

March 6, 2023

Faculty Senate Meeting with President Oldham

Via TEAMS

Attendance was not recorded for this meeting due to absence of Secretary Killman. Notes were compiled by Senator Smith-Andrews by request.

Meeting Called to Order: 3:35pm by President-elect Michael Allen.

President Oldham Comments:

1. I was in front of the State Senate Education Committee last week for the budget hearing. It went very well. We're continuing to work on additional requests beyond what was in the Governor's proposed budget that was released following the state of the state address.
2. The Governor's proposed budget did not include any new capital outlay projects for universities. We are third on the list of THEC recommendations. I think there's a chance because of where the state revenues are at the time that there will be consideration of funding more capital projects.
3. We need about \$10 million a year on capital maintenance projects just to keep pace and more to make progress. It's a lot of support so that's all going very well.
4. We had two board members up for confirmation hearings, Trudy Harper and Tom Jones. They both breezed through.

Q. Is there a motion to replace a trustee VanHooser?

PO

It will be the Governor's office that appoints a new member. It has been typically very slow to respond to that particular vacancy, so no word on that.

Q. Does the Governor not know \$10 million is needed to keep current levels up on building maintenance? TCAT is receiving \$1 billion.

PO

Anticipate there will probably be another billion dollars or so available for funding of various types of projects from the states – a lot still out there and in play. Conversations have been so you can't get a feel for how this goes. We should know something by early to mid-April.

Q. Tennessee University Faculty Senate (TUFFS) Universities report that all public universities in the State except TTU award TN General Assembly-allocated raises on the basis of Cost-of-Living (COLA). TTU Faculty Senate requests that annual faculty and staff raises can be awarded, in keeping with other institutions across the state, both on a COLA and merit-based system?

PO

I don't see this board doing that. In most years we wouldn't have enough of a raise to adequately address the cost-of-living increase anyway even if you put 100%. My honest answer is the board makes any changes they choose to but I don't see that happening.

Q. Every year cost-of-living raises versus merit comes up. The current range is 1 - 7% is it possible to see the total (number) percentage of faculty and staff who don't receive at least a 2%? Seeing this would help us determine how big of an issue this is.

PO

4% average was received by most. The majority of people got between three and 5% increases. There were a few outliers on the ends of the curve.

Comment:

I love the idea of getting the data that was just requested. It would be really nice to take a look at it from a two or three-year perspective because it's my guess is it's the same people who are not getting it year after year and that's when the lack of COLA really begins to become an issue.

PO

That's an issue on the valuation side, correct? I'm just simply saying that from a salary distribution, you've got people that either outperform or underperform and are compensated appropriately.

Q. Specifically talking about staff now: Do we have adequate supervision and training to evaluate our staff in a way that is fair for their possible merit raises because that's really where it looks like they're not being evaluated in the same way we are? I would encourage the board and you to consider a higher floor for the staff starting place and then look at possible merit afterward.

PO

We're clearly in the developmental stage of doing evaluations better. We're still growing we're still learning. HR has initiated a lot more training this year for supervisors in terms of evaluations and we're attempting to cross-correlate across supervisors. When you get different supervisors evaluating different employees and their raises come out of the same pool, if they don't have the same evaluation philosophy then you got a bit of a problem. We're working through some of those issues now and I think we should be very optimistic that this year will see some significant improvement in terms of the evaluations of staff because there's a lot more effort going into educate supervisors and help train them in the right kind of supervision. It should be an ongoing conversation.

Q: Some seem like they get a bonus equal to my salary. Whereas if someone gets their job done at a lower level maybe they didn't paint the wall in the "wings-up way", they're not getting a bonus so there's really a disparity in perception and that's why I think it's so hard to evaluate some of the work which is task oriented. I'm advocating for raising the floor for the staff.

Q: During our last senate meeting, it was suggested Chairs discuss with Deans awarding above and beyond the 50% of faculty per department an annual evaluation of “Outstanding” and the 50% who “should” receive below this- as per the form. Can you add more clarity?

PO

I have checked into this a little bit. I don't know exactly what percentage have received outstanding. I don't know the exact categories but if I remember right, there are a couple of categories that are above average on the faculty evaluations.

I can tell you that way over 50% are in the two top categories. I don't recall what percentage is in the outstanding category. I don't know if it's above 50% or not. I can tell you it is heavily weighted toward the upper end on the faculty valuations and I can also tell you that in my discussions with the Provost, there's been no communication or policy from the Provost's office that limits the distribution of valuations for faculty. I don't know the origin of this. I have no idea what instructions are provided or where they're coming from but there's no active communication coming from academic affairs.

Q. So if there's no policy out of the Provost's office who issues the form and why is it on the instructions of the form?

PO

Again, I don't know the origin of the form, maybe 20 years longer, so I have no idea when that's been looked at or where the idea originated from.

There's nobody currently in the administration that feels like that should arbitrarily be the case. HR doesn't feel that way and they have never had any dealings with faculty evaluations.

Comment:

An example of one of those situations that you said you'd like to hear about. I'm in Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education and we teach pedagogy, so “teaching” is literally our content area-our area of expertise. As a result, it seems reasonable for C&I to have 95 to 99% of faculty score ‘outstanding’ and we used to. I know this practice hasn't been around for 20 years because I've been at Tech a long time, but it was not the case until recently. That's just one example. The bottom line is there are concerns about these rules or these arbitrary quotas causing the issues we discussed earlier.

PO

The showcase events were over the two weekends with close to 1200 students who participated. All of the efforts of the faculty and staff are really paying off. We were on the doorstep at 8000 freshman applications which is a record high and we got over 6400 admits which is about a thousand more admits for freshman than we had this time last year. We're on track to have another record freshman class next fall.

Q: Are you concerned about meeting the housing needs of students with another record year?

PO

We are OK. We're doing a lot of work on that. We're prioritizing freshman housing on campus. We anticipate having a shortage of campus housing for returning upperclassmen and we imagine giving them sufficient notice so they can make other arrangements. Pretty soon residential life will open up housing applications for returning sophomores, and then it would go to juniors and seniors in sort of a priority basis but the main priority is to make sure that we can accommodate the incoming freshmen.

Q: There is a concern that we bought the class through scholarships. Do you have the same concern?

PO

We are doing really well competing for students at the high end. We were not competing very well for students in the middle- students with a 24, 25, or 26 ACT. We were losing them because they were getting slightly better scholarship offers. So, we changed all that. I feel very confident the scholarship model that we have right now will work. We will continue to look at it or make sure that it more than pays for itself over time. Even with the adjustments we made last year, we paid for it all. We're not making any budget reductions this year going into this next fiscal year. We're looking at a 5% salary pool increase. The operating budgets are one area that we need to spend some time and attention to and figure out how to do that better.

Q. What about the Office of Research?

PO

Have hired several people. In better shape now than 6 months ago. Continue to bring in significant research dollars – not quite \$20 million mark yet, but close. I'm hopeful to see another record high on activations.

Q. Compensation across campus has been announced. Has the existing faculty salary committee been sunsetted?

PO

The new group will work with Mercer – an excellent company.

Will likely hold some money back from the salary pool to address what comes out of the salary study.

Q. There are only a few faculty on the new committee. Is faculty input being diluted?

Q. Who is teaching online courses but not receiving the online fees?

PO

Former course fee monies were built back into E&G budget. If it's not adequate, that's a new conversation that we need to have.

Q. Budget has not increased. Engineering, Business and Nursing are only programs with fees. Why aren't fees as valuable in other areas as well?

PO

Department budgets have gone up but primarily in personnel.

Institutions that have gone to the 15 credit model have fared well. Former philosophy was to be the low-cost alternative. Value creation will set us apart. UTK is 30% higher than Tech. There is a lot of data indicating how Tech is perceived. We rated really high. Increasing the number of people who know about us. Need to have large freshmen classes for a few year.

Meeting was adjourned @ 5:09pm

Respectfully submitted by Christy Killman