

Faculty Senate Meeting with the Provost

February 5, 2024

via TEAMS

Members Present:

Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Megan Atkinson, Melissa Comer, Kris Craven, Mark Creter, April Crockett, Yun Ding, Andrew Donadio, Dennis Fennewald, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steve Frye, Syed Hasan, Samantha Hutson, Matthew Langford, Richard Le Borne, Jane Liu, Mark Loftis, Jeannette Luna, Jennifer Mabry, Twanelle Majors, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Holly Mills, Wendy Mullen, Michael Nattrass, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Hyewon Park, Mustafa Rajabali, Richard Rand, Christopher Reames, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Scott Smith, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Amber Spears, Leslie Suters, Kyle Turner, Hannah Upole, Brenda Wilson, Kimberly Winkle

Members Absent:

Teddy Burch, Krystal Kennedy, Christy Killman, Lenly Weathers

Senate President Allen called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m.

Remarks by Provost Bruce:

Provost Bruce spoke about the SACSCOC reaffirmation coming in 2026. Our self-study is due in September 2025. We were selected for differentiated review, in which we will be reviewed on 40 standards instead of 75.

We have a record number of applications and admissions to Tech, thanks in part to the free application offer in September. The biggest challenge is converting those into enrolled students.

The Provost's office conducted six workshops in the fall with a total of 118 attendees; these workshops primarily focused on the tenure and promotion process and were held for those considering tenure and promotion, as well as for their chairpersons and deans.

Provost Bruce mentioned three new program proposals in the College of Engineering and the School of Human Ecology.

Topics for discussion from the Faculty Senate:

Topic 1: Hiring of lecturers versus assistant professors when we wish to be an R2 institution

At the end of spring semesters, Provost Bruce asks departments to submit hiring plans to address openings that are current or imminent. Decisions on filling or not filling lines (and at what level to fill them) is made on a case-by-case basis with great consideration to the departmental needs, anticipated future needs, balance, loads, and accreditation, among other things.

Topic 2: Graduate student credit hour production

Faculty are concerned that they are either not meeting a standard or are not certain how to report their graduate teaching hours. For example, are summer graduate hours included? Provost Bruce will follow up on this topic.

Topic 3: Changes to the promotion process that affect peer letters and when/how to ask for them

A senator was concerned about the turnaround time for letters and notices of eligibility for promotion. Provost Bruce will make sure that all letters and forms include the important deadlines and information for those interested. Another senator reminded any chairs present to make sure eligible and interested faculty are aware and prepared ahead of time.

Topics 4 & 5: Change in promotion process concerning Watermark; protection of substance over process concerning Watermark and faculty effort reports and dossiers

Provost Bruce gave some background about the previous process involving physical dossiers and the challenges they created. We have needed a system for a long time to help both with data entry and workflow when sharing and managing dossiers for the tenure and promotion process, and Watermark is now that system for us. Some senators have been concerned that Watermark places more focus on quantitative factors than qualitative, but the Provost assured senators that was not the case. The electronic dossier standardizes the information quantitatively, but cover letters and narratives provide the qualitative element for a full view of candidates. The key point about a system like Watermark is that it is easier over time to adapt the tool and add information without fear of loss or lack of information available to all reviewers.

Concerning compatibility if we move away from Watermark one day, all were assured that any future platform like Watermark would “talk” to the previous system during implementation so data are not lost.

Faculty asked about the expectations for the use of Watermark with the upcoming round of tenure and promotion candidates this coming fall, and Provost Bruce indicated there may still be some who are turning in physical dossiers instead of electronic via Watermark, and she will check.

Submitted questions:

- 1. Do you by any chance know if our opinions of administrators matter at all or if it's just a formality? I feel like since these evaluations began, the faculty put effort into evaluating and making comments and nothing changes.**

Provost Bruce stated that speaking only for herself, they matter. She sees administrator evaluations as similar to student evaluations of professors – a way to look for constructive criticism for areas to improve and a way for supervisors and administrators to see trends that need addressing.

- 2. How is the administration making up snow days? I've missed 4 class days on MWF mornings and finding it very difficult to simply condense material. Suggestion: allow dead week days for new material and exams.**

Historically, the university does not makeup snow days; instructors are expected to condense or compress coursework throughout the remainder of the semester. No one would have lost more than 3 class meetings for MWF morning classes that met before 10

a.m. The decision to cancel is always made carefully and with safety top of mind, but it is not taken lightly because canceling classes is a disruption. It is a team/group effort with lots of careful consideration and input before this outcome is reached. In this case, the inclement weather hit while many were already off campus, making it even harder for more to consider making it to campus safely. One senator asked about the option to go virtual since we are all aware of how to do that post-pandemic, but the Provost pointed out that not all can go virtual from their many varied locations, including instructors who may not have the appropriate materials on hand from home. Because of the great possibility of inequity, we cannot ask all to go virtual without notice.

- 3. What is the purpose of requesting bragging points from faculty weekly? Most of us are not in fields where we get state-level awards or grants/contracts weekly. In addition, as faculty members, we are not recruiting or fundraising professionals so it is unclear why we are being asked to report those things weekly. From a faculty standpoint, reporting yearly would make more sense since we report our goals and accomplishments yearly anyway.**

Provost Bruce is not asking anyone to demand that of their faculty weekly; she asks weekly in Dean's Council so that she will have bragging/talking points for meetings she may have outside the university or with other administrators. One senator expressed this is happening in their department and that it does not help morale.

- 4. Why do administrative/financial associates, etc. not evaluate their immediate supervisors?**

Provost Bruce will follow up with the vendor that surveyed staff. She believes they should be included and has asked Human Resources about this.

Questions from the floor:

Q: Do we have a comprehensive plan to increase online offerings for undergraduates? It seems we have decreased our offerings.

A: The need or desire for it is mixed; some feel "forced" online, others want online offerings but can't have them. Two strategies may help this: 1.) When we offer a course online, we offer it in person as well, and 2.) We make sure we have a full slate of general education core classes (enough to satisfy gen. ed. requirements if not the entirety of gen. ed. courses) available online. The latter will allow us to eventually create fully online programs.

Comment: Some undergraduates like the flexibility that comes with having some online options.

Senators and Senate President Allen thanked Provost Bruce for her time.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

Approved: 02/26/2024