

Minutes from the November Meeting of the Faculty Senate

The regular Faculty Senate (FS) meeting was held on Monday, November 8, 2021 at 3:30 PM.

The meeting was conducted both in-person in JUB 100C and via Zoom for those who were unable to attend in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attendance

Present:

Jeremy Aber, Anne Anderson, Sanjay Asthana, Sal Barbosa, Vaughn Barry, Vishwas Bedekar, Larry Burriss, Lando Carter, Paul Chilsen, Claire Cook, Rick Cottle, Douglas Dabbs, Betsy Dalton, Andrea Dawson, Laura Dubek, Rudy Dunlap, Michelle Finch, Robert Gordon, Lisa Green, Michael Hein, , Renee Jones, Seth Jones, Kyle Kennedy, Rebecca King, Rachel Kirk, Francis Koti, Lei Miao, Dan Morrell, Kari Neely, David Nelson, Martha Norkunas, John Ouellette, Sharon Parente, Ariana Postlethwait, Pat Richey, Dianna Rust, Stephen Salter, Scott Seipel, Daniel Smith, Nat Smith, Raj Srivastava, Ben Stickle, Suzanne Sutherland, Zhen Wang, Andrew Wyatt

Excused: Alicia Pence

Absent: Jake Avila, Song Cui, Christina Hiers, Preston MacDougall

Faculty Senate President Bob Gordon called the meeting to order at 3:30.

Approval of Faculty Senate October Minutes

Gordon called for a discussion of the October 2021 draft Faculty Senate meeting minutes. Daniel Smith moved to accept the minutes as written and Anne Anderson seconded. The motion carried.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee report

Anne Anderson reported the committee's goal to start meeting with Alan Thomas on a regular basis to improve transparency. Their first meeting is Nov. 15. Topics to be discussed include: 1. HEERF funds; 2. Historical data on raises and how they have been funded; 3. Clarifications on data presented at Board of Trustees (BOT) meetings; 4. Athletics and funding for extra COVID testing and other COVID-related issues.

Committee Chair Comments/Updates

COVID-19 Subcommittee

The COVID-19 subcommittee met twice in October to review university COVID-19 policies and have communicated with a member of the COVID-19 Task Force to discuss new policies. The

subcommittee is in general agreement on the adequacy of current policies but seeks clarification on the following:

- Guidance or policy for faculty action if students attend in-person classes when COVID-positive
- Ability of faculty to require masking within their classrooms for Spring 2022.

The COVID-19 subcommittee recommends that the university prepare for the virus to become endemic. Potential policies include the continued use of automated lecture recording for in-person classes via Panopto and allowing faculty to use Zoom or similar tools for office hours interactions with students.

Mirror committee

There is nothing to report because the BOT committees meet tomorrow (Nov. 9). Rudy Dunlap recommends faculty attend in person or virtually. Dunlap warns that since monthly Faculty Senate meetings tend to be scheduled for the day before monthly BOT meetings, the FS Mirror Committee usually does not have timely information to report.

Old Business

Senate meeting delivery method

Gordon called for discussion of the Senate meeting delivery method.

Pat Richey stated that there is nothing in the Bylaws concerning meeting format; the only possible problem concerns use of Panopto recorded meetings. Faculty cannot vote if they watch meetings over Panopto instead of using Zoom, while the Senate risks the ability to meet quorum. Other members agreed they would rather use Zoom than record Senate meetings.

Although criticisms of the hybrid format were noted, Senators agreed to maintain hybrid in-person/Zoom monthly meetings in order to accommodate members who, for a variety of reasons, including health concerns related to the pandemic, prefer to attend the meetings via zoom.

Gordon stated that FS needs one member to be in charge of monitoring Zoom at every meeting.

A senator requested faculty senate members voluntarily share whether they had been vaccinated against COVID-19 with a show of hands. A majority of senators complied by raising their hands although no formal count was taken.

Status of Senate Administrative Aide new hire

Gordon reported on discussions with the Provost's office about how to replace Avonda Johnston as Senate Administrative Aide. Specifically, the Provost's office is considering making this position part-time or a shared position with another position in the Provost's office.

Senate members raised questions/concerns. Members agreed that FS—not the Provost’s Office—should maintain control over this position and its functions, which include the appointment of faculty members to university committees. There was further discussion of how to formalize the oversight of university committees as part of the Senate’s duties. Other Senators were concerned that a part-time employee in this position may not be allowed to use the financial systems. Also, if FS lost a full-time Senate Administrative Aide at this time, MTSU may never provide the funding for a full-time position again. Senators ultimately agreed that the position, whether part-time or full-time, should offer benefits.

Volunteers for Faculty/Athletics Engagement Committee

Gordon called for volunteers to serve on the Faculty/Athletic Engagement Committee. Volunteers included: Suzanne Sutherland, Rachel Kirk, and Dianna Rust.

Update on faculty remote teaching re: household Covid

The Provost stated that there have been just a handful of requests for brief periods of remote teaching, all of which were granted.

Asked Provost on providing response to policy change comments on website

The Provost responded that comments about proposed changes are gathered by the Office of the University Counsel then forwarded to relevant VPs. The comments are carefully considered but individual responses are not sent. Byrnes pointed out that General Education Redesign runs quite differently by providing lots of opportunities for feedback. Byrnes will not have any part in the Gen Ed Redesign process until the Gen Ed Committee issues its recommendation to him.

Provost response to URECA committee concerns

The following is from Dean Butler, who oversees the URECA program:

“URECA is not a university standing committee, and therefore, to my best knowledge, there are no specific policies in place regarding how many members can serve on the committee, defined composition or length of service. The dollars are allocated by ORSP each year.

From 2018 to the present the committee has included 9 members from various disciplines. Some members have volunteered to serve a very long time, others only a couple of years. When someone rolls off due to other commitments, we aim to fill their vacancy with a faculty member from a department/college not currently represented. Another consideration when replacing a committee member correlates to the types of proposals we see most often so we can ensure we have expert reviewers in these disciplines.

We always welcome an expansion of the committee to new members who will actively participate. There has been a significant increase in URECA proposals the past three years, which equate to more proposal reviews for current committee members. Likewise, given the increase in applications and the stagnant funding, URECA has become extremely

competitive. We are often unable to fund good proposals due to limited resources, which often leaves students and faculty members discouraged.

At present all colleges in MTSU are represented except for JCOB and UC. Since 2018, no JCOB faculty has expressed interest in serving and there has not been a pressing need as we receive very few proposals from JCOB students (typically 2-3 each year). In the past three years, there have been 3 faculty mentors/projects funded from JCOB – Diane Edmondson, Keith Gamble, and Dan Smith. We are seeing reoccurring applications from these three mentors given they have now been through the program and know it's a valuable experience for their students and one of these folks would be a logical person to ask to roll onto the committee in future years.”

Anne Anderson reported that she is now on the URECA Committee and is seeking further data.

Provost Response on Mask and Vaccination Mandates

Dr. McPhee will send out a communication on this if/when the governor signs the COVID-19 bill passed by the General Assembly last weekend. Our understanding is if the bill becomes law, the university will not be able to enforce a mask mandate. How President Biden's executive order re: mandatory vaccinations will play out is uncertain, given our state's stance and the various legal and political wrangling associated with it. Right now, we do not plan to mandate vaccinations, but that stance could certainly change.

Gordon specified that while some universities have big investments in government contracts, MTSU does not.

New Business

Kari Neely on Gen Ed Redesign presentation to Steering Committee. Invitation to Dr. Susan Myers -Shirk to meet again with either the steering committee or academic committee (or both)

Kari Neely summarized Dr. Susan Myers-Shirk's presentation to the Steering Committee on Gen Ed Redesign, including the development of new program-level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), the three models, the prioritization of student choice, and the process of/timeline for approving Gen Ed Redesign. The entire process of switching over to a new model will take six years.

Neely emphasized that even pre-existing Gen Ed courses need to go through the new approval process in order to demonstrate how they will align with the new SLOs.

Senators discussed ongoing concerns about the loss of required science and literature courses, universal transfer from community college, the Gen Ed Redesign voting system, and the rigid nature of the existing approval process for Gen Ed courses.

Senators expressed the desire to view the three models, which will be made available to them through D2L.

Gordon offered to invite Myers-Shirk back to Faculty Senate or Steering Committee for an update in spring.

Information on Library's desire for Strategic Planning survey questions for faculty

Gordon announced that the Library sought and received approval from the Steering Committee to conduct a survey of faculty about the Library's strategic planning.

Salter summary of University Enrollment Management committee

President-Elect Salter emphasized that Dr. McPhee is searching for positive solutions from faculty about how we can improve enrollment. Overall enrollment this year was down 6% from last year. MTSU has approximately doubled the number of applications that we had at this time last year but it is unclear how many of the students who are accepted will decide to come to MTSU. The biggest problem facing MTSU is that UTK continues to drain off MTSU's better students. McPhee is interested in finding a stable base of enrollment. Areas to be developed include corporate programs, unique products, and online education.

Salter expressed the concern that the areas Dr. McPhee identifies as providing potential for growth are small and limited, while Deb Sells can only forecast a 3% increase on average over the long term. Are there other areas of growth MTSU can work on?

Gordon opened the floor to discussion. Faculty expressed concerns about: UTK's ability to offer better financial packages to students and the poor performance of MTSU's own foundation; the costs of supporting MTSU's unique niche areas, which are equipment-intensive; the process of recruitment after a student is accepted and whether MTSU provides "early decision" to lock applicants in; the need to revamp online education.

Academic Freedom in light of anti- CRT legislation and University of Florida restrictions on faculty

Pat Richey moved to table this issue until next meeting and Nat Smith seconded. The motion carried.

Avonda Johnson Gift bag contribution.

Suzanne Sutherland will collect donations for Avonda Johnston's gift.

Pat Richey moved to adjourn the meeting and Anne Anderson seconded. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 pm.

Documents distributed at the meeting:

Meeting agenda

Fall MTSU Online Duplicated Enrollment

*These minutes were approved by the Faculty Senate on February 7, 2022. Respectfully submitted
by Suzanne Sutherland, Recording Secretary.*