

## **Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS) Report, 2020-2021**

Submitted by Bonnie Ownley (TUFS- Immediate Past President and UTK Campus Representative)

Tennessee University Senates (TUFS) is an independent consortium of faculty senate presidents and one elected campus representative from each of the 10 public universities across Tennessee. Members are Austin Peay University (APU), East Tennessee State University (ETSU), Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), Tennessee State University (TSU), Tennessee Tech University (TTU), University of Memphis (UM), UT Chattanooga (UTC), UT Martin (UTM), UT Health Science Center (UTHSC), and UT Knoxville (UTK). TUFS is the vehicle for communicating information about shared governance and a variety of other important issues at our institutions. Dr. Misty Anderson (UTK) currently serves as president of TUFS.

This past academic year, TUFS held four virtual meetings. As part of the fall meeting (October 26-27, 2020), TUFS members met with the newly established National Council of Faculty Senates (NCFS), which was formed in Austin, Texas on October 27, 2018, by 41 shared governance leaders from universities across the U.S. The mission of NCFS is to advocate for faculty senates and to unite members to support and strengthen shared, effective, and influential faculty governance on American university and college campuses. The NCFS is divided into regional groups and Dr. Sandi Smith-Andrews (TTU), the president-elect of TUFS, will chair of the multi-state southeast region.

At both the NCFS and TUFS meetings, primary topics were the institutional response to Covid-19, including shared governance practices during development of plans to return to campus. The importance of communication and transparency was stressed. Concerns were raised about mental health issues of faculty, staff and administrators stemming from exhaustion and isolation. The NCFS keynote speakers were Dr. Sirry Alang (Lehigh University) and Hans-Joerg Tiede (American Association of University Professors). Dr. Alang gave a powerful presentation on racial inequities in the academy and urged all to look inward at our own actions and inactions, because that is what we can control. Hans-Joerg Tiede shared and compared results of past AAUP shared governance surveys and discussed a new survey that he is developing to address current shared governance practices and university response to Covid-19.

Similar surveys were being developed by NCFS and TUFS to share information among university faculty senates to find best practices and solutions to challenges that we faced during the pandemic. TUFS collaborated with the Center for Organizational and Human Resource Effectiveness (COHRE) at Middle Tennessee State University to develop and conduct the faculty survey in late fall, 2020.

On December 5, 2020, TUFS met virtually with Carey Whitworth (UT Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy) to learn of proposed legislation that would affect higher education in Tennessee. Legislative initiatives included twelve capital maintenance and outlay projects (e.g., College of Nursing building at UTK); various covid-19-related bills that would prevent employers from telling employees to get vaccines; and a pause on Name, Image, and Likeness bills to allow for creation of a federal solution for third-party monetary compensation for student-athletes. There was an expectation that legislators favored permit-less gun carry and strongly supported equity for broadband access for rural and underserved communities.

TUFS members gave reports for their institutions with a focus on higher administration searches, involvement of faculty in operations meetings related to Covid-19, agreements for on-line teaching as

intellectual property; issues with long-term interim positions that involved few women and no people of color; acquisition of Martin Methodist by UTK; faculty annual evaluations in light of Covid-19; mental health issues of faculty, staff, and students; and examination of curricular and procedural processes to address systemic racism.

A meeting was held on January 30, 2021 mainly to discuss findings of the survey on Faculty Workload in the Age of Covid-19. Survey results were prepared for each TUFS member university and across all participating universities. Key findings for the overall survey were 1) Teaching online is more time consuming than teaching face-to-face, 2) During the COVID-19 pandemic, all faculty members are working more hours, 3) During the COVID-19 pandemic faculty members are spending more time teaching and less time doing research, 4) Each summer, 9- and 10-month faculty work nearly full-time without summer pay, and 5) Work related and non-work related stress is up significantly from 2019 to 2020. Full survey results are posted at the TUFS website ([tnfacultysenates.org](http://tnfacultysenates.org)).

On April 10, 2021, TUFS held a virtual meeting with Josh Warren (Sr. Director of State Relations and Partnerships, UT Government Relations and Advocacy) to discuss the upcoming budget amendment due to increased revenue in Tennessee. Josh indicated that there will be full funding of the higher education formula and 4% raises due to increased revenue. There are plans to fund the TN Promise Scholarship in perpetuity and changes in how capital maintenance funds can be used. The new permit-less carry gun law does not affect the restrictions that higher education institutions currently have on guns on campus. Confucius Institutes at all public universities in Tennessee have been closed. There was a strong anti-vaccination lobby in Nashville, but no bills were passed. There is a Foster Care Outreach program, and the TN State government is seeking 5 universities to reach out to them. There may be increased funding for various tuition discounts, many of which have not been fully funded in the past. There will be increased transparency for universities with online salary information of new graduates. There have been problems with sports betting in Tennessee, including money laundering and wagers on individual student-athletes. To correct these problems, there is a bill to develop an oversight council on sports betting. Governor Lee has requested 200M to support broadband access.

Given the success with the Covid-19 survey, ideas were discussed for additional surveys, including:

- Intellectual property policies and agreements between faculty and the university as it relates to teaching,
- Cost of living wages and how compensation is rolled out, and
- Gender and race/ethnicity salary equity reports.

A decision was made to start on the intellectual property idea this summer.

Reports from members included myriad topics for discussion. The ETSU basketball coach resigned following negative community and donor pressure after he supported free speech acts of student-athletes to take a knee at basketball games to protest against racism. All universities are making plans to return to 'normal' in June, but most are awaiting CDC guidelines. Searches for administration positions were announced, including a president for UM. Many universities mentioned Faculty Handbook changes were needed or ongoing. Somaditya (Soma) Banerjee (APU) was elected as the new President-elect of TUFS. TUFS will meet on June 5, 2021 to discuss the final wrap-up with legislation in Tennessee for Academic Year 2020-2021.