

## Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes – September 7, 2021

**Senators Present:** Bart Ballard, Ammar Bhandari, Travis Braidwood, Mauro Castro, Jieming Chen, Steven Chumbley, Steven Corbett, Zhaoqi Fan, Anders Greenspan, Kelly Hall, David Hicks, Michael Houf, Kendra Huff, Patricia Huskin, Dongwook Kim, Robert Kowalsky, Sarah Lucas, Tanner Machado, Lifford McLaughlan, Richard Miller, Kyle Milsap, Larry Peel, William Procasky, Christine Radcliff, Kathleen Rees, Alexander Sanchez-Behar, Velda Soydas, Maria Velez-Hernandez, Teresa Young

**Senators Absent:** Hisham Al-Bataineh, Lucy Camacho, Michael Cherry, Manuel Flores, Jeff Glick, James Glusing, Mais Nijim, Nick Scullo, Hui Shen, Daniella Varela

This meeting of the Faculty Senate was held and recorded online through Zoom due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements. A recording of this meeting and a PDF version of the slideshow can be found on the [Faculty Senate Website](#) under the heading [Digital Faculty Senate Meetings](#).

### I. Call to Order and Quorum Call.

At 3:30 p.m. President Chen asked the secretary, Christine Radcliff, if enough members were present for a quorum. Senator Radcliff replied in the negative, but it was decided out of respect for the guests of the meeting to start the meeting and have another quorum call before any business is discussed.

### II. Presentations

#### a) President Mark Hussey

President Hussey started his remarks by welcoming everyone back for the Fall 2021 semester. He reminded everyone that the hopes for this semester are to have campus return to as close to normal as possible, while understanding there will be challenges as we continue to manage COVID on our campus and in the community as well as be aware of any weather-related events that might occur. He continues to ask for everyone's patience and understanding as we navigate our way through this year.

#### **COVID and return to campus**

President Hussey thanked everyone who participated in the return to campus testing. Doing this was extremely important for us as we try to better manage and develop and modify protocols in addressing COVID-19 with the goal of keeping our students, staff, and faculty safe. Over the last 7 days the campus positivity rate was 3.4%. Our positivity rate through all testing done since August 15<sup>th</sup> is 3.1%. The campus rates are much lower compared to the 7 day positivity rate for Nueces County (22%) and Kleberg County (14%) given by the CDC as of September 6, 2021. This time last year our positivity rate on campus was 7.7%. It is still to be determined if there will be another round of testing on campus.

## **Budget and enrollment**

The legislative session was successful for TAMUK. We did see an increase in State funding due to increases in research funding from the State as well as a special item funding the Citrus Center. We still have some Higher Education Relief Funds available to fill out the budget for FY22. President Hussey did include an up to 3% merit increase contingent on enrollment along with possible market-based adjustments for some employees in the proposed budget to the Board of Regents. He will look at this again as we get closer to December, but so far everything is on track for some kind of merit-based plan.

Enrollment is down 7% compared to last year. The greatest declines in enrollment were in dual enrollment, our first time in college, and then our Sophomore to Senior retention. Graduate student enrollment is up, in international students and in the College of Business Administration. He again wanted to thank all the faculty for what they do, especially the scholarship active faculty that are supporting graduate students regardless of which College they happen to be in.

## **Priorities for Fiscal Year 2022**

### **a. Reverse enrollment trends**

- i. All Colleges have been declining or flat in undergraduate enrollment over the last 5 years. Hoping to have sustainable and predictable small growth year to year, maybe up to 3% increase each year as we go forward. It is not just recruitment of new students that needs improvement, it is also retention of the students already attending TAMUK.

### **b. Implementing strategies for goals in the campus strategic plan**

- i. President Hussey will be asking for tangible progress as we move through the year to help him believe that we're really working toward addressing the goals laid out in that plan.

### **c. Maintain Carnegie doctoral high research ranking**

- i. We received this in 2019 and it is currently being updated for 2021.

### **d. Celebration events around the stae for reaching the Capital Campaign "With you, Without Limits" goal**

- i. The first will occur on campus September 30, 2021.

In closing he spoke about hearing comments that he and the Provost don't get to meet with the faculty as much as everyone would like. COVID has made that an interesting challenge, but he really does appreciate the opportunity to visit with the faculty senate at the monthly meetings. He also wanted everyone to know that he and the Provost do meet at least once a month with the faculty senate President and President-Elect. They also have once a month luncheons with the faculty senate executive committee, and with the Regents Professors. President Hussey and Provost Reinisch are meeting

together at least with faculty leadership on a relatively frequent basis. Additionally, Provost Reinisch is engaging with department chairs and faculty groups, etc.

**b) Provost Lou Reinisch**

He also wanted to welcome everyone back to campus. He was excited to see traffic and students walking on campus when he drove in, as this was a first for him in his time here at TAMUK. He knows there will continue to be challenges as everyone returns to campus, and he asks that you let him know about your concerns and that he would be happy to discuss them with you.

**No Labor Day**

He heard lots of feedback from campus that they did not like having to work on Labor Day. He said they will be looking into whether we are going to continue to have the Labor Day holiday or if this year was just a freak occurrence because of the way the calendar lined up.

**Face Coverings**

Governor Abbott's order says we can not make a mandate on wearing face coverings. The most we can do is politely request and highly encourage everyone to wear them. Provost Reinisch has heard of something called Singer's facemasks that might be better for faculty when they are lecturing.

He mentioned again that the campus positivity rate of 3.5% is really good. The CDC says that having a positivity rate under 5% is good. Throughout the pandemic on average the United States has had a 6.9% positivity rate, and Texas has had a 9.6% positivity rate.

**Open Educational Resources (OER)**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Board of Regents are pushing for more OER courses as a way to help reduce the cost of higher education for students by asking faculty to use open educational resources in their courses. The Provost is having discussions about how we designate courses as OER so that the students will know in advance, and that lead to discussing ways to have better overall course descriptions. He would like to come up with a way that when students see a course they have a better idea of what sort of course they are enrolling in. He plans to work with faculty to identify all the ways that we teach classes, and can we give some sort of description of that to the students.

**Vaccinations**

We will continue to encourage vaccinations over the course of this semester.

## **Strategic Plan**

The new campus 5 year strategic plan has been approved by the Board of Regents, and will be made available soon. The Provost plans to have methods in place so that he can be checking against it as we go along to have it be a living plan, not just something that is put in a drawer for the next 5 years and then picking up again to see if we did all we planned to do. For those who have not had a chance to see the plan, Provost Reinisch wanted to let everyone know it is very student success focused because that is our ultimate goal is to have students who are successful here at TAMUK and also as they move forward in life.

President Chen then opened the floor for questions.

**Q:** It was asked if the mobile vaccine clinic was going to continue this semester?

**A:** Yes, the continuation is still being discussed. The other thing we are trying to do is to come up with a lottery for students who get vaccinated to be able to put their name in for prizes that won't hurt them by causing them to be taxed on it, but to help them get through their time here at the University.

**Suggestion:** Is there a way to have blackboard open with the syllabus and that kind of information earlier for the students? Currently it opens just 24 hours before classes start, which does not allow for them to be able to source textbooks from places other than the bookstore.

**A:** Provost Reinisch agreed that was a good suggestion and said he would talk to Ronaldo with D-Lit to see if that is possible and also maybe have that information available when students are signing up for the courses for the next semester. We do want to make sure there are enough safeguards for the faculty to keep their course information safe so that someone can't just go in and take the information and not register for the class.

**Comment:** Senator Castro wanted to thank the President and Provost for having everyone come back to campus. He said he has a class of 85 students, half and half masked/unmasked sitting where they want together, but what's most important to him is that he's actually lecturing, talking to them, learning their names again because they are all in the same classroom. He said it feels just like normal being in a classroom, and not Jones Auditorium, with blackboards, students working in groups and talking to each other. It feels normal and that is exciting.

**A:** Provost Reinisch said he was glad and commented too that that is what many of the students were telling administration over the summer when they weren't enrolling, is that they have had enough of the COVID learning and they really wanted the experience they've had before COVID.

**Q:** Dr. Hussey, could you clarify a little more about the pay raise? Is it going to be merit based or a blanket 3% for all faculty and staff, or something like that?

**A:** If we do a pay raise it is contingent on enrollment. If we do a pay raise it will not be across the board, it will be merit based. President Hussey added that there will be some market-based adjustments in some critical staff areas where we have been having lots of turnarounds. They have done some salary surveys and noticed in a couple of these areas that we are significantly behind market, and will be doing some across the board base adjustment in just those few areas.

**Q:** Why are the notebooks for [continuation/tenure review activity schedule first year through fifth year probationary service](#) due January 20<sup>th</sup>, which is one day after Spring classes begin? How was that decision made?

**A:** Provost Reinisch answered that this decision was floated with the deans about doing reviews of the faculty on a more timely basis for the previous twelve months, so that when we do our raises we can get them closer to the first of March. When we drag the reviews to be that they're not turned in until March, then the raises don't get handed out until June. Since this year's raise goes to base pay, losing three months is not something that he thinks people would want to do. He thinks is not unreasonable for people to be working on notebooks throughout the year and then taking the first few weeks of January to get it done and turned in.

### **III. Approval of Minutes from May 4, 2021 Faculty Senate Meeting.**

President Chen asked if we now have a quorum and Parliamentarian Huskin replied in the affirmative. President Chen then moved to approve the minutes; Senator Miller seconded. Minutes were approved.

### **IV. Report of Officers**

#### **a) Emergency Management Team Report**

Senator Radcliff reported that the most recent meeting was August 26, 2021. As of August 26<sup>th</sup> there were 1100 students checked into the residence halls. Most of the information given at this meeting was about the return to campus testing that President Hussey and Provost Reinisch have already shared.

**b) Senate President Chens' Report**

President Chen reported that he and President-Elect Machado continued to meet with President Hussey and Provost Reinisch over the summer. He reminded everyone that their standing meeting is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month, so please contact him or President-Elect Machado if you have any questions or concerns you would like brought forward in those meetings.

**Return to pre -pandemic normalcy**

President Chen reported that as we have seen the Administration is transitioning the campus back to pre-pandemic normalcy. This means returning to the original course offerings and modalities and so on. He said that he had received an email from a faculty member stating that their department had sent out emails saying that everyone needs to be here from nine to five Monday through Friday. This is not true and President Chen was able to communicate to that faculty member that Provost Reinisch's intent is for faculty to be available to students just as they were before the pandemic.

**Face Coverings**

President Chen has received many requests from faculty to urge the Administration to mandate face coverings. This is not something that we can do. As President Hussey and Provost Reinisch stated earlier in this meeting, we can not go against the order created by Governor Abbott.

**Resumption of Annual Faculty Lecture Series**

The Provost's office will move forward with the 2020 and 2021 faculty lecture series this year. The 2020 awardee is Maribel Gonzalez-Garcia, and the 2021 awardee is Richard Miller.

**Pay Raises**

Many faculty members have asked that the issue of pay raises be brought up to the President and the Provost. Faculty have not had a regular raise in over 6 years. As the President reported earlier in this meeting, the possibility of a raise will be re-evaluated in December and it will be contingent on enrollment.

**Faculty Handbook Revision**

President Chen followed up with the Provost to see why the faculty handbook revisions that were sent to his office last November had not been implemented. The Provost said that he had not received the revisions, so they were resent to him. Additionally, in conversation the Provost mentioned that there were quite a few errors in the Faculty Handbook overall and that it could use a thorough review. Upon reviewing the proposed changes Provost Reinisch said that he wanted to discuss them further with President Chen.

**Comment:** It was brought up that now that we have a different Provost, we should take advantage of this and bring the work that the faculty senate did a few years ago about salary equity and compression to his attention.

## **V. Old Business**

### **a) Tenure and Promotion Change Proposal Update**

The President and Provost would like to move forward with the recommended changes, but as of yet the Faculty Senate has not agreed to the revisions as a whole. The main sticking point is still the revision dealing with external reviews. Provost Reinisch does not feel that the proposed process for external reviews is out of line for an institution of our caliber and ranking. It was agreed that the faculty senate and the Provost will continue to work on this issue, and that revisions will not be implemented this academic year.

## **VI. Standing Committee Reports**

### **a) Committee on Committees**

Committee Chair Senator Sanchez-Behar reported that the committee has filled all the seats in the committees that report to the faculty senate.

### **b) Resolutions and By-Laws Committee**

This committee still needs to elect a Chair for this year.

### **c) Election Committee**

Senator Radcliff announced that the committee has not met at this time, but she will be reaching out to the members later this month to start working on verifying department lists to prepare for apportionment in November.

## **VII. Reports from Committees Reporting to the Senate**

### **a) Administrator Evaluation Committee – No Report**

### **b) Annual Faculty Lecture Committee**

Senator Ballard reported that the committee had been corresponding through email and they were waiting to hear about funding for the events, which President Chen reported earlier that the Provost intends to move forward with the lectures this year. The committee is working on the scheduling to have the most recent awardees give their lectures.

### **c) Piper Award Committee**

Senator Miller reported that the committee has selected a nominee and that the person has been informed. The nominee has until November to complete and submit their portfolio to the Provost's office who will forward it on.

### **d) Faculty Evaluation Committee - No Report**

**e) Faculty Benefits Committee**

Senator Miller reported that he will send a reminder email to the FS executive committee of those faculty benefits that have been recommended that have received no action.

**f) Policy Revision Committee – No Report**

**g) Faculty Handbook Committee – No Report**

**h) Ad-Hoc Committee on Anti-Racism and Social Justice - No Report**

**VIII. New Business**

**a) Face coverings**

President Chen said he would like to hear any suggestions from the senate on how to pursue this issue. It was commented that the best thing we can do is model wearing the face coverings, social distance, and encourage our students to do the same. It was additionally commented that the Provost's hands are tied by the Governor's choice, so until the Governor changes his rules there is nothing the university can do except encourage face coverings.

There was an additional comment questioning the notification process for students/faculty who test positive. Are the QR codes still being used for contact tracing? A few faculty reported that they have been contacted through the QR method, while others had not and knew of confirmed cases in their classes.

**IX. Announcements**

**a)** Senator Radcliff announced that entry to the library between 10pm and 1 am Sunday through Thursday is being monitored by swiping your TAMUK ID. Only current students, faculty and staff will be allowed to enter the building during those hours.

**b)** There is no ITS help available in the library at this time. We do not know when they will return.

**c)** Library reference services are now available at the circulation desk and through virtual chat.

**X. Adjournment**

At 4:56pm a motion to adjourn was made by President Chen and seconded by Senator Castro, motion was passed.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

Christine Radcliff

Faculty Senate Secretary, 2021-2022