

Faculty Senate President's Meeting Notes

October 5, 2020

Submitted by **K. Craven**

Members Present:

Stephanie Adams, Douglas Airhart, Dan Allcott, Michael Allen, Jeremy Blair, Troy Brachey, Chris Brown, Debra Bryant, Wei Tsun Chang, Kris Craven, Dennis Duncan, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steven Frye, David Hajdik, Tammy Howard, Janet Isbell, Brian Jones, Christy Killman, Nancy Kolodziej, Matt Langford, Susan Laningham, David Larimore, Emily Lee, Chad Luke, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Jennifer Meadows, Mark Melichar, Holly Mills, Lachelle Norris, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Anthony Paradis, Sally Pardue, Richard Rand, Jeff Roberts, Mike Rogers, Lee Ann Shipley, Troy Smith, Sandra Smith-Andrews, Barry Stein, Holly Stretz, Daniel Swartling, Lenly Weathers, Robert Wilbanks, Zac Wilcox, Kimberly Winkle, Russ Witcher, Jeannette Wolak

Members Absent:

Yun Ding, Mary Matthews

Guests Present:

Lee Wray

Call to Order

Senate President Stretz called the meeting to order at 3:36 p.m.

President Oldham's Opening Remarks

The President began with a discussion of the meeting with the Board of Trustees. He wants to celebrate with us the historic high of 40% 4-year graduation rate. This will have a significant economic impact on the students and will also impact our overall retention rate, which is also good. He also wants to commend the university on completing a third of the three planned Preview Days. This is a campus-wide effort and they have been a great success. Safety adjustments include reduction in the size of each event, but the reports are positive. Oldham indicated his belief that the university is currently healthy but not invulnerable.

President Oldham then asked for **Feedback** on the idea of changing the **Spring schedule**. So far it looks like leaving the Fall schedule the same was the right call, however that doesn't mean we shouldn't make changes to Spring. For now, the plan is to keep the Spring schedule the same, but he is looking for input from the Senate.

Comments:

- ❖ When given the opportunity, students will disburse. This means interacting with large groups which could be problematic. It might be better to limit the opportunity to disburse by modifying or canceling Spring Break week.

- ❖ No denying the amount of stress on everyone. Breaks allow for some relief, but does open the opportunity for higher risk activities. However, if breaks are allowed they should not just be for students and faculty, staff should also be given the opportunity for the same break from the stress. This should extend to the upcoming fall break next week. (President Oldham indicated that they are not sure about legal issues with giving staff additional breaks, however, he and his staff are looking at the options.)
- ❖ What are the alternatives. – Response – no break with a shorter semester; Academic Affairs is planning to work with the Deans on the decision
- ❖ Spring Break is a time for faculty and administrators to get some work done without the usual rigor of classes. Eliminating the Spring Break would impact the ability for this to occur.
- ❖ Other things happen during Spring Break that would be impacted if it were eliminated. Examples include Study Aboard trips, service opportunities, and other alternative educational experiences.
- ❖ What about a compromise of multiple shorter breaks, this will limit the opportunity for high-risk activities. However, that can impact the course schedule. Shorter breaks are often long weekends which include Friday and/or Monday. The Tuesday/Thursday classes are not affected. This creates a problem with the number of classes available for MWF vs TR.
- ❖ Other activities during Spring Break are research work, like proposal writing.
- ❖ Due to the COVID-19 response, some faculty members and/or students may have postponed their plans from last summer to this coming Spring Break week. Now what will they do?
- ❖ Spring Break came about when moved from quarters to semesters. That is when the quarter would end and there was a break before the next quarter. Quarters didn't require breaks due to the shorter length, but needed a break between. With semesters the break is needed more.
- ❖ Would this be just this semester due to COVID-19 or is this a permanent change?
- ❖ Spring Break can sometimes be used to mitigate other uncontrollable factors like closures due to bad weather. No Spring Break, more impact if these circumstances occur.
- ❖ Other schools altered their Fall semester schedule, did this help? Was there a difference in the number of positive cases due to the Labor Day holiday being canceled versus not being canceled? – Response – no formal analysis has been done, we would need to discuss with the contact tracers.
- ❖ We have two joint degree programs with ETSU. The two schools have never had the same exact schedule. Since these students are taking classes at both schools, those students never really get the break. There should be some coordination between the schools.
- ❖ The varsity sports have been significantly impacted with fall sports being postponed. Currently the spring will see all of the varsity sports competing. How will the sports schedules fit into the semester if it is shorted by a week at this late date? – Response – Winter sports will start in November with Basketball, others overlaid with Spring sports (football in Feb, March, April). We will be following all protocols including testing and supervision, this is a lot of effort.

Question: What is the plan moving forward regarding online fees? Students who are opting to take online classes due to the pandemic were not prepared for the additional fees, some are struggling financially.

Response: This is something that we have been working on. Today online fees for TTU courses is up approximately 50%, e-campus courses is down and we only get 40% of these fees. The result is slightly net positive. We are planning to only charge online fees for courses that were already planned to be online, not for courses that went to online delivery due to COVID-19 response.

Question: Some students with personal issues who were forced to take the planned online courses and were required to pay these fees. They now are questioning it. What should advisors be telling them?

Response: The Cares Act did give some funds directly into the student accounts based on unique needs. If there is still a need, have the student contact Enrollment Management, Dr. Brandon Johnson's office. The plan is to keep things in Spring as they were for Fall. This may be revisited after the COVID response ends. The new flat rate tuition plan is still in place and is working as expected. This has made a positive improvement in the Budget by providing stability and an ability to control increases over a few years.

Question: We are seeing the actual attendance in classes where the students have the option of attending virtually to be decreasing, many of these are now completely virtual. There was no additional fee for these classes based on this discussion. Shouldn't we just remove the online fee?

Response: We will have to investigate this issue.

Question: We are collecting fees for the planned online courses now. If we don't do that it will create a hole in the budget. Will this result in higher across the base fees or more budget cuts to compensate?

Response: The cost structure for online courses may or may not be more, but it is different. Initially there were additional infrastructure costs, made more sense to blend the costs.

Comment: Delivering both online and hybrid is more work, but we are not getting paid more for the extra work. We are taking this for our students, but it is not equal.

Question: This semester we are delivering a lot of online and hybrid content without additional fees because of COVID-19. Will this be the same in Spring semester?

Response: Yes. The baseline will still be held at pre-COVID levels.

Other Comments:

- ❖ Perception is reality right now. We are viewed as a commerce entity by parents and students. Impression is why charge more if online. We are being viewed as a bank and online delivery is the cost of doing business.

- ❖ After the pandemic is one thing. I am uncomfortable with charging additional fees for a route that improves safety. Not everyone can do what makes it easy for others, why should they pay a higher price?
- ❖ A time will come when online delivery is the cost of business. Faculty will find it useful, just like other improvements that have come – like ADA buttons. We will likely move toward universal design of teaching. May be more expensive to get started, but this will settle after some time of doing it.

Question: Last meeting the President said that there were no raises for Administration. Lee Wray became Secretary of the Board of Trustees, this came with a salary increase that will be permanent. Is this not a raise?

Response: This is a change in duties that required significant additional work and deserved compensation. This duty used to be part of the University Council, it will permanently move to Lee Wray. The new University Council will no longer have this duty.

Question: We are hiring a new University Council. Are we adding \$30k to the budget to keep the salary the same now without this duty?

Response: Deb Combs, the assistant to the University Council, is also retiring. We are restructuring the duties of these positions. Should be a net zero change. It is not unusual to give the same salary to a new hire in the same position.

Follow-Up: This is typical when the hire is from off-campus, not always compensated the same when it happens in-house.

Response: OK

myTECH HelpDesk:

- ❖ Need to find a way for additional help.
- ❖ Before COVID there was a restructure which made it harder for faculty members to get immediate help. We need IT people who are dedicated to us. Currently there is a wait for getting help, then when the help does come often the need is over – we already had to dismiss the students.
- ❖ After hours help is an issue, which is not new. There is little or no help when teaching at night. Students need help during off hours too. Needs to be some sort of 24/7 availability. What about after hours help by phone?
- ❖ Now there is an issue with not enough help during the day also.
- ❖ There are also issues with the new computers. We didn't ask for them and for some they are not equivalent to what we had. Access to the correct software has also been a challenge, especially special software for research. The timing was not good either – many were getting the new computer after classes already started.

Question: What is the news about Center Stage?

Response: There are still many questions. The temporary reductions in the requests due to reduced programming has had a positive effect. Center Stage has discovered that there are carryover funds and they are starting to plan again. Things are looking better.

Question: The Budget Committee meets later this week. Will this be the usual information discrimination or will there be opportunity for input into decisions?

Response: We are taking a fresh look at a new structure which should be more meaningful for everyone. We will be creating subgroups to explore allocations in various areas, both short and long term. These were explained. This will be a way to keep the involvement timely and move the decisions up in the overall cycle so they have more opportunity for an impact in the Budget cycle. Dr. Stinson is in favor of this and is working closely with President Oldham to make it be successful.

Other Discussion:

- ❖ Can we do something more productive with old computers? – Will look into it
- ❖ Representatives are working with IT to address some concern about issues regarding support for research
- ❖ (Wray) According to HR, 250 are taking the COVID health survey each day, this is out of approximately 2,000 employees. This is an issue. Need to urge employees to comply and self-report health issues.
- ❖ Barriers on Peachtree are being ignored, what should be done? Eventually that area will be a pedestrian mall.
- ❖ In the master plan, in 2014, the location for the new engineering building is in Sherlock Park. There will also be a residence hall build in that area of campus. They are planning to daylight a stream for research into water issues. However, there will still be some park in that area.
- ❖ Centennial Plaza is bleak and bare, what about a gazebo or fountain? More trees. The construction is causing some damage. We are trying to compensate with new planting and other landscaping. Still looking for the right idea of how to improve Centennial Plaza. Maybe ask the students – they have great ideas.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:29 p.m.

Approved: October 26, 2020