

Minutes of
THE FACULTY SENATE
OF
ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

The special meeting of the 2019-20 Faculty Senate was held at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, 2020 via WebEx.

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

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

II. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Grade Policy Modification for Spring 2020

Dr. Eshelman introduced a draft policy (see attached) for a temporary modification in grading for the Spring 2020 term due to the COVID-19 protocol. Dr. Eshelman requested a motion to approve to open discussion.

Motion by Dr. Tucci, seconded by Dr. Hanna, to accept the proposal and move to discussion.

In discussion, several faculty requested clarification on the specific problem(s) we are addressing with a temporary change in grading policy. All faculty were in agreement that everyone is experiencing great difficulty under the current circumstances. Some faculty expressed the importance of considering how any changes in the grading policy might impact students. Several faculty spoke about students who might not have access to adequate resources off campus to be successful in the online environment, or students whose life circumstances have changed because of COVID-19 restrictions. Specifically, some faculty were concerned that students who were performing well before COVID-19 restrictions might have a performance drop due to limited or no access to technology or other resources. In these situations, students with limited resources would be further disadvantaged by a P/NC choice while maintaining the A-F system. Students with access to resources could still maintain sufficient performance and remain in the A-F system while students without access to sufficient resources might be tracked to the P/NC system. Faculty with these concerns requested Senate consider the consequences of moving all students to the P/NC system or staying in the A-F system but adjusting how content is graded from the onset of COVID-19 restrictions.

A clarifying question was raised regarding the cut-off for the P/NC grade. Under the draft policy, a grade of P requires a "C" or better in the A-F grading system. It was noted that for undergraduate courses, a grade of "D" is considered sufficient for awarding credit hours.

Amendment by Dr. Clements, seconded by Dr. Stacy to adjust the grading scale so a grade of “P” requires a “D” or better in the A-F grading system.

Concerns were raised with how the P/NC system would impact courses that require a letter grade for accreditation, licensing, admissions into undergraduate or graduate programs, or various other circumstances. Faculty expressed the importance of communication and informing students of selection of grading option might impact them academically beyond GPA.

Amendment by Dr. Ellis Laffoon, seconded by Dr. Lockyer to create a list of courses and programs that cannot use the P/NC grading system without serious repercussions and to add the following statement to the policy: Students must consult with an academic and/or faculty advisor prior to selecting the P/NC option.

Dr. Clements moved to call the question (begin voting) on policy with amendments, seconded by Dr. Tucci. Senators were instructed to use the chat function to vote on the motion to accept the proposed modified grading policy for Spring 2020 with approved amendments.

Motion carried.

B. Statement on Faculty Flexibility and Understanding

During discussion of the grading policy it was noted that Academic Affairs had received multiple reports of faculty who were not providing students with the flexibility necessary to adjust to changes due to COVID-19. Dr. Schwehm requested Senate draft a statement setting the expectation that faculty be flexible and understanding when working with students.

Faculty Senate, with significant input from Dr. Tucci, drafted the following statement:

As part of the Tech family, we need to remember that not all of us are blessed equally. Some of our students face severe economic disadvantages under our current situation. Please be considerate and try to give students the benefit of the doubt when dealing with student issues and assignments. It is when we are in times of need such as this that we should follow our hearts in dealing graciously with each other.

C. VPAA Report

Motion by Dr. Schwehm, seconded by Dr. Stacy to approve the statement and distribute to faculty. Motion carried.

Dr. Barbara Johnson, Vice President for Academic Affairs, notified Senate of the following date changes:

- Grade Submissions for Spring – May 11, 2020
- Faculty Annual Evaluations – date pushed back, but new date not set
- Final exam schedule is being reviewed

Dr. Johnson wants faculty to work now to have all the resources they need at home IF there is a stay-at-home order issued. Faculty are authorized to get supplies from their office if needed. Faculty planning on going into the office for supplies should email Dr. Johnson, their Dean, and their Department Head. The email is for notification purposes and the faculty do not have to wait for permission.

Dr. Johnson asked that faculty think early of what they want to do with their final exams, so that they can get help from OIS in a timely manner.

Dr. Hanna asked if budget cuts would impact current faculty openings. Dr. Johnson said at this time, there is no loss of faculty lines.

Dr. Hilliard asked how faculty should handle incompletes from Fall 2019. Dr. Stacy asked about extending the grace period for academic probation. Dr. Johnson said she would discuss the issue with incompletes with Ms. Weaver, University Registrar, and report back to Senate. Dr. Eshelman will contact Financial Aid about academic probation.

D. End of Course Evaluations

There was discussion regarding the distribution of end-of-course evaluations and any changes to the evaluation process because of COVID-19. Some faculty requested each individual faculty be given the option of opting out of end-of-course evaluations for the Spring 2020 term.

Motion by Dr. Stacy, seconded by Dr. Davis to allow faculty to opt out of Spring 2020 end-of-course evaluations being used for the purposes of promotion, tenure, or annual evaluation. Motion carried.

III. Adjournment

Motion by Dr. Tucci, seconded by Dr. Stacy to adjourn. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,



David Eshelman, Ph.D., President



Jeremy Schwehm, Ph.D., Secretary