

UTK Faculty Senate Executive Council Meeting

Monday, November 06, 2023

3:05 pm – 5:00 pm

West Wing, 440 Haslam Business Building

MINUTES

- I. Call to Order at 3:05, President Roessner presiding
Attending: D. Alderman, S. Benjamin, E. Bernard, M. Brannen, C. Clark, J. Coble, B. Coldren, R. DuBois, M. Hinten, N. Fomin, M. Griffin, D. Kelly, O. Kilic, B. Krumm, A. Langendorfer, J. Laughter, E. Lukosi, S. Madison, B. Ownley, I. Schoenbach, E. Schussler, M. Scoggins, R. Spirko, A. Steiner, P. Thompson, M. Violanti, A. Williams, R. Zakrajsek, J. Zomchick,

- II. Approval of Minutes
 - a. Faculty Senate Executive Council [Minutes from October 02, 2023](#)
Motion to approve by Senator Violante - second by Senator Alderman –
discussion: suggestion to clarify language raised as comment in draft minutes by Senator Griffen was resolved with the suggested language accepted into the draft – motion passed by majority vote.

- III. Announcements and Reports
 - a. **President’s Update** (A. Roessner)
Each time that we glance at social media or turn on our television sets, we are reminded that we live in a challenging world in the midst of chaos and conflict, but as we draw near to a season of thanksgiving on Rocky Top, I want to convey a message of sincere gratitude to you from the bottom of my heart for the sometimes thankless work that you do within this campus community and to encourage you to continue to advocate for inclusion, equity, and wellbeing for our students and for our staff and faculty colleagues on Rocky Top.

Our agenda includes an update about the university calendar process from Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and University Registrar Brian Coldren; a Preliminary Findings Report on Exit Interview Procedure and a motion to revise [Faculty Handbook 1.6.3](#) from Faculty Affairs Committee co-chairs Jud Laughter and Anne Langendorfer. Before we begin with new business, we have several updates and informational items:

Based in recommendations at our September Faculty Chat, I recently inquired about and advocated for the development of a legal defense fund to be used in the event that the State Attorney General ever determines that he would not represent faculty or staff in a case related to this legislation at the University Faculty Council’s October meeting. UT System President Randy Boyd responded by stating the following: “As a state entity, UT would be prohibited from using UT funds to pay for legal defense of a UT employee if the Attorney General says the State will not provide a defense. This applies whether or not the funds are donated vs. appropriated in nature. While nothing prohibits individual employees pooling personal resources for such a defense fund, it is our opinion that the university cannot engage in such a matter as a state institution.” In response, I then

inquired about the possibility that a legal defense fund could be initiated through the UT Foundation and Boyd suggested that he would check into this possibility; The Office of Ombuds Services has published an annual report and a schedule for available workshops [see the appendix for additional information and links]. The Ombudsperson recently told the Faculty Affairs Committee that many faculty are unaware of their evaluative roles, which can lead to conflict and this committee asked that I share the need for faculty to reconsider our approach to conflict, drawing on the following Ombud's goals: *Develop a culture where campus community members view conflict as an opportunity for reflection, innovation, and positive growth. *Develop a campus culture that supports frequent, open, and constructive communication, particularly within evaluative relationships. *Provide educational opportunities that enhance campus community members' willingness and capacity to have meaningful dialogue and constructively manage conflicts;

A faculty survey will be appended to the November 27 Senate mini-minutes. Committees wanting to add survey questions for faculty input should submit to [President Roessner](#) or GA [Jordan Shipley](#) by noon, November 21.

b. Committee Reports

- Senator Benjamin, Chair of Diversity and Inclusion Committee: The committee has questions pertaining to the name change happening around moving diversity, equity, and inclusion to access. We would like clarity on where this is. Faculty on the committee and across campus are receiving mixed messages regarding this change with some colleges sharing information to faculty and others not. The committee is hearing concerns, especially from faculty of color, and would like clarity on where this is and exactly what is happening to share with faculty.
M. Scoggins: The Chancellor is working with I think where we are is that the chancellor is working with Vice Chancellor Small's office to develop the plan. President Boyd requested the campuses to engage in this work at the retreat in August. The plan is in the works but will need to ensure they are in alignment with Boyd's directive before they are announced to campus. An update will be provided at the November 20th Faculty Senate meeting.
Senator Benjamin: Not knowing is causing anxiety and it would be helpful for the chancellor to send out a message that this is being worked on.
- Senator Madison, Co-Chair of Finance and Benefits Committee: The committee received a question regarding the ongoing negotiations between Covenant Health and Signa that will affect those covered under Covenant Health in the following year. Will open enrollment be extended to allow employees to have a choice once negotiations are completed.
M. Scoggins will follow up with Associate Vice Chancellor Lucal.
J. Zomchick: He received an email, as a covered member, from the state that open enrollment is extended until December 1. If negotiations are not complete by December 1 we will need to address this.
- Senator DuBois, Co-Chair of Teaching and Learning Council: They have been meeting with staff in Institutional Effectiveness to continue the conversation about course evaluations. Institutional Effectiveness is responsible for enacting

policy, not making policy. The Council has oversight of the course evaluation process. They are interested in seeking input from faculty on a number of questions including: how many back years of data faculty need access to, who should have access to data, what is done with unofficial data, and should faculty be allowed to offer incentives to students to complete surveys. They will work to prepare questions for the survey that will be sent with the November mini-minutes.

IV. New Business

a. [Academic Calendar Process](#) (B. Coldren)

Academic calendars are now published through the 2026-27 academic year. This is done with a formal [academic calendar committee](#) composed of an executive committee and stakeholder group. Their goal is to have calendars for 3 years out to do proper planning. The groups met multiple times through fall 2022 and updated calendar guidelines that had not been updated since 2015. They then used these guidelines to inform proposals for the new calendars. The work was done through an iterative process where committee members gathered feedback on proposals and returned to the committee to revise.

The committee established 3 overarching goals:

- Envision an academic calendar that aligns with the strategic vision of the University, providing enhanced access to learners while meeting the pedagogical and instructional needs of academic programs.
- Balance the consideration of providing multiple entry points for students by utilizing various sessions/modules within the academic calendar while understanding the crucial need to structure the calendar to enhance the likelihood of successful student learning outcomes.
- Create a collection of semesters, sessions, etc. that are consistent for academic programs in their planning of educational content, so that course offering can be developed to fit those sessions and be replicated throughout the academic calendar.

The committee worked to establish guidelines around instructional days, attempting to maximize instructional days to align with the credit hour, exam periods, commencement, and break periods. Coldren noted discussion and concern in the committee regarding staff burnout in addition to student and faculty burnout as we continue to add mini terms and summer sessions.

The committee consulted with the Provost and others in spring 2023. They worked with leadership throughout the summer to develop a single calendar recommendation for the Chancellor for approval in early fall. Calendars for academic years 2024-2025, 2025-2026, and 2026-2027 were approved and published in Fall 2023.

Next Coldren shared specifics regarding the 2024-2025 calendar ([see slides](#)). The year will have 4 types of replicated sessions with each type being the same length.

- Full Semesters – 70 instructional days – Fall and Spring
- Embedded Sessions – 34-35 instructional days – Fall 1st & 2nd sessions, Spring 1st & 2nd sessions, Summer Full
- Mini-Terms – 10 instructional days – Winter mini term, May mini term, Summer 3rd session
- Summer Sessions – 26 instructional days – Summer 1st & 2nd sessions

Mini-terms have been standardized to 10 instructional days, allowing the condensing of the overall calendar length. The revised institutional definition of credit hour allows for online/hybrid courses to consider total student engagement time instead of previous standard of 2 minutes outside classroom work for each 1 minute of face-to-face time in the classroom. Full summer has been adjusted to the same length as embedded session in Fall and Spring semesters. Summer 1st & 2nd sessions were lengthened from 20 to 26 days to meet the needs of several disciplines.

Breaks were adjusted so that both Fall and Spring semesters have 7 days of break. Beginning in Fall 2024, the election day in November will be a break day. They are working closely with athletics and Knox County Schools to align the calendar and not have to make changes for non-academic issues. Note that they typically align spring break to be between 1st and 2nd sessions but spring 2025 it will be off-center to align with Knox County Schools.

Question: The 7 break days in fall and spring but they are grouped very differently. In spring it affects only 2 weeks but the fall breaks affect 4 weeks. Multi-session courses with labs and discussions are affected by any week with a break as the lab sections meet across the week. B. Coldren: the issues of the lab sections was brought up in discussion with the committee but they cannot meet every need with the calendar. We will need to see how this works in the coming year.

Question: January mini term was originally introduced as a way to help students not doing well in the semester get back on track before spring semester classes. Do we have any idea of what percentage of students attending January term are using it for this and being successful. B. Coldren: we have data from year 1 that I don't have at this moment. We have seen an expansion of study abroad in this time which might be an approach to keep them going off track from doing study abroad in a full semester. We do know that registration nearly doubled in the 2nd year we offered winter mini-term. We also track what students register for. A. Williams: Last spring, 2,100 undergraduate students attended winter mini-term. When asked why, the top reasons were: reducing academic demands in future terms, expedite graduation, fulfill mandatory course requirements, and an opportunity to concentrate on a single course.

B. Coldren: There is a system wide discussion to explore an aligned academic calendar. We are the only campus doing a winter mini term. There is a push to

start spring on the Tuesday after MLK day in such a calendar, which would make the winter mini-term difficult.

Question: Was there any discussion about making thanksgiving a full week off?

B. Coldren: It came up once but was not broadly discussed. There was some concern about the short amount of time after Thanksgiving before finals and if the break was extended that it could cause the post-thanksgiving classes seem pointless or disconnected. Part of the issue is that sometimes Thanksgiving is very close to finals.

A. Roessner, encourages faculty involved in the process to partner with Faculty Senate, particularly the communications committee, to get input from the caucuses.

b. Exit Interview Procedure Preliminary Findings (J. Laughter & A. Langendorfer)

The goal of this work is to find out what kind of data is gathered when faculty or staff leave the university. HR looks at staff data and Faculty Affairs looks at faculty data. D. Kelly: They are expanding their capability to get more actionable data from this with a new staff coming on board to help with data. HR does the exit interviews for faculty and staff and send the faculty data to Faculty Affairs. There is not a lot of data at this time and sometimes, the data is so small from a particular College or Department that it is difficult to share without revealing identities. They would also like to get more data from the annual faculty satisfaction survey.

c. Motion to Revise [Faculty Handbook 1.6.3](#) (J. Laughter & A. Langendorfer)

A. Roessner: Though this comes to you from the Faculty Affairs Committee, there is additional context to share about this motion. In a monthly meeting with the Chancellor, the Chief of Staff, and the Provost, we noted that some non tenure track (NTT) faculty members do not have voting rights over the curriculum they teach due to unit-level bylaws. It was recommended to partner with the Provost's Office to eliminate this problematic inequity through a handbook change that guarantees minimum voting rights for NTT faculty. President-Elect Derek Alderman drafted the recommended language before it went through the Faculty Affairs Committee.

D. Kelly: This has not yet had administrative review. Administrative review is when the provost office looks at it along with Deans and Department Heads. In the past sometimes this has happened before it came to Faculty Senate. This is a different approach. Without administrative review, there could be changes to the draft.

J. Zomchick: Having a preliminary administrative review before things go for a vote can reduce faculty frustration as the review and editing process takes times

and can seem like the issue is delayed or stalled and the final item will need to return to Senate for a vote. We are willing to pilot this approach but it might be better to delay this on the Senate agenda, submit to VP Kelly and have her refer to the Deans and expedite that part of the process. This way, when it comes to Senate it is closer to the final form.

A. Langandorfer: with this in mind, let's look at the text. Regardless of if this goes to full Senate, we would like feedback. Trying to address the fact that as we have a growing number of NTT faculty there are discrepancies between departments where some NTT faculty have full voting rights and others have no voting rights.

Questions and feedback: Part of the reason to move on this is a frustration of previous things that have been proposed for the handbook and trying to gain some momentum. We don't want to cause unrealized expectations or frustration but it sends a very important message that this may not be the final wording but it sends the message that we feel strongly about this and it sends a sense of urgency.

Feedback: The approach we have taken on this issue is very much in the spirit of something the chancellor articulates – to be more nimble and more agile. That was the intent with bringing this quickly to Faculty Affairs and vet this idea here and simultaneously engage with the larger university community for feedback

Feedback: As long as we make it very clear to the Senate that we are sending this forward to go under review and it will come back significantly different at least it shows we are putting something on the table and making progress.

Feedback: We could learn a lot from design colleagues about editing some of these things in an iterative way. If we do this, we need to make it clear that we are voting on a recommendation, not final language.

Suggestion: We should all think through the process carefully. What if we consider equity voting not equal voting. Our departments are different and have very different populations of NTT vs TT faculty.

Feedback: Voting in the Faculty Senate is a way to indicate that this is a need and something we want to see. The administrative review is about how it is done.

Question: How long would the administrative review take if we did the normal procedure? If we are talking about a reasonable amount of time then we can still get this out there and address the needs. J. Zomchick: We could have something for the January meeting. He has already shared something with the Deans. There are questions arising about differences with NTT research or extension faculty who don't have a direct connection with instruction. I would hope that we could have an initial response by the January Senate meeting. We are all frustrated at the amount of time review takes for faculty handbook changes but these changes do have to go through several levels of review and by general council.

Feedback: When we look at the *Faculty Handbook* and the role of the Faculty Affairs Committee – any Senate vote is a recommendation. This was brought to our committee, we revised and voted so we bring it to executive council. We are responsible for recommending changes. We are not asking for an immediate vote but faculty has drafted the language and is ready to move it along in the process.

Feedback: Putting this on the agenda at Faculty Senate Executive puts it on the record that this is an issue faculty are concerned about and can then continue in process for administrative review without necessarily needing a full Senate vote.

Feedback: Whenever a proposal is brought up it brings out unique situations that may not have been considered. If we don't vote but we bring as an informational item, will we get those conversations going? Can we share it in the mini-minutes. We do want this to be a broader conversation than just the committee members.

A. Roessner: In good faith with administration, I would like this body to do a vote to recommend these changes go to administrative review with the idea that we need feedback by sometime in January. Another caveat, the full faculty should be informed of this vote and be provided this draft so they know we are making some traction on this issue. We would like to reassure faculty who are concerned about this issue that work is moving on this.

Motion by Alderman to vote today to move the recommendation to the Provost office for review and to bring as an informational item today with the caveat that we want this done in a timely way and that we'll have some understanding of where the process is by the end of January, M. Hinton seconded – discussion: Schussler amended the motion to make this a voting item at the next Faculty Senate meeting with the understanding that the vote would be to send the draft recommendation to the Provost for review. Amended motion passed by majority vote.

V. Adjournment

Senator Schuessler moved to adjourn – Alderman seconded – meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.

Information Items and Committee Reports

Unapproved Faculty Senate [Minutes from October 16, 2023](#)

Draft [Committee Reports](#)

[Digital Learning at UTK - Summary](#)

Appendix:

Ombuds Services Reminders:

Wed Nov 1 [Getting Unstuck: Intro to Ombuds' Services](#) 12:30-1:15 pm - come learn how Ombuds can help you! (and what an Ombuds IS.)

Wed Nov. 8 [Intro to Crucial Conversations: Two Routes to Constructive Workplace Dialogue](#)
1:30-2:15 pm

Wed Nov 15 [Understanding your Individual Conflict Dynamics Profile](#) (CDP) 2-3:30 pm -
Learn how can you strengthen your constructive responses in conflict.

Registration Deadline: Nov. 10 (Pre-survey Due by Nov. 13)

Prospective Agenda Items for Future Senate Meetings This Fall

Nov. 20th:

Teaching Evaluation Policy Update from Institutional Effectiveness Team (H. Hartman, M. McFall II, E. Pemberton)

Hazing Prevention (H. Flavin)

Future Meeting:

Upon Determination of Faculty Affairs

Faculty Handbook 5.6 [Voting Item](#) (J. Laughter and A. Langendorfer)

Upon Outcome in Undergraduate Council

Expedited Modality Review Process Potential Voting Item (J. Zomchick)