

UTK Faculty Senate Executive Council Meeting

Monday, March 25, 2024

3:05 pm – 5:00 pm

MINUTES

I. **Call to Order** at 3:05pm, President Roessner presiding

In Attendance: D. Alderman, K. Alldredge, K. Baker, S. Benjamin, M. Brannen, B. Coldren, M. Collins, E. Cooper, R. DuBois, D. Kelly, R. Kite, B. Krumm, A. Langendorfer, J. Laughter, E. Lukosi, S. Madison, A. Roessner, M. Scoggins, B. Schussler, R. Spirko, P. Thompson, A. Williams, R. Zakrajsek, J. Zomchick

II. **Approval of Minutes**

a. Faculty Senate Executive Council Meeting Minutes, [February 26, 2024](#)

Motion to approve by Senator Crumb, Discussion: none, Second from Senator Alderman, vote: motion passed.

III. **Announcements and Reports**

a. President's Update (A. Roessner)

As we segue into the end of the spring term, it's time to begin to square the circle, so to speak. With that in mind, we have a relatively full schedule today—we would like for you to affirm the vote of our senators on April 8th's Eclipse[d] Faculty Senate Session; we hope to offer time for feedback on a few senate leadership initiatives, specifically Athletic Investment in Academic Initiatives and NTT Educational Leave of Absence and proposed faculty senate bylaw revisions; we want to update you on nominations and elections and to get your feedback on a potential resolution emerging from the Diversity & Inclusion Committee. We want to address concerns that recently have arisen related to curriculum, including needs related to our role in vetting voluminous undergraduate council minutes, changes in modality, and the abbreviated winter mini-term. With regards to the last topic, though there was faculty representation on the calendar task force, the decision to abbreviate the winter mini-term left many faculty with the sense that a broader group of faculty should have been consulted. From where we sit, we are concerned that without greater faculty feedback and input now, we might see a similar, but perhaps even greater sense of dissatisfaction from faculty, over expanding the teaching schedule past primetime. We hope that as good partners in shared governance we can help avoid that by encouraging dialogue and feedback early in these early planning stages. Moreover, given queries that we have received, we also have asked Provost Zomchick to offer an update on the ASU agreement; Vice Provost Ozlem Kilic to offer an update on CECS; and Vice Provost Diane Kelly to offer an update on Elements, and we invite them to answer any questions related to those matters at this time.

J. Zomchick:

This is information about how we arrived at the decision about winter mini-term. He read responses from faculty regarding going from 13 instructional days to 10 days. He was impressed with the care of faculty regarding the learning outcomes as the concern with the shortening of winter mini-term. We found ourselves in a situation where we had to determine if we needed to shorten winter mini-term or extend spring to Memorial Day or beyond. It's a tradeoff. The decision was based on a few things, number one being how many people would be impacted by the decision and the fact that winter mini-term is an optional thing in which departments can decide if they want to offer courses in that term or not. They tried all they could to see if they could keep the 13-day mini-term or even extend to 14 days without making spring semester go past Memorial Day over the next 3 years, and it was impossible.

The work of the Office of the Registrar provided this data, and it's clear you can see how many winter mini-term courses were asynchronous. We also looked at hours and credit hours and how many unique courses offered in winter mini-term vs spring semester. 1.6% of courses are offered in winter mini-term compared to spring courses. The students served in winter mini-term were 7.5% of students served in spring semester. The number of instructors engaged in winter mini-term instruction were much smaller than faculty teaching in spring. Moving spring semester later impacts summer internships. Ultimately, the decision to shorten winter mini-term impacts less people than extending spring semester. Importantly, it is up to the faculty in discussion with department heads to see whether or not winter mini-term is viable.

Statement: When you account for 44% of overall time being spent on class and 8 hours of sleep per day it only leaves about 5 hours open.

Question: That last comment I heard you make is that winter mini-term would go away if faculty vote not to keep it? Response: no, it would go away if faculty didn't offer classes. This schedule is set for AY25, AY26, and AY27 because of the calendar.

Question: Are we going to combined graduation ceremonies? If so, will we still need 4 days? Is May 26 still a firm date? Response: The number of days needed for combined graduation is still being determined.

Question: May mini-term and session 3 of summer are also 10 days. May mini-term seems like lots of students do study abroad. Is the summer session 3 being utilized. Response: We've only had 1 summer with session 3 but I don't have the data in front of me. We can get the data and follow up. It is nested so it is part of the overall summer. There is a summer 1, 2, 3, and full and making sure students can take any 2 of those without overburdening themselves.

Question: I appreciate you trying to represent this data but a 3-hour course cannot fit within a 10-day semester. Each credit hour has 35 hours of engagement (combination of contact time and outside student learning) but a 3-hour course is triple that number. 35 hours is for a 1-credit hour course.

Comment: As someone who has taught winter mini-term all 3 years, I initially built a 17-day course. It is 52 hours per week if we offered a 3-hour course and it's just impossible to see how we do a 10-day semester. There are a lot of instructors who want to keep it and there are some who know it will be sub-standard but want to keep it. We should acknowledge how difficult it is to teach in this situation. Math is cutting 6 of their courses and part of the original purpose of winter mini-term was for students falling behind to catchup or others to get ahead and some of those math courses seem core to that mission.

Response: We wonder how we can help maybe with TLI support but the answer may be no. Could we offer 2-hour courses? But this may not meet general education requirements. We considered starting winter mini-term in December, but it would require going straight from fall exams into winter mini-term. Right now, the best option is for all of us to work together to see what we can do for the next 3 years. The decision to offer a winter mini-term course in this 10-session term will be made collaboratively with the faculty member and the department head to think about what can be offered without lowering standards. One thing we realized was that this had grown from. The number of courses has grown each winter mini-term. We wanted to provide our students with opportunities to make up something they needed to or other things, to get ahead, to travel abroad, field study, those kinds of things.

Question: It really does come down to requiring students to do 52 hours of work per week. Once you cut back the hours of work you are requiring, it not only impacts those students but what if the students are teaching VolCore courses. It impacts the quality of the instruction we are offering. Are other SEC schools who are doing 10-day semesters in a successful way doing so with academic integrity? Are there strategies they are using we can implement? Also, if we are moving to a system-wide calendar we need to let faculty know now. I am also curious about withdrawals in winter mini-term. I'm curious with a 10-day schedule if we will see an increase in withdrawals. Response: Vice President convened Chief Academic Officers of the campuses this week. At this point there is not a lot of sentiment in favor of a coordinated calendar. There are some different approaches; for example, we could all begin fall and/or spring semester in the same week. One current issue is that each campus is located in a different local school system. We have tried to coordinate UTK spring break with Knox County schools for the benefit of our faculty and staff with children as have the other campuses. There are some other unique things on the schedule at different campuses like Spring Recess where all campus have Friday off, but UTK also has no classes Thursday. We recognize the work that goes into building courses. We will work with faculty who want to modify their courses.

Question: I had brought this up at Graduate Council, there are a number of graduate programs doing winter mini-term. The reason a lot of us do that is because students want to take that 3rd certificate course during that mini-term. I want to know about the dropout rate. Student burnout is a real concern.

Question: We have a number of faculty who like to increase income by teaching courses. I hope we can set up a schedule where we don't encourage faculty to

teach sub-par courses. Response: I think those decisions belong at the College and Department level and it is up to faculty to determine what can be taught. For many years English taught no mini-term courses at all because they felt they could not.

Question: Right now, what we have is a calendar decision putting us in a situation where we all acknowledge that the quality of courses is at risk. We have a lot of underpaid faculty who need the income. Because of the budget model, we might have units thinking we need to offer a course in the mini-term and faculty may be voluntold to teach. The majority of offerings cannot be done in this time frame. We are disrespecting those people who already spent so much time compressing their courses. What does this signal to faculty about our expertise and value. Are we saying that good teaching or that quality doesn't matter? Response: If someone says I cannot do it in this timeframe then we should say don't do it. This is the responsibility of faculty. In conversation with Dean Hinde today, in the College of Arts and Sciences, he doesn't push down revenues into the Departments. They stay at the College level to avoid that type of pressure.

Discussion: If a course is a VolCore course, doesn't its impact go beyond the department?

Question: One of the things that concerns me the most about the model is that one of the goals is to help students who didn't perform well on fall semester. It seems like these students will not be successful in this structure. Students who are struggling need more help. Is this the way we are telling them they can get on track? Are we doing anything to assess and track student outcomes as they move forward after these mini-term courses. Are these helping them get on track? Response: We will work with Student Success to we make sure students who are at risk are advised appropriately regarding winter mini-term. If you look at retention and graduation rates, I think what you'll see is retention is at an all-time high. The burnout question is hard to assess, but we need to track if those who have taken winter mini-term courses persist at the same rate as the general population.

Question: I hope we will also track faculty well burnout and wellness. I think the VolCore question is saying it might cause impacts that cross colleges – so like if Ag offers a course online that could compete with a VolCore course in another college. Response: The budget serves the academic mission of the university. We make sure the budget doesn't drive the academic mission. We adjust the budget to support units that don't cover everything through revenue generation. We want to make sure that this isn't a reason for limiting student choice. I know this is difficult and controversial. I just could not see extending the spring semester as a viable option. I hope you tell your colleagues to stick to your principles.

A. Roessner: Even if we have faculty representation on a task force or

committee, it is up to that representative to bring information to the attention of the faculty through faculty senate so that we can gain broader feedback.

IV. **New Business**

- a. April 8 Faculty Senate Meeting Eclipse[d] (A. Roessner)
Knox County schools will have an early release. I want to get feedback from senators regarding the scheduled full senate meeting. Please indicate if you would be willing to shift the meeting to 4:30pm online.
- b. Nominations & Elections (UTK Advisory, D. Alderman)
Suggested we table this and update at next executive council session.
- c. [Resolution](#) Honoring the 50th Anniversary of the Commission for Black Communities (S. Benjamin)
Friendly Update: - get from Anne Langendorfer
Friendly amendment: Paragraph 5 – change to “has been a source of inclusion and belonging” not “sense of inclusion...”
Motion to bring resolution to senate by Senator Collins, Second by Senator Alderman, vote: motion passed unanimously.
- d. Winter Mini-Term (K. Baker and D. Coleman)
Addressed previously.
- e. Curricular Concerns (B. Cooper)
From Teaching and Learning Council Co-Chair Senator Cooper. Our Council was thinking about what role we might play. There have been situations where faculty have been asked to teach in 2 modalities at the same time, and it counted as one course toward their teaching. When we asked about this, we were told it shouldn't happen but we know it has happened. Our committee has not voted on language for a resolution. I would like to see some kind of language regarding teaching multiple modalities and each modality has a level of students that it be counted toward your teaching. Related is when faculty are told they must teach asynchronous in the summer without any regard to how much prep time it takes to move a course. We have also been asked to add some number of asynchronous seats to a course. We have junior faculty who don't feel like they can say no.

Question: Do you have any sense of the frequency of those requests from department heads? No, I have just heard some people asking. J. Zomchick: We need to know what departments this is happening in because it sounds like an abuse. There is also the ombuds and services they provide. D. Kelly: I agree that this is an issue, and you can direct faculty to talk to me.

Question: Would there be value in a senate resolution? D. Kelly: The word abuse sounds strong to me. I can see a department head maybe not understanding what it takes to teach online. Abuse sounds willful. In terms of the question about senate resolution. If we are talking about a few cases, we can handle it one-on-one but if it is more widespread a resolution could be helpful.

f. Committee Reports

Finance and Benefits Committee: Some committee members met with IRSA. We have the salary data and expect to have that report for Senate Executive Council review in April.

Communications Committee: The caucus chairs performed very admirably in getting senate nominees. The last time the committee met the speaker discussed the ability of students to use financial aid for certificate programs outside of the minor might be constrained because of the federal compliance. Establish greater line of communication and information sharing for when that might be enforced more strictly. We've been told almost all our careers to create more minors and certificates. We need to find a way to still offer these creative options but where students can pay for them.

Two issues related to next steps on two initiatives:

D. Alderman: Last time we met we shared a proposal where we are asking for dialogue around Athletics restarting a tradition of explicit reinvestment of academic efforts. I'm happy to take questions or comments. I've had meaningful discussion with colleagues from the Athletics committee. We just want to be able to get around the table to have a discussion with people in athletics to see what can be done to restart the tradition of investment. I was at UGA and heard a speech by an endowed professor from athletics.

Question: Have you had any feedback from the Chancellor? Response: Yes, we've had expressions of support, and I would like to continue the conversation.

Question: In both of these cases, these are issues we have brought to the table with the Chancellor and Provost. We've done what we can at the leadership level. We need to know from the faculty about what we need to do as next steps. We have gone as far as we can with NTT leave and do we take to senate for discussion?

What we've seen is many of our peer and aspirational universities are already making these types of investment.

If you have feedback or questions, please let Senator Alderman know and he will meet. This proposal isn't a slight on athletics but could be beneficial to the

university and academic. It is an uncertain time in collegiate athletics so I think this is just moving more slowly than we would like. If we don't see action, then maybe it's time to take it to the senate for a resolution or to find out that the senate doesn't want to move in that direction. If you don't feel comfortable speaking out in this format, please reach out to us.

A theme of this meeting is monetary interest vs the right thing to do. If NTT leave had no impact on the budget, then this would not be an issue. Same thing with athletics. It seems like when we don't push then decisions will be made based on the budget.

V. **Old Business**

a. Proposed Bylaw Revisions (A. Roessner, A. Steiner)

A. Steiner, Research Council Co-Chair. We are under a period of review related to Article 2 Section 10 lines 69-70. Any additional feedback for that proposed bylaw change related to who can be faculty senate president.

Comment: Traditionally senate has been led by someone who has tenure and there are reasons that might have been. This is a good place and time to discuss if we should change that tradition.

Comment: The concern of faculty who are non-tenure track is that they are soft money so someone needs to buy out their time.

Comment: What are the current arrangements for senate president in terms of course release and all that and how would it map on non-tenure track. Response: we are trying to secure release not just in terms of teaching release in number of courses, but a percentage of time released like 25% in years you are president elect and past president and 75 percent when you are president. Right now, the course release is 1 and 1 – 1 course released in the fall and 1 in the spring. It doesn't work for all. It does not work well for someone with a high course load.

Comment: As a non-tenured faculty, what protections would be there when you are pushing back. Response: I don't know that we've thought through that completely. I think we wanted to put that decision making capability and weighing risks directly into more hands to give opportunities to a wider range of faculty. The point that NTT faculty have limited-term appointments and less protections than tenured faculty, we need to consider what types of punitive action might be taken toward anyone in this role. Senate leadership meets with members of campus leadership monthly and, as representatives of the faculty, sometimes are in a position to disagree with campus administration or to push back based on faculty feedback. We need to consider things like protection through the union if positions like this are open to NTT faculty.

I encourage you all to review the informational items including the appendix that has important upcoming dates.

D. Kelly: We just learned before the meeting that President Boyd has approved all changes to the Faculty Handbook.

VI. Information Items and Committee Reports

- a. Faculty Senate Minutes (unapproved), [March 4, 2024](#)
- b. [Winter Mini-Term Concerns, Faculty Feedback](#)
- c. [Senate Committees and Councils Summary Reports and Minutes](#)
- d. [Executive Summary of Survey Results](#)
- e. [Summary of the Master Collaborative Agreement between UT and ASU](#)
- f. [Faculty Hiring Trends](#)

VII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Senator Collins meeting adjourned at 4:50

Appendix

April Faculty Senate

- Optum and Here4TN Emotional Wellbeing Solutions (T. Keeler)

Mark Your Calendars:

Chancellor's Honors Program Roundtable

- Monday, April 01st, 10:30-11:30 a.m. in SU 262A
- Thursday, April 04th, 3:00-4:00 p.m. in Mossman 212

Plenary Session on Faculty Workloads with Dawn Culpepper

- Friday, April 12, 2024, 2:00-3:30 p.m. in SU 377

Enrollment Update Roundtable

- Monday, April 29, 2024, 2:00-3:00 p.m. SU 262B
- Friday, May 3, 10:00-11:00 a.m. SU 262C