

Minutes of
THE FACULTY SENATE OF
ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

This meeting of the 2020-2021 Faculty Senate was held at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 13, 2021 on WebEx. The following members were present:

Dr. Alejandra Carballo	Dr. Sean Reed
Dr. Jon Clements	Dr. Scott Jordan
Dr. Michael Davis	Dr. Randy Kelley
Dr. Pam Dixon	Dr. Jeremy Schwehm
Dr. David Eshelman	Dr. Asim Shrestha
Dr. V. Carole Smith	Mr. Steven Junker
Dr. Newt Hilliard	Dr. Brendan Toner
Dr. Efosa Idemudia	Dr. Masanori Kuroki
Dr. Cynthia Jacobs	Dr. Carey Ellis Laffoon
Dr. Sean Huss	
Dr. Shellie Hanna	

Guests: Dr. Robin Bowen, Mr. Walter Branson, Dr. Barbara Johnson, Mrs. Pat Chronister

I. Call to Order

A. Approval of the minutes - from the March 9 meeting. Motion to approve from Dr. Sean Reed. Seconded by Dr. Sean Huss. Motion Carried.

II. New Business

A. Curricular Items

<https://www.atu.edu/registrar/2021CatalogCurriculumProposals.php>

Motion to consider them as a block by Dr. Sean Huss, Seconded by Dr. Jeremy Schwehm. Motion Carried. Motion to approve by Dr. Sean Huss, Seconded by Dr. Newton Hilliard. Motion Carried.

B. Standing Committee Elections (Schwehm)

Dr. Jeremy Schwehm indicated that an e-mail will go out April 14 and run until April 30. Dr. Sean Huss reminded everyone that this is the first time the full faculty will have an opportunity to vote for the new Vice-Chair who will become Chair.

C. Dr. Bowen and Mr. Branson Q/A

Dr. Jon Clements asked the following questions:

Question 1: The Faculty Senate believes that the satisfaction survey and the anonymous comments represent the voices of those who believe they are not heard in any way. Many of the comments are thought out and well written. By and large, they represent a deep commitment to Arkansas Tech University as an institution. During a time of restructure, it can be tempting to become demoralized and to give up. Instead, the faculty are showing their conviction. We hope that you will take these responses for what we believe them to be: an earnest desire to communicate. The results of the faculty satisfaction survey have been consistent over the last three years in showing faculty dissatisfaction with the president, with the president's decision-making, and the president's vision. Regarding the survey and anonymous feedback, the first question is for Dr. Bowen in particular. When you read over the responses, what trends did you notice? What stood out to you? What actions might you take to address the concerns that were raised?

Answer 1: Dr. Bowen acknowledged that this has been a difficult year because of the pandemic. She indicated that she has always been impressed by faculty dedication and commitment to students. She indicated that she shares that commitment. No one wants to do restructuring, but they did this in order to ensure the financial stability of the university. The board gave us the resolution to restructure and we did so. They approved our processes and they also approved the outcome. Throughout all of that, we had faculty and staff involvement on all of the different things. We had faculty and staff representation.

- **Dr. Bowen's** general impression of the concerns in the survey included **communication and transparency**. She reminded the senate that there is a President's Communications committee. She has been sending weekly communications to the campus, but understands that communication is still a concern. *Dr. Bowen would like to have some more conversations with the Faculty and Staff Senates regarding what the senates are looking for by way of information.* She illustrated the issue that information is cascaded down from the VPAA to Deans, then Chairs, then the full Faculty, sometimes resulting in something akin to a game of 'Telephone'.
- In terms of **shared governance**, there is a committee that is working on shared governance and shared definitions. **Dr. Bowen's** administration has also established a budget advisory committee. They wanted to have faculty, staff and student voices on those issues. *Dr. Bowen indicated a desire to entertain a (at least) quarterly, Executive Council meeting that would include Faculty, Staff and Student Senate representatives who could provide agenda items that they want included.* She believes this would help the faculty have

more say with respect to some administrative decisions that are made, and to have access to the ‘flavor’ of what happens in the EC and how it works.

- Another item **Dr. Bowen** noticed as an area of concern from the survey was **Pay**. Dr. Bowen reminded the committee of the \$6M added to faculty salaries as part of her initial push to raise salaries to CUPA levels. Unfortunately, we have gone back to where we were because there have been no raises for the past couple of years. She intends to remain committed to increasing faculty salaries.
- **Dr. Bowen** indicated that another thread she noticed in the survey was consternation related to **non-disclosure agreements** signed during the restructuring process. She indicated that the intent was to protect people's privacy. If there were positions that were named in meetings with the Senior University Support Committee and the Academic Affairs Committee. In hindsight, Dr. Bowen believes more clarity regarding what committee members could and could not talk about might have been more beneficial. This might have enabled committee members to interact with their constituents.

Question 2: Based on the faculty survey results and anonymous comments from staff to the faculty senate, it appears that claims of transparency and shared governance are not trusted. Indeed, we have heard a great deal about shared governance and transparency without seeing the substance of it. What are you going to do moving forward to regain the trust of the faculty and staff? When will the Faculty Senate and Staff Senate have official seats on the Executive Council? When will the Faculty Senate and Staff Senate have direct access to the Board of Trustees? We, as a faculty and a staff, need to see action. We need to see concrete examples of trust, transparency, and shared governance. While we are restructuring, would this be the best time to increase faculty and staff participation and align your rhetoric with substantive policy?

Answer 2: **Dr. Bowen** indicated that the communication committee and the shared governance committees are attempts to do that, but *again emphasized a desire to have more regular meetings with the Faculty and Staff Senates*. Board of Trustee communications: this past year, the BoT was amenable to have communications from the Faculty and Staff Senates, *and will be willing to continue*. These are usually submitted in the form of reports or agenda items in advance of BoT meetings. In addition, the BoT indicated that, once the pandemic is over, *they would like to come to ATU in the morning on days when they have board meetings, when possible, and visit departments and units across the university*. They would like to visit with staff, faculty and students about what is working and what is not. They can see the space, the labs, the classes, etc.

Question 3: We understand a percentage of current and future CARES funding must go toward aid. We also understand there are restrictions in how current and future CARES funding can be spent. With that in mind, will you commit to using eligible CARES funding to freeze tuition for a period of no less than two years and to slow the pace of layoffs before any additional CARES money is placed in the University reserve? Also, will you commit to full transparency to show that any eligible CARES funding is going toward freezing tuition, reducing layoffs, and replenishing budgets before any additional funds go into the University reserve?

Answer 3: Dr. Bowen indicated that the CARES funding has some limitations. Before the money had to go to items related to COVID. More recently, there has been for flex in that. We are not sure exactly what those differences are. We may be able to use some of that money to recoup for expenses and losses. We may be able to use them without the parameters that they be used for COVID.

- With respect to monies that have been used that are related to COVID: HVAC systems were purchased in Witherspoon, Crabaugh, and Dean. We wanted to specifically address academic buildings with those CARES funds.
- Big items have to go through the BoT, so **Dr. Bowen** can not commit to what they will approve.
- If we freeze tuition, there is a longer implication. We will not get the CARES fund money again, so we can't use it for recurring issues like salaries for example.
- **Dr. Clements** indicated that it is his understanding that the CARES money is there to make us 'whole' so we should be where we were before after COVID. **Dr. Bowen** indicated that this won't help us with recurring costs. We might be able to get through this year, but in another year or two we will be in the same position because we won't continue to have the CARES money.

Question 4: At the Staff Senate meeting last week, a reduction in executive compensation was discussed in the budgeting process, but the decision was made that it wasn't the right move because executive pay needed to remain competitive. The Governor just signed a pay raise for public school teachers. This makes our pay even less competitive than it already was in our field. We have faculty making less than school teachers with lesser degrees...that goes along with the discussion people had in the comments from the survey about competitive salaries. Why does EC get to have a competitive salary when staff and faculty are below what our competitors are? Our competition is public school. This is why we have had an unfilled position for years now. Would you please elaborate on the decision-making process with respect to executive compensation?

Answer 4: Dr. Bowen indicated they explored all of the different options. Task Force B group checked on ramifications of cutting the salary of various groups.

- Because we are already in the situation that we are in, and are NOT offering competitive salaries, we didn't want to lose more ground. These salary changes would be for 5 years. This keeps strong candidates from accepting positions, dropping from a search, because they are making more money elsewhere. We have the same problem at the executive level that we have at the faculty level in this regard. We had two candidates for the position of VP of Admin and Finance who dropped from searches because they are making far more in their current positions than they would at ATU.
- Comparing salaries of public teachers is apples and oranges. The Governor provides monies in different ways. The disparity between public schools and higher ed distresses her.
 - **Dr. Bowen** is happy for the teachers and agrees that they should be paid more, but believes we should be receiving more money for higher ed. so we can raise our salaries.
 - CUPA jumps are to continue to be included in future *promotions*, but faculty have to wait six or seven years for those increases.
- **Dr. Clements** indicated that he has looked at the executive salaries compared to other universities in the state, and we rank *second* in the state for executive packages. Partly this is because there are two new positions (Chief of Staff and Director of Enrollment Management) that have been added since **Dr. Bowen** came to ATU. The concern amongst faculty is that there are more administrators and that they are making more money.
- **Dr. Bowen** reminded what she calls the Chief of Staff position was Julie Morgan's position in the previous administration. She indicated that she did not believe that she has any more VP's than the previous administration. In the previous administration, there was a Vice President for Government Relations, and **Dr. Bowen** chose to use that position for Enrollment Management. Given our financial situation, she has chosen to move this position, or tuck it under another unit for savings. This also makes sense structurally in light of the plan to create a One Stop Shop.

- With respect to salaries, we are very overt. Pretty much all of what **Dr. Bowen** is paid is shown in the budget. A lot of other presidents have big components of what they are paid out of the foundations so you don't see those packages there. **Mr. Branson** indicated that many universities do parse out salaries from other sources like foundations. Some universities include a housing allowance, while others provide housing. This is the same with vehicles. Deferred Compensation – many other presidents have those, and if you factor that into a salary, it is higher. **Dr. Branson** expressed interest in seeing the data source for the numbers we are looking at, and **Dr. Clements** agreed to send him that information.

Question 5: Two initiatives that we've heard about are the one-stop-shop and the reorganization of enrollment management. It was stated that the one-stop-shop will cost an additional \$200K. Outside of a potential reduction in salary for the VP of Enrollment Management, how are these changes saving the University money and how much is being saved? Also, why haven't we heard details about how the one-stop-shop will work and why it will cost \$200K?

Answer 5: Dr. Bowen indicated that the One-Stop Shop was not something that we created to save money. It is more of a change in philosophy regarding how we deal with students. Research indicates that it is more effective for students to have one place to go to have 95% of their questions answered.

- NASPA, AASCU have looked at student experiences, and have indicated that Career Counselling is a key component that is often missing, so we are adding that in.
- We are combining some things. Admissions, Advising, Career Services, Student Accounts, and the Registrar (at some point) for example. These areas will have the most common questions coming to them. The people who are running the one-stop shop will be able to answer those questions.
- **Dr. Clements** asked whether or not we believe, as the world is more online and Internet-driven, that it will be necessary to have a place where people can go versus doing everything from their computers. **Dr. Bowen** indicated that there will be that option, but ATU will remain committed to providing a traditional college experience. Students are hungry for that interaction. **Dr. Nichols** will have a meeting with the Senate to talk about this.

- **Dr. Bowen** indicated that students, GA's, Professional Staff, and More Advisors are all reasons why this will cost around \$200K. Students often drop out for reasons that we can help them with (day care, flat tire – other reasons for which a student shouldn't have to drop out). Professional Studies has done a beautiful job with this sort of problem. We want to adopt some of their policies.

Question 6: Why can the staff being fired/relocated in May not be informed now, so they can more accurately prepare for the situation.

Answer 6: Dr. Bowen indicated that she has heard, loudly and clearly this concern, and has heard this from the Staff Senate as well. They want to lay off as few people as possible. The longer we wait, the more jobs we can save. ADHE requires that we give them a list with the names of the people who need to be laid off. Had we done that two weeks ago, more people would have been on the list than if we did that today. If someone leaves for another reason, then people can be added back on. We want to wait as long as we can in order to make sure we have the fewest people impacted as possible. We started out with 77 positions (RIF - reduction in force list) 16 were faculty lines. 61 were staff lines.

- With the *faculty lines*, there were a number of retirements that were not filled (Academic Affairs did not feel the need to refill at this time given the situation). There were several vacancies. There was one tenure-track faculty member who is moving to a different college. Once we had some faculty resignations and retirements, we were able to move people from the RIF list into No Action. At this time, there are no further actions with respect to *full-time* faculty members.
- With respect to the *staff* side of the question, there were 61 lines that were identified. 36 were *vacancies* (it was felt that these could continue), leaving 25 as of several weeks ago. Today, we are down to 18. By not giving ADHE a list several weeks ago, seven people's jobs have been saved. We are holding 7 positions that are vacant. These are positions that people who are laid off can apply for. That will happen before their contract runs out, hoping there will be continuity of pay and benefits. We have 887 employees. There are 18 staff positions in limbo (about 2% of our employees). Even one person losing their job is too many and none of us want to do this. Some other universities in Arkansas have waited too long for the restructuring.

Dr. Clements indicated that there is a lot angst on campus regarding this.

Question 7: There is a deep frustration about the tuition waiver being decreased. You have indicated that we classify our waivers as *scholarships*, so it counts against the university in some way. However, it is our understanding that the university chooses to classify the waiver as a scholarship. Other state institutions do not classify the waiver as a scholarship (see HSU) and instead write off the tuition similar to how out-of-state tuition might be waived. Are there any possible alternative solutions to restore it to the original waiver amount, or at least allow a "grandfather" period for staff and faculty already in the program so they can finish their degree as they'd expected when they signed up? Can you also discuss the benefits of classifying the waiver as a *scholarship* versus a *reduction of revenue*?

Answer 7: Dr. Bowen indicated that when we go through restructuring, sometimes there are two possible avenues and neither is desirable. About 10% of the faculty and staff participate in the program. So, while this had a big impact on those people, this didn't impact a lot of people across the university. The cost was equivalent to two to four positions. Part of the logic was to save those positions and keep people employed. If we find the new policy is not working, this may be revisited.

Mr. Branson indicated that we have to budget the revenue, even though we are waving it, so we budget revenue and then an offsetting expense. He indicated that we have to count it as scholarships. He has not looked at other institutions in Arkansas, but at other institutions where he has been, this is how it is done. Even if there is something called a 'staff rate' behind the scenes, it is still budgeted as revenue, then with an offsetting expense. In our case, by reducing the waiver, we still have the revenue budgeted, but we've reduced the expense, and that helps create a positive bottom line.

Dr. Clements indicated that this was a benefit for the people who made the least amount of money. This was evident in the Faculty Satisfaction Survey. \$600 in fees was a large chunk of money. By eliminating the waiver, we have said that 10% of you don't really matter to us as much. We tout that we bring people at lower socio-economic classes and elevate them. A lot of people believe that that small amount of money won't save the university enough. People will just drop out and leave. He believes there may be an opportunity for us to find the money elsewhere and stop this in two months instead of two years.

Dr. Bowen indicated this has already gone to the BoT. They did take this to the Academic Committee and the University Support Committee. In hindsight, she wishes that more input had been sought on this issue. They did not look at the salaries of the people who would be impacted.

Question 8: What data is being used to support the move of Academic Advising and Career Services to Student Affairs? Are there performance issues of which we are not aware? What research data or best practices point to Academic Advising and Career Services being more effective when moved outside of Academic Affairs? If these decisions are truly data-driven, then there must be some data to support the decision.

Answer 8: Dr. Bowen reminded that we talked a little bit earlier about the One-Stop Shop. That is the backbone of this evolution. AASCU is one place they looked. They have an Academic Affairs unit and look at advising. They also looked to NASPA and other sources. Different colleges and universities do things differently. She isn't aware that there is research regarding combining these units. **Dr. Nichols** is coming to speak to the senate to describe her vision for the model. We put this model together in order to provide the best experience for students. Upper division advising will continue to go through Academic Affairs and the faculty. This mentor relationship is vital. We have always had to work across lines, but we put this model together (wrap around service) in the best interest of the students.

Dr. Bowen doesn't want to get into personnel issues regarding performance issues.

Question 9: Given the bleakness of our current outlook, have we explored joining a more successful university system such as the U of A or ASU?

Answer 9: Dr. Bowen indicated that is a BoT decision. Dr. Bowen does not believe that the board is looking at that at this time. When Dr. Bowen has been to meetings with schools that have merged, she has encountered some things she would like to share. The first time she went to a university president's meeting she encountered that a person who is the head of a system basically veto any discussion on an issue. When you join a system, you lose your autonomy, your voice, and you do not get more money. Salaries don't go up. There is no more money in the budget. The one advantage is that you can borrow more money, but that can cause even more financial trouble.

Mr. Branson indicated that he has been part of systems, and smaller campuses are largely ignored.

Question 10: We sometimes hear about the "Futures" model, which our administration believes will ensure our university's success in upcoming years. I have two related questions about the "Futures" model. First, can you tell us more about the "Futures" model? What is it exactly? Second, if we are understanding the bucket exercise correctly, Bucket 1 is to be funded with money saved from Bucket 5. But, in our case, all savings from Bucket 5 are being applied to a shortfall. In that case, how is the "Futures" model going to be funded? Again, two questions---what is the "Futures" model and how are we paying for it?

Answer 10: Dr. Bowen indicated that one bucket was not intended to pay for the other. One was meant to meet the cuts that we needed to make to adjust our budget to a level that put us within our means moving forward. We asked for some money for innovation that can be used as a *cushion* if, for example, we do not meet our tuition numbers. If we do meet our tuition numbers, we can use some money for innovation. Dr. Bowen indicated that she has some graphics and visuals she usually uses to explain this.

- Part of the base of this is the *stack-ability of credentials* that students can earn along the way. Certificates, for example, will generate more money. ADHE will determine whether or not certificates will serve a need. Micro-credentials – surveys of perspective students (Pugh, Lumina foundation) indicate that they want something they can get quickly and start making more than minimum wage right away. As they mature in a position, they may need a Bachelor's degree. **Ted Abernathy** was invited, by the Chamber of Commerce, to speak to the chamber and economic alliance. He is talking about this. He is coming back this summer and next fall to work with the region, studying business and industry jobs. He has already written one *report*, which has been shared with the Deans. There are at least 10 different goals in there, and civic leaders want to get started on this. The idea is that we need to attract more white-collar jobs in the area. Mr. Abernathy calls this the Collective Impact Model. This includes: Business/Industry, the Community, P-12 Schools, and Higher Ed. The Futures model is the ATU part. This is a growing market – students who want what they want quickly. We are going to continue to serve our traditional students, but we may also need to find faculty who will prefer this newer model.

III. Old Business

A. VPAA update

- a. May 5 is Professional Development Day
- b. Commencement – there is still a need for volunteers for the Friday evening ceremony. There is an inclement weather plan. If there is inclement weather, faculty will NOT be expected to attend. This will just be a walk-through for students and parents. People should not wear high heels because faculty will be walking out on the football field.

B. Faculty Satisfaction Survey and Results (Schwehm)

Everyone should have received the full packet.

C. Time period between Sabbatical assignments (Barron)

Dr. Clements indicated that we should table this until our next meeting or next fall. Dr. Alejandra Carballo and Dr. Carey Ellis Laffoon agreed that we should table this.

D. Faculty Handbook edits/survey updates (Huss/Schwehm)

After our last meeting, a survey was sent out. Something will be forthcoming at the next senate meeting.

E. Registration Waiting List (Davis)

A committee is being formed. Dr. Jamie Stacy, Dr. Michael Davis, have both volunteered. Dr. Stacy asked whether or not people who are not faculty could be on that committee (i.e. Advising Center). John Jackson also volunteered.

F. BFSO Request

Dr. Sean Huss indicated that this is a request from the BFSO in the fall. This has been postponed. A committee needs to be formed that will address and improve the circumstances of faculty of color. Dr. Sean Huss and Dr. V. Carole Smith and Dr. Alejandra Carballo, Dr. David Eshelman, Dr. Carey Ellis Laffoon and Dr. Sean Reed have volunteered to be on this committee. Dr. Alejandra made the observation that Asian groups often get left out of discussions regarding people of color.

G. Concerns related to the primacy of academics / Provost (Eshelman)

Dr. Eshelman put forth a motion, seconded by Dr. Sean Huss “The Faculty Senate believes that the restructure is being used as an excuse to enhance the Student Affairs division at the expense of Academics. To counter this trend, we renew our call for ATU to elevate the VPAA immediately to provost and to halt the migration of any academic service divisions—e.g., academic advising and career services—to Student Affairs.” **Motion Carried**

IV. Open Forum

Dr. Jon Clements indicated a desire for senators to talk to all of their constituents regarding a debate on whether or not the Faculty Senate has confidence in the President of Arkansas Tech University. This debate and a vote will take place on the next Faculty Senate meeting. The vote will be taken anonymously.

V. Announcements and Information Items

VI. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Dr. Sean Huss, seconded by Dr. Michael Davis **Motion Carried.**

Respectfully Submitted,



Jon Clements, D.M. President



Sean Reed, D.M.A. Secretary