

September 19, 2022

Meeting with the President notes

Via TEAMS

In attendance: President Maxwell, Secretary Killman, Past-President Luna, President-Elect Allen, Senators Liu, Swartling, Comer, Meadows, Burch, S. Smith, Smith-Andrews, Isbell, Turner, Fornehed, Mullen, Hermann-Turner, Park, Craven, Null, Rajabali, Weathers, Spears, Upole, Lee, Hutson, Alley, Brachey, Frye, Manginelli, Mills, T. Smith, Fennewald, Langford, Hajdik, O'Connor, Loftis, Hasan, Winkle, Rand, Sisk, Pickering, Duncan, Allcott, Ojo, Witcher, Ding, Reames, Crockett

Guests: President Phil Oldham, Lee Wray, Mark Creter, Robert Cardana

Absent: Senators Canfield, Howard, Adams, Shipley

Call to Order: 3:35pm

President Lori Maxwell called the faculty senate meeting with the President to order and offered special thank you to President Oldham for joining the meeting. Senator questions were collected, grouped topically and previously distributed. President Oldham said he would take the questions topically, addressing each category. President Maxwell turned it over to President Oldham and encouraged Senators to ask questions at the end of each topic.

President Oldham greeted the group and reported the largest freshman class in years, with 2050 students. Freshman applications for next year are being accepted for next fall, and some 20% above the same time last year. He indicated when enrollment goes up, everything gets easier on campus, that's where we are headed. President Oldham expressed hope that logistics of this large freshman class isn't causing any issues. He indicated that freshman retention from last year is 79%, and the addition of diversity in each freshman class is another positive. When compared to other campuses across the state, some are similar to us but there are several that are down in enrollment.

Question:

What about housing for freshmen? Students have indicated potential problems with dorm rooms, such as the bed being too close to the ceiling.

Answer:

The long-term plan (3-years), a housing project in final design, going to miss the fall 2024 target, but likely fall 2025 semester there will be about 400 beds added to campus. He stated that we could use them now, we need them bad and trying to push the project to begin and once it is, a phase 2 will begin for another 300-400 beds. It's about 3 years until these projects are complete, so looking at some local options. Used UTK as an example, saying they leased an entire hotel this year. Tech is now looking at some apartment complexes near campus that we could potentially take out a long-term lease on existing apartments that we could manage and utilize. Looking to maximize availability of housing on campus and make it as good as possible. Currently close to 100% capacity in housing on campus. It is a good problem to have and we are looking at all the options right now.

The semester started with 130 students in hotels, now down to 50 according to Lee Wray. Did not place any first-time freshmen in hotels. Worked with upper classmen in that regard. Great participation from local hotels.

President Oldham indicated that Knoxville has seen an enrollment increase, Chattanooga has seen about 1.5% decline. Martin is up some, TSU is up quite a bit, and he doesn't have a full understanding of how that has occurred. A lot of their students are from out of state. Middle is down about 4% and Austin Peay is down 4%. Growth is campus specific.

Question:

Is there anything that we can do that might make it easier on the students who are in hotels?

Answer:

Feedback that he has received so far is that students are in a pretty good situation and like it and some don't want to come back to campus. Shuttle buses are available to accommodate student schedules, hotels have been good about accommodating students in special ways. Resident assistants are living in the hotels, too. They are being taken well care of, but contacting Dr. Polk-Johnson for methods to connect to student majors will be great.

Topic: Research

Comment:

The Office of Research has been an ongoing project for a while according to President Oldham. There are aspiration goals for research at Tech and we continue to climb toward that. Last year we fell just short of 24M in research activations, which was 4-5% increase over the prior year. President Oldham said there is a lot of great work going on here. There are a number of activations pending now. There is between 6-10M in projects to be activated this fiscal year. There has been significant loss of staffing in the Research office according to the President. He said it's urgent that some things get done to continue to move forward. Dr. Taylor is stepping down as VP at the end of this month, leading to a good time for restructuring. He is in communication with an experienced individual from off campus who has been a research VP at a SEC school. Ideally, he would come in for temporary assignment to help us keep our efforts going in positive direction. President Oldham will be charging him to assess the functionality of how the office runs and define adequate or deficient and then resources will be martialled. President Oldham also said that a search will be launching soon for the new VP of Research and Economic Development. We need as many hands in this as we can get. When he has more information, he will share it with campus.

It was shared that there have been several job advertisements in Research over the summer and some faculty have served on search committees. President Oldham was asked to share the status of the 2 candidates who interviewed for the director position and if that search is moving forward.

President Oldham stated again that we need as many hands as we can get, so we are trying to push all those who are feasible through the process (to hire) – we are not waiting on anything, we're going to keep pushing these through. To be fair to individuals who may be coming to Tech, they need to be made aware of the transition because that could change their mind.

The restructuring of ORED (Office of Research and Economic Development) was questioned.

President Oldham responded saying there needs to be assessment and he's asking the individual to do assessment to see where we are and what is working and not working, and see if we can come up with at least a short-term strategy to make things work as well as possible based on the human resources that we have available to us. There has been a lot of discussion in the past about restructuring the R

office. At this point in time, about a practical approach to get us thru the next year and make sure things are functional and make sure proposals can be submitted effectively and with as little drama and turmoil as possible and move forward. When we get the next VP, that individual will have a chance to take stock and go from there.

Question:

How much is faculty who are doing research involved in understanding what's needed from the research office?

Answer:

President Oldham has met with a number of researchers on campus over the last few weeks about some of the issues. He has an open door and wants input and expects anyone who comes in to do the same thing. He is in agreement with the statement that most faculty had no clue about the restructure because there has been no input from faculty and there should be heavy input of faculty who are doing research and needing services of the research office.

Topic: Salary Equity Issues

Comments:

President Oldham has no comment right now on many of the questions. Review has been completed and will be presented to the board at the next meeting. They will have opportunity to review those results and take whatever action they choose. He doesn't want to get out in front of the board in that regard. Thinks it will speak for itself once all is said and done. Questions not directly tied to that issue he will talk about, such as structural alignment of HR, where HR is in org chart and who HR reports to. Continuing work looking to see if there is a better structure and if he's able to determine a better way to approach HR, he will share with faculty and campus. Still taking Faculty Senate recommendations under advisement.

Regarding compression of salaries and how that relates to change in promotion increments that was recommended by Faculty Senate last year was discussed. President Oldham said that there could be some faculty inversion in salaries – doesn't know that it's happened yet. Knew from the start it was something to take into account and look into and possibly make corrections. The decision is simple to support that because in the long run everyone will be way better off. If it helps push overall faculty salaries up, glad to support. Department chairs and deans are encouraged to raise those questions if and when there is a problem in a departmental salary structure that doesn't seem to be appropriate.

Question:

Can HR do an equity review?

Answer:

There's a mixed bag - merit salary, internal equity, market adjustments, reclassifications, promotions..., but the report does a good job untangling. What do we do in the future to handle the equity issue in the most effective way possible? The university is contracting for a 6 to 12-month salary study by an outside firm. It will help us do a better job defining what we're doing, why we're doing it and what are the targets we are looking at. That will absolutely be part of the process going forward.

Question:

Some faculty members who have been here a while resent experiencing salary inversion. Is it good to wait 6 to 12 months from the time a firm is hired? It would be nice if HR could at least take a look at Academic Affairs to see if there are inversions that need to be corrected sooner than later.

Answer:

If there are egregious cases that need to be addressed, they should be raised through colleges to the provost's office, and those can be prioritized.

Question:

To clarify legally, as incoming Faculty Senate President, I asked the Comptroller's office if they were investigating this matter and they said they were. Is it not legally correct that the merit raise investigation is now at the level of the state comptroller?

Answer:

President Oldham stated he is giving information that is second hand to him. Our Internal Audit reports to state audit. In this administration, the state is taking a stronger role in most everything. They make initial determinations whether to handle in Nashville or delegate it back to campus to handle. In this case, our internal auditor gave all the info she had, and over the summer, they (State Comptroller's office) turned it back over to her and said they were not pursuing anything further. Read into that whatever you want to. They are not pursuing anything further at this time.

Question:

For the record, the state comptroller has stopped investigating and turned this back over to TTU's internal auditor? You are saying this on the record, 9/19/22.

Answer:

That wasn't necessarily the language President Oldham said he would use, but for now they (State) have informed us (Tech) that they are not pursuing it any longer.

Comments:

Lee Wray added that in a general sense that is correct.

President Maxwell stated she wants to see the report.

President Oldham said he should not be quoted as he has no first-hand knowledge.

Lee Wray stated that the board sees the report then President Maxwell will get a copy.

Question:

Will the report be shared with Faculty Senate once the board has seen it?

Answer:

President Oldham answered, "yes".

Question:

After we (faculty senate) see that report in October, we can ask questions about residual merit pay that was distributed in 2021-22, correct?

Answer:

President Oldham answered, "sure".

Question:

Organizationally, who does Internal Audit report to at this university?

Answer:

Formally, Internal Audit reports to the Board with a dotted line to me as president, Oldham replied.

Topic: Study Abroad

Comment:

Covid had a negative effect on study abroad, according to President Oldham. Was there money available then that should be available now? Bottom line is yes. Study abroad is kicking back up, with a huge increase in requests this year. It's managed by Dr. Stephens. Monies not used in Covid years rolled over, it was not lost. He suggested we contact the Provost if there are additional/specific questions since study abroad is managed in that unit. He stated he wants study abroad to flourish, in fact, strategic plan initiative wants to lean into study abroad over the next years and want to make it even better. Study abroad is coming back to life as it should and we're excited about it.

Question:

Where is all the money that students paid in for study abroad? Dr. Stephens said that the dollars have not been carried forward, it's been requested but not carried forward. Seems to be a pattern. How can we get a real answer?

Answer:

President Oldham said he would follow up, but he was told unambiguously those funds rolled over.

Information was told to various faculty senate members that contradicts what President Oldham is saying. It's a high impact practice and we need to get back to doing everything we can to provide these opportunities.

Topic: Faculty Tenure and Promotion

Comments:

President Oldham discussed separability between tenure and promotion decisions. We have separate policies for tenure and promotion. By policy they are separable. In practice there's more nuance to it. Promotion from assistant to associate professor and tenure are essentially the same except for time element. It's hard to see a reason to tenure someone without promoting them because criteria are same in terms of performance, scholarship, teaching ability, etc. Of the two, tenure is most valuable, as it is essentially a guaranteed position for life, barring something serious. Tenure is a significant commitment on behalf of the institution. Do occasionally promote early if it makes sense. Don't believe there has been a request to tenure and not promote in his time at TTU. Glad to talk thru questions about this.

Question:

You said you think tenure is the prize, and of the two, tenure is more important but has same criteria as promotion. I've heard a department chair say that in his department, tenure requirements are lower than promotion. Which is it on campus? If tenure is equal to or greater than promotion, then it needs to be made clear across campus.

Answer:

President Oldham stated that by policy, the wording/language is essentially the same with the exception of time. From the perspective of a junior faculty member, it's disingenuous to say we are going to give you tenure but hold this promotion over your head, even though the criteria are essentially the same. What if the individual you awarded tenure to decides to cut back? It's a dangerous practice.

Question:

The way the policy is right now faculty can choose to go up for promotion. Tenure policy talks about potential whereas promotion policy no longer talks about potential.

President Oldham: In every academic department there is a unique culture around tenure and promotion. The important thing is to have good communication with junior faculty so they know what the expectations are. Faculty member should have a clear understanding that these two things should happen at the same time. If we do something other than that, we are rare and out of step. Good mentoring and communications annually with feedback is essential. Both should be based on substance and not just arbitrary things we dream up. From practical perspective, not a good practice to tenure before promotion.

Question:

What happens if we are trying to attract someone who is not entry level from another institution in a lateral move? We don't necessarily want them to be promoted to full professor just to be tenured. How do we make it attractive enough to get them?

President Oldham said the way we work to get them here depends on prior experience level of individual talking about. Generally, he never suggested tenure at hiring unless they already earned tenure someplace else. Generally, give department the consideration. Trying to recruit someone who has already earned tenure at another place, it's hard to get them if you don't offer tenure.

Question:

Agree with lining up of the policies. Historically, peer evaluators for tenure were tenured individuals and peer evaluators for promotion are promoted individuals. These are not necessarily the same people.

President Oldham: A great point. He explained the historical practice could have been a work around to keep good teachers (instructors) more than the allotted 3 years.

Has the individual demonstrated during probationary period sufficient evidence that they can sustain a career in the discipline? If they haven't demonstrated they are a colleague that needs to be kept around, shouldn't promote or tenure rather cut them loose. Fan of 3-year review of faculty so decisions can be made early. Worth keeping long-term. Being a great teacher is the baseline. If not good at teaching we shouldn't want to keep them. If pretty good at research, too, should be good to go.

President Oldham asked the question... From the stand point of the applicant, what's the risk if they apply for both (tenure and promotion)? If they gain tenure and not promotion, they have not lost anything. Tenure decision is the only risk. Promotion can be applied for at a later time. Don't know why you wouldn't apply for both.

Question:

Inefficient to have a policy where you get tenure or you have to leave. Seems self-defeating to make someone leave and then try to get someone who is at least as good as the one who left.

Some institutions do tenure-track appointments for teaching faculty and have criteria specific to that appointment for the reasons noted. We find ways to keep them here (multiyear contracts). Tenure – what are the on-going expectations? Wide variety of opinions across campus.

Question:

What are your views on allowing lecturers to be a part of the committee when reviewing people for tenure and promotion since they do not have obligations of research faculty?

President Oldham: Personal feeling is it may not be a good idea, but understands different cultures in academic departments and could be the reasons it makes sense. A lot of departments struggle with functions within the department – lecturers have a voice, but not dominant voice. Tricky departmental governance issue. A strong department chair and dean can help with the issues.

Final comments by the President:

Think we are off to great start. Received the resolution last week. Will get back as soon as possible. Excited about enrollment. Excited about opportunities coming our way. Aware of struggles around operating costs. Continuing to focus to improve salaries and operating budgets moving forward. Appreciate everyone's contributions and let's have a great year.

Adjourned at 5:17pm

Respectfully submitted by Christy Killman

