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Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes – February 2010

Faculty Senators

University of South Alabama

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
Faculty Senate

February 17, 2010
Library Auditorium
3:00 pm

Approved Minutes

Present: Estis, Spector, Axsmith, Carr, Connors, Fisher, Haywick, Hillman, Lunceford, Marshall, Perez-Pineda, Powers, Rowell, Shaw, Shelly-Tremblay, Toelken, Johnsten, Langan, Kingman, Baggett, Romey, Byrne, Omar, Lemley, Prendergast, Falkos, Perry, Rizk, Retzlaff-Roberts, D. Turnipseed, Woodford, Brown, Keasler, King

Also attending: John Sachs, immediate past chair of the Faculty Senate

Excused: Adams, Gubler-Hanna, Summerlin, McCormick, Campbell, Kinniburgh, P. Turnipseed, Ambrose, Bosarge, Burnham, Kahn, Madden, Meyer,

Unexcused: Finley, Pacheco, Quereshi

1. Call to order at 3:06 with a quorum present
2. Approval of minutes from the January 2010 meeting

Minutes for the January 2010 meeting were unanimously approved.

3. Chair's report – D. Turnipseed
 - a. Budget – Currently there is no sign of an impending additional economic blow to the University budget for the next three months. The University is, however, going to have to cope with a \$10 million funding drop at the end of this year when the federal stimulus money ends.
 - b. Fringe Benefit Committee – The University Fringe Benefit Committee has recommended some changes in fringe benefits for the coming year. President Moulton reduced the recommended changes. Details on the changes recommended by President Moulton should be available soon.
 - c. Enrollment – The enrollment for Spring semester 2010 is up over Spring semester 2009.
4. Old Business
 - a. Proposed Faculty Senate Constitutional Amendment

Proposed language: Amendments to this Constitution may be proposed by three-fifths vote of the Senate. The faculty shall be notified of proposed amendments by both print and electronic means at least thirty (30) days prior to voting, and an open forum to discuss same will be offered two weeks before the vote if requested. The amendment does not become official until a majority of the faculty has voted on the proposed amendment and a majority of those voting approve the proposed change. After approval by the faculty the proposed amendment must then be submitted to and approved by the Board of Trustees of the University of South Alabama.

D. Turnipseed opened the discussion of the proposed change to the Faculty Senate Constitution by noting that is important for the constitution to be structured so that no one person or group can grab power. However, the Constitution also needs to be structured so that changes are possible when change is needed. Currently, change is needed in a number of areas, but as currently structured it will

be virtually impossible to get any changes approved because of the requirement that 50% of the faculty vote for the change – it is going to be difficult to get 50% of the faculty to vote at all. The difficulty will continue to grow over time as more people ignore requests for voting on new issues.

D. Turnipseed opined that next year's Senate will need to carefully review the Constitution and Bylaws and really study it: who can be a Senator, rules of procedure, the need for continuity, attendance, etc.

D. Turnipseed then opened the floor for discussion of the proposed amendment. No discussion ensued.

S. Fisher moved that the proposed amendment be brought to a vote as written. The motion was seconded. A voice vote/hand count followed with all present voting "Yea." There were no "nays" and no abstentions.

D. Turnipseed announced that the resolution will be joined with the two previously approved changes for a vote of the faculty next week. D. Turnipseed asked for the help of the senate and, particularly, the caucus leaders in getting faculty members to vote. An email ballot will be sent to the faculty. We need to have the votes returned quickly and, if approved, get something to Monica for the Board of Trustees meeting 10 days before the March meeting.

5. New Business

a. Texts in Library

D. Turnipseed asked for a consensus of the Senate on recommending that faculty members place a copy of textbooks on reserve at the library. He noted that books are becoming increasingly expensive and more students are trying to get by with outdated editions, or no book at all.

The general response from those in attendance was negative, though several in attendance saw a need for faculty to take steps to address the needs of students who do not have the resources to purchase new texts.

b. University Committee studying student evaluation of teaching effectiveness

Dr. Johnson has convened a University-level committee to study the student evaluation of teaching effectiveness. There are five members of the Faculty Senate on the committee. D. Turnipseed noted that all of the Associate Deans are also on the committee. Because of the size and composition of the committee, D. Turnipseed indicated a desire to obtain feedback from the faculty on the issues to be discussed to allow the faculty to steer the direction of discussions. D. Turnipseed noted that a memorandum from K. Woodford and J. Estis had been provided as an attachment to today's meeting reminder and as an attachment to today's agenda soliciting feedback in the areas of 1) procedures for administering the survey, (2) the content of the survey, (3) the interpretation of the raw data/methodology used in calculating faculty scores and comparative data, and (4) the use of the results in the annual evaluation of faculty.

D. Turnipseed opened the floor for discussion.

One member noted the need to address "urban legends" among students about the use and interpretation of the survey results. Some students believe that giving an "all good" survey will get the results "kicked out" and, as a result, the student will give at least one "bad" mark in a random area (e.g., get a "1" for availability when the professor is in his/her office all day, every day).

Another member noted the importance of administering the survey in an on-line format. Administering the survey in class is cumbersome and uses valuable teaching time. The faculty member suggested utilizing ECollege's survey software to give the students a 2 week optional window for taking the survey

and then make the survey mandatory to enter ECollege. Another member discouraged tying the survey to ECollege, with the hopes that ECollege will not be the on-line platform much longer. Suggestions included tying the survey to the Banner system so students cannot access grades until the survey is completed.

Members also suggested simplifying the questions – four or five, at most, simple questions seeking meaningful information. Students have concerns about the questions as well, and students have voiced a desire to have a simple question: did you learn anything in this class. Faculty have concerns about what the students are being asked to evaluate – in many instances the students do not know enough about the pedagogy to make an informed evaluation of the things they are asked to evaluate. Another member noted that often students do not realize how much they have learned until much later – e.g., a student in biology may not know how much a class taught him/her until the student is in medical school and is substantially better prepared than his/her peers. The need to improve the instrument used so that it is a quality/validated instrument is only one “piece of the pie,” but a very important step towards improving the whole process.

Others asked for more open ended response questions as those tend to produce usable information from which a faculty member can improve teaching. Some members suggested requiring a written response if a student gives a “1” or “2” negative response to allow for feedback for potential change, as well as feedback to allow administrators to evaluate the negative mark(s). Others suggested open-ended questions such as “What were the strengths/weakness of this instructor/course.” Feedback on open ended questions is often useful; such as a student who indicated that he still did not understand a particular concept after an exercise.

A member also suggested utilizing the same questions and same administration system in all colleges to allow for meaningful comparisons. Others, who were in favor of a set of uniform questions for all classes, also wanted the ability to add department or individual professor’s questions. Some noted that there is specific information the faculty member may want (e.g., opinion on a particular project or particular method) to help improve teaching.

One member noted that the evaluations had been a subject of discussion at the department level. In the department discussions noted a dual purpose for evaluations: (1) to differentiate between people for purposes of pay, tenure & promotion and (2) feedback to improve individual teaching. Uniform questions can help with the first, but some differentiation or open ended questions will be needed to effect the latter.

Questions were raised about the use of anonymous student feedback in the merit and promotion process; *i.e.* to differentiate between people for purposes of pay, tenure & promotion. Some have said that “it all works out over time,” but it appears that the evaluations are not being used as “over time” instruments. Instead, one bad class in a year could sink the possibility of a raise and, potentially, negatively impact a tenure/promotion decision if the bad class occurs close to that decision.

A member of the medical faculty noted that student input into performance evaluations has been an on-going issue in many medical schools. The member noted that in the past residents’ complaints that a faculty member was “hard,” was considered a good thing – rigorously preparing students to practice medicine. “We were better teachers before the residents had power” over our pay, tenure, etc.

One member noted that it is as if the inmates are being allowed to run the asylum. Another member noted that if the inmates are going to be allowed to evaluate the guards, then the warden needs to start coming around and evaluating too. A member noted that there was a push for University-mandated peer or superior evaluations several years ago, but that push was killed by the added workload for the chairs. However, if students are given input, several members felt that at the pre-tenure stage those student evaluations should be supplemented by/offset with evaluations by tenured faculty or the chair. Some studies have shown a correlation between student evaluation and chair evaluations – if that is the case with our evaluation system, it would give it more meaning. Another member noted that faculty members,

particularly non-tenured faculty members, should be given chair feedback in any area in which the instructor received poor ratings so the instructor has the opportunity to make corrections, if needed.

c. UAH

J. Shelley-Tremblay asked about the University's response to the UAH shooting, particularly given that the shooting apparently was in response to a negative tenure decision. He questioned whether the Faculty Senate has (or should have) a representative on the Violence Prevention Alliance and if there is anything the Faculty Senate could/should recommend in connection with this incident. D. Haywick noted that the concerns fall within the scope of the University's Safety Committee, of which he is a member.

d. Piece-meal closing of University for snow

A member asked the Faculty Senate to address the University's seemingly haphazard response to last Friday's snow day. Closing for part of the day was not a good option. Faculty members who teach two sections of the same class had one section meet, and the other section not meet, creating issues for the rest of the semester. In addition, closing at 3 created havoc for faculty members teaching a 2:30 class or lab – was that class supposed to be canceled or not? Leaving the “choice” to an individual faculty member caused problems/confusion for students.

One member noted that the response system goes back to Opal – the University's response to that hurricane was a disaster. The system for closing for weather related issues has worked fairly well until Friday.

3. New fee for hybrid courses

A member raised the question of a new fee being charged for hybrid courses. S. Fisher noted that the fee is something management did; it was not discussed by the University committee and there has been no discussion of how that money will be used/distributed.

6. Committee Reports

- Academic Development and Mentoring (Phil Carr) – a new charge for the committee has been submitted to the Faculty Policy Committee. The committee submitted several questions that are being asked on the faculty survey regarding mentoring. In addition, the committee has asked to address the Dean's Council to get feedback on mentoring in the various colleges. The committee hopes to make recommendations for college level mentoring programs.

P. Carr also announced the upcoming 17th Annual Faculty Development Forum. Information on the forum was sent via email with the meeting announcement and is also attached to today's agenda. P. Carr noted that the new deadline is March 1 and he encouraged departments to create a poster highlighting faculty members' research for the year.

- Environmental Quality (Doug Haywick) – No committee report. D. Haywick noted that Bill Guess, the University's director of safety, is looking into a bio diesel program for the campus.
- Evaluation (Amy Prendergast) -- Part I of the survey is active. She asked if everyone present had received the announcement; all said they had. So far she has received 232 completed surveys, 195 of which were received in the first three days. The survey is open until March 5. Amy asked Senators to encourage members of their colleges to complete the survey.
- Planning and Development (Sheryl Falkos) - No report.
- Policies and Faculty Handbook (Sam Fisher) – The committee reviewed the proposal of the Academic Development & Mentoring Committee for a new charge and the committee has approved the proposal.

- Salary and Benefits (Julie Estis) -- The University Fringe Benefit Committee met on January 26. The committee proposed USA entering the American Cancer Society's Quit for Life Tobacco Cessation program. That program provides education, medication, and counseling services for plan subscribers who would like to participate. The University is considering a premium increase for smokers – premiums would increase for all participants, but participants could receive a premium rebate if they certify they do not smoke.

Human Resources is looking into an inexpensive short-term disability policy, instead of a proposed sick leave bank. It would be a low-cost option to which faculty and staff could opt to subscribe. The University is also seeking bids for a new Long Term Disability plan.

The Senate Committee is looking into concerns on the restriction on the use of sick leave to care for ill family members. Currently, employees can only use 3 of their annual sick days to care for an ill family member; thereafter, employees can use vacation to cover absences. This is a problem for faculty who do not accrue vacation.

- Technology Utilization (Tom Meyer) – No report.

7. Caucus Reports

- Allied Health (Elizabeth Adams) – No report
- Arts and Sciences (Thomas Shaw) – The caucus met with the Dean on Monday to discuss morale and other issues.
- Continuing Education (Vickie McCormick) – No report
- Computer and Information Sciences (David Langan) – No report
- Education (Dennis Campbell) - No report
- Engineering (Peter Byrne) – No report
- Library (Vera Finley) – No report
- Mitchell College of Business (Donna Retzlaff-Roberts) - No report
- Medicine (Judy Burnham) – No report
- Nursing (Diane Keasler) – The college has submitted 9 grant proposals and has 2 more going out in March. The college is preparing for its September accreditation visit.

Adjourned at 4:10 p.m.