

Minutes from the February 7, 2022 Meeting of the Faculty Senate

The regular Faculty Senate meeting was held on Tuesday, February 7, 2022 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, Sal Barbosa, Vaughn Barry, Vishwas Bedekar, Larry Burriss, Lando Carter, Claire Cook, Rick Cottle, Sally Ann Cruikshank, Douglas Dabbs, Betsy Dalton, Andrea Dawson, Laura Dubek, Michelle Finch, Robert Gordon, Lisa Green, Michael Hein, Christina Hiers, Ryan Jones, Renee Jones, Kyle Kennedy, Rachel Kirk, Rebecca King, Francis Koti, Preston MacDougall, Lei Miao, Dan Morrell, Kari Neely, David Nelson, Todd O'Neill, John Ouellette, Sharon Parente, Arianna Postlethwait, Dianna Rust, Stephen Salter, Tiffany Saul, Scott Seipel, Daniel Smith, Nat Smith, Raj Srivastava, Ben Stickle, Suzanne Sutherland, Jennifer Woodward filling in for Zhen Wang

Excused: Jake Avila, Martha Norkunas, Alicia Pence, Zhen Wang, Andrew Wyatt

Absent: Sanjay Asthana, Song Cui, Rudy Dunlap

Guest: Logan McVey, Assistant Chair of Academic Affairs for the Student Senate

Faculty Senate President Bob Gordon called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM.

Greetings

Approval of November, December Minutes and November Minutes Addition

Gordon called for discussion of the November and December minutes and the proposed addition to the November minutes.

Kari Neely moved to accept the November minutes as written. Anne Anderson seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Daniel Smith moved to accept the addition to the November minutes as written. Larry Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Smith moved to accept the December minutes as written. Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Fulltime Administrative Aide Hire Status

Gordon reported that there are two finalists for the fulltime Administrative Aide position. The two candidates will be interviewed and a finalist selected in the next few weeks.

TUFS Update

Gordon reported on the Tennessee University Faculty Senate (TUFS) meeting. A major issue of discussion is academic freedom and how new legislation may impact academic freedom. TUFS does not advise taking preemptive action. Tennessee is \$1 billion over budget. McPhee asserted to Gordon that MTSU is on the list of universities that will receive additional funding, although at the time of the Senate meeting Gordon had not been able to verify this information through public sources. Of note is the fact that UT Southern is officially entering the UT system. COVID is considered a “dead issue.” Gordon requested senators bring further issues to his attention to raise with TUFS.

Brief Committee Reports

Finance - Anne Anderson, chair

Anderson reported that Alan Thomas has been forthcoming about answering the committee’s questions. She plans to brief the Faculty Senate on the overall financial picture at the next meeting. Of special note is the fact that reimbursements for certain faculty work-related expenditures during COVID have been approved and that recommendations on workload reform will be presented at the next chairs’ meeting. Finally, the committee is completing its analysis of faculty salary data. Once this analysis is finished, Gordon and Anderson plan to meet with McPhee and then report back prior to the next Steering Committee meeting.

Covid - David Nelson, Alicia Pence, co-chairs

Nelson reported on the proposed revision of Policy 311A on attendance and the request for further guidance from the administration that reflects advice from the CDC and the state. The COVID committee has requested that administration provide the following: clearer guidance on isolation, including the need for infected students to provide medical notes with quarantine/isolation dates; a clearer definition on what constitutes “fully vaccinated”; clarification on whether to inform other students when an inadvertent class exposure occurs; reinstatement of the symptom checklist.

The COVID committee noted concerns about legal exposure for faculty and urged administration to make guidance open and direct, even if the guidance is to “do nothing.” Gordon will present these requests to the Provost.

Health - Andrew Wyatt, chair

Jeremy Aber reported for Wyatt on the discussions of the Health committee, which include: the student mental health crisis and possible improvements; student health insurance, especially for graduate students; the on-campus childcare closure; campus sustainability issues. Aber pointed

out that MTSU's transition to R2 status creates new expectations regarding these issues since MTSU is now competing with a new set of peer institutions.

BOT - Rick Cottle

Cottle reported that there are no major issues on the horizon other than salaries. McPhee has put salaries on the radar of the trustees. Cottle asked for questions from senators.

Q: Why wasn't MTSU mentioned by Governor Lee in the State of the State speech?

A: Not sure. MTSU does not have the lobbying apparatus of UT, which has lobbyists on staff whereas MTSU uses a consulting firm. The liaison is John Hood, but he never has information to report. Cottle is pushing this question with the trustees.

Q: Is MTSU planning on providing partial funding of the approved 4% raise? If so, what percentage? When was the last time MTSU actually made up the difference between what the state approved and what the state funded?

A discussion about raises ensued, which touched upon the question of whether all or most other state universities received the full 4% raise last year and if MTSU is an outlier or not. Other topics included the role of tuition freezes and lack of adequate endowment funding.

Anderson reported that McPhee and Thomas are currently discussing raises. Anderson, Gordon, and Cottle will address the BOT on the issue of funding for raises at the next BOT meeting. Cottle requested that senators email him with their questions and concerns in advance of the meeting.

Faculty/Athletic Engagement - Suzanne Sutherland, chair

Sutherland reported that the Faculty/Athletic Engagement committee discussed ideas for engaging faculty in athletics with Chelsea Floyd. Ideas include honoring notable faculty, student-faculty projects, departments, and/or colleges at specific games and inviting faculty to attend. This committee is interested in creating a permanent Senate committee with members from every college who can provide recommendations to assist Athletics in planning, starting next year.

Peer Evaluations and Student Evaluations of Teachers - Bob Gordon, chair

Gordon reported on conversations with Brian Hinote about current flaws in the student evaluation system. Faculty are advised to make the case to students for completing evaluations. Anderson asked why peer evaluations are not consistently implemented if they are required by MTSU's policy. Gordon noted that SACS does not require peer evaluations for accreditation. He will discuss this issue with Cheryl Torsney, including the request that peer evaluations take place across all departments for tenure-track and non-TT faculty.

Academics - Lando Carter, chair

Ben Stickle presented the draft bylaws of the proposed University Research Council. The purpose of the council is to enhance and promote research across the university. Stickle explained how membership on the council will be determined. He fielded further questions on the impact of the transition from R3 to R2 status, how to submit written feedback, and how the University Research Council intends to work with the Office of Research.

University Resources - Michael Hein, chair

Hein reported on discussion with Hinote about use of APS in determining faculty lines. Faculty lines are the number one university resource and we need to understand how they are allocated.

Bylaws Revision Vote

Stephen Salter, chair of the Bylaws of the MTSU Faculty Senate Review Committee, summarized the proposed revisions as containing “a lot of little changes,” which had been introduced at the previous Steering Committee meeting and which were contained in the proposed bylaws revision document.

Anderson asked whether the bylaws committee had considered revising term limits for Faculty Senate officers, especially for officers limited by one-year terms. Gordon stated that such changes required a Senate vote while each officer’s department would have to approve since officers earn course releases. Senators discussed the advantages and disadvantages of extending term limits.

Salter requested that the Senate vote on the current set of revisions as presented, noting that these revisions had been provided in writing along with the request to read and review them in advance of the meeting. According to Article 10, Section 2 of the bylaws, the bylaws committee must deliver their report and seek a vote in February. However, the bylaws committee will continue to work on revisions and will consider term limit revisions later in spring.

Anderson asked whether, as an alternative, the Senate could postpone the vote to consider this issue at once and then conduct an electronic vote on the bylaws revision by the end of February. Some members of the Senate stated that they had not received a copy of the bylaws revision document to review in advance. Daniel Smith moved to table the vote, and Nat Smith seconded the motion.

Salter requested assurance that the vote on the bylaws revision take place by the end of February.

Smith moved the previous question.

Salter withdrew his motion and resigned as chair of the bylaws committee.

Some senators responded that the motion to table the vote had already been seconded. Burriss seconded the previous question.

The motion to table the vote on the bylaws revision passed.

Stickle nominated Anderson as chair of the bylaws committee. Smith seconded the motion. Anderson accepted the nomination. The motion passed.

New Business

There was no new business.

Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Burriss seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 pm.

Documents handed out at the meeting:

Senate Agenda

2021 SET Committee Report

2022 01 24 Workload Committee Rec

Academic Freedom Resolution Draft

Applications for Administrative Aide Position

COVID Policy 311A Redline

COVID Committee Meeting Report

Faculty Athletics Engagement Report

Faculty Senate December Meeting Minutes Draft

Faculty Senate November Meeting Minutes Draft

Proposed Addition to the November Minutes

Health Committee Report

Middle Tennessee State University Council for Sponsored Research Bylaws Draft

Summary Report (MTSU Finance)

TUFS Meeting Summary

Respectfully submitted by Suzanne Sutherland, Recording Secretary. Approved by the Faculty Senate on March 14, 2022.