

Minutes from the December 6, 2021 Meeting of the Faculty Senate

The regular Faculty Senate (FS) meeting was held on Monday, December 6, 2021 at 3:30 PM. The meeting was conducted both in-person in JUB 100C and via Zoom for those who preferred to attend remotely.

Attendance

Present: Jeremy Aber, Anne Anderson, Sanjay Asthana, Sal Barbosa, Vaughn Barry, Vishwas Bedekar, Larry Burriss, Lando Carter, Claire Cook, Rick Cottle, Douglas Dabbs, Betsy Dalton, Andrea Dawson, Michelle Finch, Robert Gordon, Lisa Green, Michael Hein, Christina Hiers, Renee Jones, Kyle Kennedy, Rebecca King, Francis Koti, Alfred Lutz (surrogate for Laura Dubek), Preston MacDougall, Lei Miao, Dan Morrell, Kari Neely, David Nelson, Martha Norkunas, John Ouellette, Sharon Parente, Alicia Pence, Ariana Postlethwait, Pat Richey, Dianna Rust, Stephen Salter, Scott Seipel, Daniel Smith, Nat Smith, Raj Srivastava, Ben Stickle, Suzanne Sutherland, Zhen Wang,

Excused: Laura Dubek

Absent: Jake Avila, Paul Chilsen, Song Cui, Rudy Dunlap, Seth Jones, Andrew Wyatt

Faculty Senate President Bob Gordon called the meeting to order at 3:38 PM.

Avonda Johnston's Thank You and Gift Presentation – Bob Gordon, Suzanne Sutherland

FS President Gordon thanked Avonda Johnston for her service and presented her with a gift from the Faculty Senate.

Approval of November 8 Meeting Minutes

Gordon called for a discussion of the November 8, 2021 Faculty Senate meeting minutes draft. A revision was proposed:

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Original text:

Although criticisms of the hybrid format were noted, Senators agreed to maintain hybrid in-person/Zoom monthly meetings in order to accommodate members who are unable to attend in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proposed revision (in bold):

*Although criticisms of the hybrid format were noted, Senators agreed to maintain hybrid in-person/Zoom monthly meetings in order to accommodate members who, **for a variety of reasons, including health concerns related to the pandemic, prefer to attend the meetings via Zoom.***

Pat Richey moved to amend the minutes as proposed. Larry Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Ben Stickle requested an addition to the minutes to record the fact that members of the Senate voluntarily disclosed their vaccination status at the November meeting.

Anne Anderson moved to table approval of the minutes until the additional language was drafted. Michael Hein seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Old Business

Replacement of Faculty Senate Administrative Aide – Bob Gordon

Gordon presented the option of transforming the Faculty Senate Administrative Aide role into a part-time position and mentioned that a qualified candidate had expressed interest. In conversation with Gordon, Provost Byrnes confirmed that decisions about the Faculty Senate Administrative Aide fall under the purview of the Faculty Senate and that the Faculty Senate Administrative Aide role should not be part of a shared position with the Provost's Office.

Senators preferred to maintain the full-time Administrative Aide position and recommended that the duties of the position be developed to support Senate work more fully. One suggestion included asking the Administrative Aide to help organize and take minutes at the meetings of the subcommittees to improve productivity.

Anne Anderson moved to request that Stephen Salter, Rick Cottle, and Bob Gordon re-design the duties of the role, present a revised job description to the Provost's Office, and fill the position. Nat Smith seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Gen Ed Redesign Status – Kari Neely

Kari Neely reported on the current status of General Education Redesign:

The General Education Redesign Committee is unusual in its bylaws and procedures, including forfeiture of the right to vote if a member is absent. The committee composition is skewed, and Liberal Arts underrepresented despite the fact that Liberal Arts courses form a disproportionately large part of the General Education curriculum. This imbalance results from the fact that the General Education Redesign Committee is a standing committee formed based on the college model in which each college contributes two representatives. There are 20 representatives on the committee: five from Social Sciences, two from Natural Sciences, one from History, one from English, nine members from departments without courses in the current General Education model, and two student members (with voting rights). There are no representatives from Communications, Math, or Fine Arts.

During the last two meetings, the committee finished their review of the three new models. They completed a ranked-choice vote in which Model Two received more votes than the other models (although no model received more than 50% of the vote). The vote was confusing because members were apparently unsure as to whether they were voting on the original or a revised version of Model Two.

The next step is to send the General Education Redesign Committee's recommendation to the university General Education Committee for comment. In February, the Gen Ed Redesign Committee will examine a "tweaked" version of Model Two and will likely vote on whether or not to send it out to the university committee for the 2-week comment period. There is no requirement that the Gen Ed Redesign Committee throw out features the university committee disapproves of. The Gen Ed Redesign Committee will need a simple majority to vote and a 2/3s majority to approve the model. Neely recommended Gordon invite Susan Myers-Shirk to report back to the Steering Committee or Faculty Senate before the February meeting.

No study on the impact of the various models has been or will be performed.

Gordon called for questions and/or comments:

Q: What happens if the committee does not achieve 2/3s approval? Do they continue to work? Neely responded that the committee is a standing committee and will continue to meet.

Q: What is the timeline for redesign? Neely responded that the timeline will vary according to whether Model Two is approved in February or not. The goal is to approve Model Two in February and an assessment plan in spring. Lando Carter stated that implementation of the new model will be delayed beyond Fall 2022.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Academic Freedom – Zhen Wang.

Zhen Wang moved to untable CRT and Academic Freedom. Sanjay Asthana seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Wang requested that the Faculty Senate pass a resolution affirming the faculty's right to teach CRT. Gordon agreed with senators who stated that a resolution on this issue be focused on academic freedom in general, rather than on a specific academic topic, while some urged that the resolution refer specifically to CRT. Senators requested a clear definition of academic freedom and asked whether MTSU's existing academic freedom policy is sufficient. Alfred Lutz, president of the MTSU chapter of AAUP, confirmed that MTSU's current policy is sufficient and advises against policy revision. Gordon volunteered to follow up on this issue with Byrnes and Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs Cheryl Torsney. He requested that the Academic Affairs Committee investigate further.

Pat Richey moved to table CRT/Academic Freedom and send it to the Academic Affairs Committee. Larry Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

New Business

Report on Enrollment Situation and Enrollment Management Committee – Stephen Salter

President-Elect Stephen Salter provided an update on enrollment for next year and on the discussions taking place on the Enrollment Management Committee:

While the enrollment numbers show a marked improvement, the main question is how to prevent “melt,” which occurs when students have applied to and been accepted into MTSU but decide to attend another university. Furthermore, even with improved numbers, MTSU is still facing a 500-person shortfall compared to the 2019 enrollment figure. The major challenge is to continue to focus on Dr. McPhee's original vision, which targeted expansion in areas such as online and graduate programs, rather than declare victory.

Closure of MTSU Childcare Lab and Childcare Issues Update– Jeremy Aber

Jeremy Aber reported on the sudden closure of the MTSU Childcare Lab mid-semester:

The MTSU Childcare Lab was forced to close due to the labor shortage, the retirement of the director, and state regulations. Sarah Sudek stated via email that MTSU is currently trying to create a new childcare coordinator to help affected families find other childcare facilities.

Martha Norkunas asked whether the Faculty Senate could formally express dissatisfaction at the state of MTSU's childcare support.

Pat Richey moved to table the issue and send it to the Health Committee. Larry Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Anne Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting. Daniel Smith seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 PM.

Documents handed out at the meeting:

November 2021 Faculty Senate Draft Meeting Minutes

Proposal for Amendment to November 2021 Faculty Senate Draft Meeting Minutes

These minutes were approved by the Faculty Senate on February 7, 2022. Respectfully submitted by Suzanne Sutherland, Recording Secretary.