

Faculty Senate Executive Council  
Convened via Zoom  
September 14, 2020  
MINUTES

Present: Joel Anderson, Ernest Bernard, Amy Broemmel, Rachel Caldwell, Tamah Fridman, Millie Gimmel, Martin Griffin, Julia Jaekel, Cheryl Kojima, Brian Krumm, Anne Langendorfer, Beauvais Lyons, Stephanie Madison, Audris Mockus, Bonnie Ownley, David Patterson, Gary Skolits, Rob Spirko, Shawn Spurgeon, James Williams

Guests: Monica Black, Diane Kelly, Harrison Meadows, Donde Plowman, Dixie Thompson, John Zomchick

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

S. Spurgeon called the meeting to order at 3:32 p.m.

### **II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Minutes of the Executive Council meeting of July 13, 2020, were presented for approval by C. Kojima and seconded by B. Lyons. Minutes were approved, 19 yes, 2 abstained.

C. Kojima reviewed the content of the minutes of the Undergraduate Council meeting of September 8, 2020. The minutes come with a motion and a second since they come from a senate committee.

Discussion: it is disappointing to push back the approval of the new curriculum but it is necessary. This is the second delay because it has been a challenge to get all of the necessary courses approved. The curriculum change has been in the works for 5-7 years. These changes are never easy or fast. The Provost is clear that work that has already been done will not go to waste. B. Lyons suggests that we showcase some courses that will help bring everyone together as we move toward this goal.

The committee voted 20 for and one abstention to send the minutes for approval to the full Faculty Senate on Sept. 21.

### **III. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REPORTS**

#### President's Report (S. Spurgeon)

UT campus has been approved as an Early Voting site, probably in the new student union (October 26th-29th, 8am-8pm). The president apologized for the lateness in getting documents to the committees. Any documents to be shared with the full senate for the meeting September 21 need to be turned in by September 15. In general, documents should be sent two weeks before a meeting. Dr. Spurgeon spoke with the *Compass* and praised the resilience of faculty and administration. He explained to them the difference between teaching online and sharing material online and the amount of work necessary to teach online. The president praises everyone for their efforts.

#### UTK Chancellor's Report (D. Plowman)

The Chancellor began with good news. We have received two historic large gifts, one from the Haslam's and another from the Zeanah family. In the midst of a pandemic and financial crisis

we are up in financial gifts. Freshmen enrollment is up by 5%. Transfer students are up 7%. Overall, enrollment is up 4%. Retention is 88.6%, up from 88.3%.

As of today (Sept. 14), we have 659 students, 11 staff and one faculty member with COVID-19. Faculty and staff infections may be from K-12 students going back to school. Massey Hall was smoothly emptied, the last students are leaving today. This will provide additional isolation space for students who test positive. We have begun restricting indoor events. So far, we do not have infections happening in classrooms. One student was hospitalized overnight for observation. Most cases have been mild or asymptomatic. Students who have been identified as close contact will be able to quarantine in their room unless their roommate has an underlying condition. Most students are trying hard to make this work. The packed bars are not helping the situation. Dr. Birx will be visiting tomorrow from the White House Task Force. She will be meeting with the campus team that has been managing the virus and then will meet with members of the wider community. Our goal is to get the numbers down and keep them there. COVID-19 has impacted everyone in a big way. For many of us, dealing with COVID is a huge part of our daily work. The Chancellor also praises the resilience of faculty and staff.

B. Lyons asked if there is movement toward making a large community committee per the News-Sentinel editorial on Sunday. Dr. Plowman is in favor of this. Dr. Langendorfer asked if the Chancellor has been following on Reddit the op ed pieces written by students and if she has reached out to students who are commenting on the situation. Has she worked with students to help them help themselves to create a fall experience that they want? The Chancellor feels that students are doing a lot of work already and are generally positive. Student Life is working on this as well (getting former COVID positive students to work with currently positive students). Most students are positive about online instruction also.

T. Fridman requested that we keep students at UT and not let them go back to their communities. In Israel, 40% of the infected cases caught it from a family member and if we keep infected students here, we will save others from infection.

#### Provost's Report (J. Zomchick)

Provost Zomchick thanks everyone for their work and reminds us that COVID won't last forever. He has been meeting with Colleges to gather information and talk about leadership in some cases and timelines for searches (Architecture and Design, Law dean). He will lead a leadership retreat on Diversity and Racial Inequity and Social Justice at the university and come up with clear action items. October 5-9 is Vol Success Week with many activities to engage students. Different colleges and clubs are working hard to give students opportunities to engage with each other.

Calendar: A report was submitted offering two options. The following was chosen which will give faculty and staff an extra week of winter holidays and avoid the MLK holiday weekend.

Jan 20: classes begin. There will be no spring break. There will be a recess day on April 2. Classes end April 22. Exams are April 26-29.

Summer: Mini-term begins May 10.

Summer sessions end July 30. This lengthens the time between summer sessions and fall. A committee will look at the feasibility of a Winter 22 winter term.

Senator Black asked what are we doing to empower our students to see their university experience in a different way, as less of a consumer experience of football and tailgating and community building but as a chance to achieve academic excellence. The Provost feels that that message is well communicated and our admission rates are evidence of this.

There was a question: Will the timetable hours remain the same? Yes.

#### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

##### Humanities Caucus Resolution on Teaching Modalities (H. Meadows)

H. Meadows expressed the appreciation for the Chancellor and Provost for letting faculty choose their own modality for course delivery. This resolution does not prefer any particular modality but only asks that faculty continue to have autonomy on their choice of modality and to restore scheduling to be departments. He read the formal resolution. Motion to approve by B. Lyons, seconded by Senator Williams.

Discussion: Provost Zomchick expressed two concerns: He is unsure what returning control to the departments means. It seems too broadly phrased when this has always been a collaborative endeavor and it is necessary that there be a central body organizing scheduling, i.e. the Registrar. He is unsure that faculty have the "right" to determine their modality since this is not in the *Faculty Handbook*. Usually the modality change goes through a curricular process. There are logistical issues that cannot be given exclusively to faculty (when and where to teach). Both the Provost and Chancellor are on the record saying that no faculty will be forced to teach in a modality they are not comfortable with. H. Meadows stated that this is about restoration of pre-pandemic status. Choosing modality is overly complicated by having to have this approved up the chain of command. We have never had to deal with a pandemic before and the second part of the resolution is specific to the pandemic. Some commented that during the summer it was very difficult for departments to adjust schedules and it was very chaotic. The first part of the resolution hopes to avoid a repeat of this. Provost Zomchick says we now have a registrar who will work to avoid a repeat of these confusions.

The Council voted 13 yes, 6 no and 0 abstentions to send the resolution to the full Faculty Senate on Sept 21.

##### Senate Representative for TUFS (S. Spurgeon)

President Spurgeon requested nominations. There were none from the floor. The president nominated Dr. Bonnie Ownley and was seconded by Dr. Skolits with a vote of 17 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstentions.

##### The Importance of Retention Reviews During a Global Pandemic (B. Lyons)

B. Lyons presented this as an informational item. The role of tenured faculty in giving quality feedback to junior faculty is very important and it is done inconsistently across the university and not always done in compliance with the *Faculty Handbook* recommendations. He asks for feedback from the council. This does not have to be on the agenda for the full senate next week or can be presented as an informational item.

A. Langendorfer stated that NTTF do not receive support like this and this makes it very clear that their academic work is not equally valued or is completely denied.

Proposed Changes to UTK-UTI *Faculty Handbook* (B. Lyons)

B. Lyons went over suggested changes to the *Faculty Handbook*. These are to bring the *Handbook* into compliance with board policy. They have been vetted and approved by the Faculty Affairs Committee. They propose that the FS president would consult the Executive Council in matters of dismissal. The EC votes were 16 yes, 0 no, 2 abstentions. There will be a full reading at the September Faculty Senate meeting and this will be an action item in October.

Establishing Annual Goals for Standing Committees (S. Spurgeon)

S. Spurgeon appreciates the committees turning in their goals for the year and asks the EC to look these over. This will be on the full Faculty Senate meeting agenda.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

S. Spurgeon adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.