees – academic, student affairs, and operations. Each committee met 3 times and the task force also met 3 times. The focus from the academic standpoint was “what is the fall going to look like.” Educational quality and following current health guidelines were most important in their discussions. Most classes would need to be 1/3 to 1/2 classroom capacity to meet guidelines.

Want hands-on classes to be onground as much as possible. Departments have been surveyed to see which of their courses could go online or remote. Most courses will be in those formats in the fall.

One option for onground courses is a one-week-on/one-week-off format. It is vital that the content be captured for every class meeting so that students who are not present have access to the information.

VP Petryshak (IT)

IT is working on enhanced technology plans for classrooms. Cameras will be available in classrooms with connections with white boards, computer, etc. Everything would be interfaced with D2L so that the system would know that a certain course would take place in a certain room and would automatically be archived in D2L and kept for the term (and deleted after the semester is over). Classes will be prioritized for this format. This is not about stockpiling videos to be used later. It is a way to give students access to class content for that semester only. They are also looking at exam proctoring technology and will have something in place to facilitate this.

Provost Byrnes

Many decisions still have to be made and departments will be given parameters.

The fall calendar will be adjusted with no onground classes after Thanksgiving. There are only 3 classes scheduled after Thanksgiving and they will be replaced with the two days for fall break and the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

A university-wide attendance policy will be implemented and will only be for the duration of the pandemic. Students and parents are concerned that faculty with stricter attendance policies will encourage sick students to come to classes when they should stay home.

The goal is to reduce density on campus.

VP Sells

There will likely be restrictions on typical student events. We still want students to make strong connections, but there will be limitations on reserving space, density in the residence halls, etc.

VP Thomas

Talked about cleaning, disinfecting, and bringing employees back to the university. Looking at budgetary impact if there is a significant decrease in enrollment.

President McPhee

Stay-at-home orders was extended to June 16 in order to see what the surge would be like as businesses began to open in Tennessee. We will have a better sense if Tennessee will experience what other states have experienced with surge in positive cases in a week or two. There is no question that we will have infections with the size of our institution. The key is to have a plan to mitigate when this happens.

VP Oppmann

On June 16 we will begin restoring operations on campus. There are three phases: Phase 1 - June 16, partial reopening with minimal staffing; Phase 2 - target is July 14, moderate staffing with remote arrangements continuing; Phase 3 - target date TBD, full staffing and function as “new normal.” Will not be a “flipped switch” process, and adjustments will be made as needed.

VP Thomas

Referred to report regarding employee reentry guidelines and protocols, and administrative controls regarding telecommuting, proper PPE, consistent signage, and cleaning/disinfecting protocols.

President McPhee

The Task Force report and the website has been launched with the plans for the fall. There will be open Zoom Q&A sessions for the university community. There are a lot of moving parts based on news on a daily basis. The priority is to reduce density. We will have to adapt and be flexible based on scientific information. Wants to hear from faculty in case there are issues that they have not considered. Documents should be considered as “living documents” that will change and evolve.

McPhee opened the floor for questions or suggestions.

Senator Questions

- Will we be ramping up mental health services for students?
 - Yes, this is a concern. VP Sells responded that we have been providing a telehealth model in the spring and summer and will continue this as an option in the fall. They have also been doing group therapy which would provide access to more students.
- Has there been discussion to encourage the Raider Learning Community model so that students are exposed to fewer students since they have more than one class together as a cohort?
 - Have not specifically discussed expanding RLCs but will add it to the list for consideration, especially for the spring.
- Are there plans for crowd management for events?
 - Unsure at this time what the requirements will be, but they are working on it.
- What’s the difference between the Task Force report and the Board of Trustees (BOT) report regarding cuts, especially regarding FTT faculty and furloughs?
 - No decisions have been made at this point. But with a \$14M cut, everything will be on the table. The Task Force report includes recommendations, not decisions. Prepare for tough decisions that may include personnel reductions, furloughs, salary reductions, and buyouts. Every option is on the table.

- How were the CARES Act funds dispersed?
 - The BOT report includes this information. About half of the money, \$9M went to students. We are holding on to \$1M of that money while waiting for clarification for federal government on some issues that are still being worked out. \$9M went to institutional support for housing and meal plan refunds and technology. We are not able to use those funds for lost enrollment or PPEs (personal protective equipment) We are exploring other avenues for those costs.
- What is being done for students who need help with access to technology?
 - The BOT report outlines these efforts including student hotspots and laptops.
- What about face coverings recommendations?
 - We are not requiring it of everybody right now, but certain areas of the university require it. There is no current requirement of students, but it will be encouraged. Want to be sure that we can enforce anything that is a requirement. A Senator expressed concern for encouragement and not requirement. McPhee shares this concern, and this is a difficult issue to enforce for 22,000 students.
- Asked for more information about accommodations for faculty or if faculty get sick?
 - When there is a legitimate, medically documented reason, faculty will not be required to teach on campus. Clarification and specific guidelines are forthcoming.
- Asked about potential reduction in force? Would financial exigency have to be declared? What policy would it be based on?
 - No decisions have been made. But a number of positions could be affected because our budget is highly personnel focused. Any of the policies may apply depending on the decisions that need to be made. Everything is on the table.
- Are freshmen being given priority to onground classes?
 - In general, hands-on courses get priority. It will be up to the departments to decide how they want to allocate classrooms. There is also the possibility to move to larger spaces that are not typically used for classrooms (ballrooms, theaters, etc.) Details will have to be worked through over the next few weeks.
- Research and travel guidelines?
 - Will be working on this with clear directions upcoming. Budget deficits will impact this. Everything will be on the table. What about external funding projects be restricted? If safe and within CDC guidelines, it will be taken under consideration. Want to be flexible.
- Has the Task Force discussed labs?
 - Yes, the report gives detailed recommendations for this. We will not likely be able to hire additional faculty to staff labs. This will be a local decision.
- Who has the final authority on what types of courses will be taught?
 - It is up to the faculty and chairs and will be a collaborative process. Are working to make the distinction between online and remote. Still want to encourage faculty to do remote with flexibility on how to approach it to emphasize quality.
- Have you thought about 1/3 or 1/2 of students attend each class if onground?

- McPhee said success will depend on creativity, flexibility, and patience. When instructionally sound, there will be a lot of flexibility given. The safety and health of employees and students is the priority. Byrnes shared that in general, the goal is to record every course session. One of the options is a week-on/week-off format to address this. Will have to be worked out through the department and scheduling.
- Are there additional revenue streams to help fund faculty positions? When will cuts be made to address deficits?
 - No federal funds can be used to plug deficits. The governor's relief fund is a part of the CARES Act. There is a big difference between stimulus funds from Great Recession and what we have gotten for the pandemic. Clarified that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the FTTs will likely be renewed. Waiting for more information about funding for the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ FTT. May not know until August. There are no easy decisions. Will make decisions based on the best interest of the overall university. There will be some tough reductions.
- What is the protocol if an on-ground class has a positive COVID test?
 - There will be more information with specific guidelines about this soon. Have given this a great deal of thought.

McPhee closed by thanking the administrators and faculty who have worked to keep the university running while dealing with this unprecedented event.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43pm.

Respectfully submitted by Deana Raffo, Recording Secretary