

Minutes of
THE FACULTY SENATE
OF
ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

This meeting of the 2019-20 Faculty Senate was held at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14, 2020 on WebEx. The following members were present:

Dr. Alejandra Carballo	Dr. Randy Kelley
Dr. Jon Clements	Dr. Carey Ellis Laffoon
Dr. Michael Davis	Dr. Joshua Lockyer
Dr. Pam Dixon	Dr. Jeremy Schwehm
Dr. David Eshelman	Dr. Asim Shrestha
Ms. Holly Ruth Gale	Dr. Jamie Stacy
Dr. Shellie Hanna	Dr. Joe Stoeckel
Dr. Newt Hilliard	Dr. Brendan Toner
Dr. Efosa Idemudia	Dr. Jack Tucci
Dr. Scott Jordan	Dr. Alaric Williams

Guests: Dr. Barbara Johnson, Dr. Blake Bedsole, Ms. Tammy Weaver, Ms. Laury Fiorello, Ms. Gabriele Haulmark, Mr. Wyatt Watson; Ms. Kayla Chambliss

I. CALL TO ORDER Dr. Eshelman called the meeting to order.

A. Approval of the Minutes Dr. Eshelman requested a motion to approve the meeting minutes for the March 10 and March 31 Senate meetings. Dr. Lockyer asked to be added to the list of faculty serving on the ad hoc committee on travel in the March 10 minutes.

Motion by Ms. Gale, seconded by Dr. Tucci to approve the March 10 and March 31 minutes with the requested addition of Dr. Lockyer to the ad hoc committee on travel to the March 10 minutes. Motion carried.

II. NEW BUSINESS:

Dr. Eshelman requested changes to the agenda to allow guests to speak first and to add an item to set a date for the final Senate meeting of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Motion by Dr. Hanna, seconded by Dr. Lockyer to adjust the agenda. Motion carried.

A. International Strategic Plan Ms. Gabriele Haulmark, Instructor of English and World Languages, presented the International Strategic Plan developed by the International Committee. The purpose of the plan is to help the University prepare students for loving and working in a global world. The committee requests that students, faculty, and staff review the plan. Please submit any feedback to Ms. Haulmark via email at ghaulmark@atu.edu.

B. Recording of WebEx Senate Meetings Dr. Schwehm requested permission from Senate to record online meetings using WebEx to aid in the writing of minutes.

Motion by Dr. Stacy, seconded by Dr. Hanna to approve of the recording of online Senate meetings using Webex. Motion carried.

C. APERS Study

Ms. Laury Fiorello, Chief Fiscal Officer, Ozark Campus, presented a study on the fiscal viability of the APERS retirement program and a proposal to eliminate APERS as a retirement plan option for new hires. Employees currently using APERS would be allowed to remain in the program. Pros of eliminating APERS as a retirement plan option are a reduction of pension expense contributions will decrease for the University, TIAA-Cref has no vesting period (APERS has 5-year period), long term APERS expense would gradually decrease for the University, and prior service costs long-term liability will decrease for the University. Cons of eliminating APERS as a retirement plan option for new hires includes TIAA-Cref as the only retirement plan option, TIAA-Cref has the higher employee contribution rate (6% TIAA-Cref vs 5% APERS), ending retirement benefit would be limited to ATU and employee contributions over employment cycle.

If APERS is eliminated as a retirement plan option for new employees, all current APERS employees will be grandfathered status and remain in the retirement plan. There is the possibility of other retirement options to be offered through TIAA-Cref.

Dr. Hanna asked if changes to APERS would impact Arkansas Teacher Retirement. Ms. Fiorello said it would not. Dr. Eshelman asked what happens to the proposal now. Ms. Fiorello said the proposal would go to Staff Senate and the Executive Council for review before going to the Board of Trustees.

D. COVID-19 Issues

Pass/No Credit Grading Change for Spring 2020

Senators discussed additional changes to the Pass/No Credit grading option. In the March 31 meeting, Senate voted to include the letter grade of “D” as passing at the undergraduate level and for courses/programs that required a grade of “C” or better to be identified for advising purposes. Dr. Johnson, Vice President for Academic Affairs, stated there were a plethora of issues with including “D” as a passing grade at the undergraduate level. To address these issues, a grade of “Pass-D” (PD) was added to the grading options for Spring 2020. A grade of “Pass-C” (PC) was added for graduate level courses.

Several senators asked about the difference between using Pass-D versus a CR (credit) option. Ms. Weaver, University Registrar, said some institutions might not accept CR grades for transfer, but would accept a Pass-D if the institution accepted grades of D for transfer credit. Dr. Johnson stated that the representatives of the Student Government Association approved of the proposed changes. Dr. Eshelman requested that the list of courses requiring a C is a living document, compiled by the VPAA based on information from the deans.

Undergraduates will have the option of receiving credit (earned hours) without a grade for the Spring 2020 semester. They will make their decisions after they receive grades, on a class by class basis, in consultation with their advisors who must sign off. Undergraduates may choose to replace grades of “B” or “C” with a grade of “P”, a grade of “D” with a “PD”, or a grade of “F” with “NC”. Graduate students may replace “B” grades with “P”, “C” grades with “PC”, and “D” and “F” grades with “NC”. The addition of the PD / PC grade option will account, for instance, for courses or programs that require a C to pass.

Motion by Dr. Clements, seconded by Dr. Stacy to accept the updated grading proposal and to allow the list of courses/programs to be a living document. Motion carried.

Summer Courses & Commencement

Dr. Johnson stated that an announcement would be forthcoming that all May-term courses will be virtual; discussions are ongoing about June and July session summer courses. The deans have been asked to move any courses that required a face-to-face component to late summer. Dr. Stacy announced that the COVID-19 Task Force will recommend all courses

be moved online for the summer and that the Executive Council can determine if there are any exceptions. Dr. Johnson noted some exceptions might be lab courses that cannot complete equivalent work online. If lab courses are to meet, staggered scheduling would be used to reduce the amount of students in the lab at the same time. Other priorities include contractual obligations, such as Upward Bound programs.

Dr. Johnson stated that although Spring and Summer graduations will be combined, only those with summer teaching assignments will be required to attend Summer graduation.

Tenure Clock

Dr. Clements researched how other institutions are handling extensions to the tenure clock. Some state institutions are allowing a pause of the probationary period or at the 3-year review period. Some state institutions already have policies that allow for extension of the tenure clock. Dr. Schwehm noted that we already have a policy in the handbook that allows for extensions of the probationary period. It was added in the last round of handbook changes.

Dr. Laffoon asked if cancelled conferences could be listed in the annual evaluation or promotion and tenure portfolio. Dr. Huss recommended drafting a statement to go to the DPTCs, UPTC, Department Heads, and Deans outlining the need for flexibility on student evaluations and scholarship.

Dr. Eshelman asked Drs. Clements, Stacy, and Huss to draft a statement.

E. Enrolment Projections

Dr. Blake Bedsole, Vice President for Enrollment Management, and Mr. Wyatt Watson, Director of Institutional Research, discussed short- and long-term enrollment projections. The long-term enrollment projections, which forecasts enrollment numbers to 2032, are built on historical enrollment data, state-level data on projected high-school graduation rates, and national-level data. The long-term projection does not include any type of intervention or initiatives by Enrollment Management and will be used as a baseline comparison for actual enrollment numbers. The short-term projections are more precise.

Mr. Watson stated that pre COVID-19, enrollment projections based on state- and national-level data indicate a steady increase in enrollment from 2019 – 2026, followed by decreases in enrollment through 2032. It is expected that Arkansas high school graduation rates will increase until 2027. Dr. Bedsole reiterated that long-term projections are being used as a baseline and do not reflect new initiatives to increase enrollment. Examples of new initiatives include expanding the active recruitment area to east Texas and Oklahoma. Dr. Bedsole stressed that a major impact on enrollment numbers is our ability to retain students. A one-percent increase in enrollment accounts for 75-80 students.

Enrollment projections for 2021 (prior to COVID-19) were increases in the overall undergraduate population, but declines in both graduate enrollment and international enrollment.

F. Primacy of Academics

Dr. Eshelman has been hearing concerns that academics is being unevenly targeted in addressing budget concerns and stated the overall concern among faculty that academics was already underfunded before the announced budget cuts. Dr. Hanna said there is growing concern over positions being cut.

Dr. Johnson said Executive Council does not necessarily review the budgets of each unit, but each area was asked to look at cuts of 5%, 10%, and 15%. Dr. Johnson told the deans to let her know if they do not have the ability to absorb budget cuts in their divisions. One area that will absorb budget cuts is travel. Dr. Johnson stated there is pressure to look at program enrollments using the Program Performance Matrix. She also urged faculty and academic units to be on top of position searches and complete searches as efficiently and quickly as possible.

Dr. Eshelman suggested Faculty Senate prepare a statement reinforcing the position that academics should be a budget priority. Dr. Schwelm asked that any statement include wording that demands transparency in budget cuts and that Senate be provided with a list of cuts throughout the University. Dr. Eshelman read the following statement:

The Faculty Senate reminds its administrators that a university is an academic institution and that, in times of budgetary uncertainty, our university must first work to protect and enhance its academic mission. ATU should look to academics as a place to address budgetary shortfalls only when other possibilities have been exhausted. We also request full transparency of budget cuts for the purpose of review.

Motion by Dr. Tucci, seconded by Dr. Stacy to adopt statement. Motion carried.

G. Instructor-Track Faculty

Dr. Eshelman requested volunteers to work on an ad hoc committee to review issues related to the creation of instructor-track faculty. These issues include, but are not limited to, representation on committees, access to funding (e.g., Professional Development Grants), eligibility for awards, etc. Drs. Stacy and Huss volunteered to work on the committee and to recruit instructor-track faculty to be part of the committee.

H. Adjunct Faculty Representation on Senate

Motion by Dr. Davis, seconded by Dr. Hilliard to table discussion/voting on adjunct faculty representation on Senate until the next Senate meeting. Motion carried.

I. Evaluation of Deans and Department Heads

Discussion moved to next Senate meeting.

J. Date and Time of Final Senate Meeting of 2019-2020 AY

Motion by Dr. Lockyer, seconded by Dr. Davis to hold the final Senate meeting of the 2019-2020 academic year at 1PM on Wednesday, April 29, 2020. Motion carried.

III. OLD BUSINESS:

A. REPORT BY VICE PRESIDENT for ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Dr. Barbara Johnson, Vice President for Academic Affairs, encouraged faculty to participate in a survey distributed by Drs. Manandhar and Peters on COVID-19 knowledge and preparedness. Dr. Johnson also requested faculty participate in a survey conducted by the Office of Information Systems (OIS) to identify if faculty have access to resources required to deliver content online.

Dr. Johnson asked that Senate nominate a representative to serve on the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs search committee.

Motion by Dr. Laffoon, seconded by Dr. Davis, to nominate Dr. Hilliard to serve on the committee. Motion by Dr. Clements, seconded by Dr. Stacy to close nominations. Motions carried.

B. End of Semester Schedule

The final exam week calendar was adjusted to remove exam times. The submission deadline for final exams is 11:59PM on the designated date of the exam. Dr. Stacy mentioned there needs to be clarity on how to deliver the exam so that faculty do not wait until 9:00PM on the designated date to open the exam. Dr. Davis stressed that exams should be open all day and that faculty should be as flexible as possible in this difficult, extraordinary time.

Dr. Johnson researched how other institutions are able to allow for more grading time between the end of the semester and commencement. Many institutions start the terms earlier than Arkansas Tech. Dr. Johnson mentioned this to Dr. Bowen, President of Arkansas Tech University, and Dr. Bowen approved of Academic Affairs/Senate looking into the issue further. Dr. Davis noted that an earlier start might cause issues with professional development.

Dr. Hanna asked if faculty who do not teach over the summer are required to attend the combined Spring/Summer commencement. Dr. Johnson said faculty who do not teach in the summer session are not required to attend the Spring/Summer commencement.

C. Departmental Promotion and Tenure Committee Handbook Edits

Motion made by Dr. Davis, seconded by Dr. Stacy to table discussion/voting on handbook edits until the next Senate meeting. Motioned carried.

D. Standing Committee Elections

Motion made by Dr. Schwehm, seconded by Dr. Stacy, to revise the dates of the standing committee elections to April 20 – May 4. Motion carried.

E. Travel Issues

Discussion tabled until return to campus.

IV. OPEN FORUM

Dr. Eshelman noted the Budget Advisory Committee has been charged to look at what areas the University can cut, but also areas where the University can grow. Forward any ideas to Ms. Kim Renteria, the faculty elected representative of the Budget Advisory Committee, to Dr. Eshelman, or to your respective dean.

Dr. Chris Kellner and the ad hoc committee reviewing the faculty/staff tuition waiver policy will submit their findings/suggestions to Senate for review.

The Shared Governance Committee would like to collect any information regarding our response to COVID-19 with the intent to highlight what we are doing. Forward any information to Dr. Eshelman or another member of the Shared Governance Committee.

Dr. Laffoon asked how faculty should be planning for the fall semester and if we should be planning for face-to-face or all remote delivery. Dr. Stacy said the COVID-19 task force would be meeting about that soon, but they will not get ahead of decisions being made at the state level. Dr. Laffoon asked where the task force information goes. Dr. Stacy said all task force information is submitted to the Executive Council.

Dr. Lockyer asked if students selecting the P/NC option will need signatures and if the signatures can be electronic. Ms. Weaver, University Registrar, said students will be able to log into OneTech and request, on a course-by-course basis, to move to the P/NC option.

Grades are due May 11, 2020. Students can petition for grade changes starting May 14, 2020. Graduating seniors have until May 29 to request a grade change.

V.
ANNOUNCEMENTS
AND
INFORMATION
ITEMS

No announcements.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Dr. Davis, seconded by Dr. Hanna to adjourn. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,



David Eshelman, Ph.D., President



Jeremy Schwehm, Ph.D., Secretary