

Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS) fall semester meeting October 23, 2021

Attending: FS President Lou Gross and campus representative Senator Bonnie Ownley
Submitted by B. Ownley

TUFS is an association of the faculty senates of the eleven four-year public universities in Tennessee. It represents the interests of over 10,000 faculty members across the state. Member universities are Austin Peay State University (APSU), East Tennessee State University (ETSU), Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), Tennessee State University (TSU), Tennessee Tech University (TTU), University of Memphis (UM), University of Tennessee – Chattanooga (UTC), University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center (UTHSC), University of Tennessee – Knoxville (UTK), University of Tennessee – Martin (UTM), and University of Tennessee – Southern (UTS).

Covid-19 Policy Update – Members provided updates on current Covid-19 policies, including mask mandates, teaching modalities, compliance with the federal guidelines for vaccine mandates, social distancing, use of federal COVID CARE Act funds, and incentives for vaccinations. All reported mask mandates within university buildings and most faculty were teaching in-person (with accommodations available for those with health conditions, in quarantine or sick). Members reported that they intended to follow federal guidelines on the mask/vaccine mandate and are awaiting more guidance from university administration. TSU reported that Covid-19 relief funds were used to erase student debt. Some universities offer significant incentives for vaccinations, such as a \$100 gift card. Others held drawings and proof of vaccination was required to enter; prizes included \$2500, iPhones and laptops, and donor money was used for prizes. Concerns were raised about air quality in buildings and a desire that administration recognize how the pandemic has affected faculty workloads, including burnout, the impact on research productivity, and increased service requirements.

Enrollment/Budget Update - APSU, ETSU, TSU, UM, and UTK reported increased undergraduate enrollments, while UTC, UTM, and TTU reported decreases. TSU received federal funding to cover a deficit. Concern was expressed that a desire to increase enrollments may negatively affect the quality of instruction. UTK and ETSU are undergoing new budget models. Some member universities reported raises (ETSU, UT System schools and TSU).

Calendar – Member universities discussed various issues including alignment of contact minutes to credit hour, lack of classroom space due to increased enrollment, creation of a winter term at UTK that pushes spring graduation to mid-May, service requests of 9-month faculty during semester breaks, whether faculty are covered by workman’s compensation if conducting service during a semester break, and rates for summer salary on federal grants.

Legislative Report – University President Cabinet members for legislative advocacy, Carey Whitworth (UT System) and Terry Saltsman (TTU) gave updates on the upcoming legislative session. The State has a \$3 billion surplus. Currently there are discussions on enforcement of Executive Orders by President Biden, restructure of state funds for public institutions, use of additional federal monies, capital projects, full funding of the higher education formula, test optional policies, lottery and student financial aid (Pell grants have increased), Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) legislation to improve the current law, gun laws, and critical race theory (CRT). Stands on CRT include, “You can’t teach it (which violates

academic freedom) to concerns that CRT is embedded in university policies. However, the majority of legislators appreciate the role that higher education plays in the State.

University trends in hiring tenure-track versus non-tenure track faculty – there has been significant growth in the number of administrators and non-tenure track faculty versus tenure-track faculty in the last few years. Growth of administrators and professional staff is related to increased compliance requirements, growth in information technology, outsourcing of student advising, and Student Life and Student Success programs. On the latter, student expectations are high and if you provide for them enrollment increases.

University IP Policy – TUFS members will continue to collect information on current IP policies related to teaching. This has become especially important with online teaching.

Topics for the next meeting in January 2022 - 10-yr changes in hires for tenure-track, non-tenure-track, and administrators; post-tenure review; Faculty Senate model for president-elect; dual enrollment; information on faculty awards at the president/chancellor level and college level.