

To: Joanne Hall, Faculty Senate President

From: Martin Griffin, UTK voting representative

Subject: TUFSS Spring Meeting

March 24, 2015

The Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFSS) met at Austin Peay State University in Clarkesville from March 20 to 22. I was the sole representative for UT Knoxville as we had no alternate for the second position. The UTK Faculty Senate report was submitted to TUFSS president Jeff Roberts (Tenn. Technical University) before the meeting.

The meeting dealt with a number of topics over the two days of meetings (the first event on the Friday was a dinner hosted by the new president of Austin Peay SU), but the following issues captured the most time and attention. These summaries are intended to give a sense of the discussion and do not imply UTK Senate endorsement of, or opposition to, any position.

a) Tenure/"de-tenuring"

Although the UT president did not in fact use the term himself, the error on the part of his communications staff was revealing. Many TUFSS members felt that their administrations are becoming more assertive as regards removal of tenure "for cause" and going beyond that to using performance reviews as a tool of personnel and budget management. The meeting recognized that there can be some cases e.g. a psychiatric problem where a department or college has to suspend or remove a faculty member, but these should not be dealt with by "de-tenuring" and/or firing. Faculty handbooks are often contradictory or unclear, and legal advisors to administrators can determine that the faculty handbook does not apply in any particular case (which can lead to litigation). TUFSS members should remain vigilant for attempts to by-pass normal procedures in order to remove tenured faculty.

b) Status of non-tenure-track faculty.

This debate showed that campuses have both shared and distinctive situations. The general feeling was that while the position of adjuncts and NTT faculty colleagues is precarious and worthy of support, there is a continual danger that administrators will use increased adjunct/NTT recruitment to isolate tenured faculty over time so that tenure becomes the exception rather than the standard. As our representative, I informed the meeting that UTK's senate has had NTT members on almost-equal footing for the last two years. Some campuses felt strongly that attempts to weaken the distinction between tenure-track and NTT "silos" should be resisted: in particular, assistant professor titles should not be conferred internally on NTT faculty who have gained a PhD, as they require a national search.

c) Effects of *Drive to 55* and *Tennessee Promise* on four-year schools.

TUFS had a compelling presentation from Mike Krause, the executive director of Tennessee Promise, who gave us a very clear sense of the aims of TP in respect of bringing more Tennesseans through the community college system. He made the point that if this increase happens, a certain number will be sure to transition to four-year colleges, and we will also benefit from, in a broader sense, a changed conversation about higher education in the state. He stated that he wanted, in particular, to remove any impression that four-year institutions are only marginally relevant to TP and the Drive to 55.

I found the exchange of information and the comparative approaches of different faculty senates to be very illuminating, especially with regard to handling broader-based issues such as the protection of tenure. Lateral collaboration, even in a very loose way, strengthens faculty on all sides.

Although not finalized as yet, the August 2015 TUFS meeting will be in Memphis and organized by colleagues from the UT Health Science Center faculty senate.