

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
Faculty Senate

Faculty Senate Plenary Meeting
August 21, 2024- MCOB- 3:00-5:00 p.m.
MCOB 265
MINUTES

Present (In-House): J. Adams, R. Bates, C. Baughn, M. Black, G. Borchert, C. Brock, G. Brower, J. Bunch, C. Davidson, S. Davis, T. Davis, A. Donaldson, J. Ellzie, L. Fleck, Y. Getch, R. Godang, C. Hauff, G. Hudson, M. Lin, D. Meola, B. Merritt, M. Migaud, J. Miller, B. Minton, S. Ní Chandhain, T. O'Connor, A. Pavelescu, J. Pfleeger, B. Rabideau, C. Raczkowski, J. Richardson, C. Shaw, A. Shea, D. Streeter, J. Swofford, V. Tate, E. ter Horst, R. Thomas, C. Thompson, L. Vrana, S. Walker, C. Wassenaar, B. Webb, and C. Wu.

Present (Zoom): P. Henning, N. Holliday, A. Marass, and K. Pancione.

Excused: Y. Coronado, W. Cutchen, S. Ferguson, J. Huang, Y. Huang, Z. Khan, T. McDonald, C. Rawlinson, J. Robertson, and D. Turnipseed.

Unexcused: G. Abeynanda, S. Bessette, B. Dzwonkowski, C. Gavrilita, C. Holliday, W. Kilgo, M. Sehgal, A. Stenson, A. VandeWaa, and A. Williams.

Guests: Beth Davis (BCRFA), Sidney Raine (SWAPTE), Tamekia Cunningham-Abrams (FPHC), and Michael Chambers (Chief, Economic Development Office).

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 pm with President Christina Wassenaar, presiding. Quorum was met.

I. PRELIMINARY BUSINESS:

Presentation of the 2023/2024 Faculty Senate Award Winners:

- Semoon and Youngshin Chang Endowed Award for Humanitarian Service: Angela Nocera [not attending]
- Outstanding Research Partner: The Breast Cancer Research Foundation of Alabama (BCRFA) – accepted by Beth Davis
- Outstanding Community Partner: Southwest Alabama Partnership for Training and Employment (SWAPTE) – accepted by Sidney Raine
- Outstanding Teaching Partner: Franklin Primary Health Center (FPHC) – accepted by Tamekia Cunningham-Abrams

Approval of Minutes: Approved by a majority of quorum.

Approval of Agenda: Approved by a majority of quorum.

President's Report (Wassenar): Written report was sent to all members prior to Plenary meeting.

Additional information presented in the meeting:

- It is becoming clear that there is a “bottleneck” around the sharing of information within the campus community. Most faculty do not have a lot of access to information from senior leadership at this university. A proposed program to help with this would be to have a series of monthly meetings between various levels of faculty with senior members of Academic Affairs administration. This would help the upper echelons of administration to know what faculty are doing in terms of teaching and research. The Deans will not pick the faculty to be included in the discussion meetings. It will be based on a pool of interested faculty who wish to participate and are able to attend scheduled meetings.
- Christina would like to get FACULTY as part of the strategic priorities for the university, which they are not currently featured as a priority. She is putting together a new institutional planning committee comprised of faculty from a cross section of the university that will work on designing and updating different priorities for the university. The committee will focus on renegotiating priorities to develop supports for faculty. Donna Streater and Christina will be the co-chairs of the committee, and will give out more information once scheduling and details are firmed up. They hope to present this at the October plenary meeting for further discussion, and have something to present to the Board of Trustees by March. The goal is to make faculty a component of the strategic priorities so that metrics can be developed and included as part of the budgetary needs of the university.
- A presentation from the Title IX office about problems occurring on campus that was scheduled for this meeting, but it needed to be postponed. The purpose was to understand how the new laws relate to the requirements of Title IX. There has been an increase in complaints in this area having to do with faculty, though there are no details to share. In the near future there will be a presentation before the Senate on this subject.

- There have been a number of people wanting to come and present before the Senate. If there are any topics that the senators would like to hear about information, please submit requests to someone on the Executive Committee.
- For those faculty who have offices near the area where the new College of Medicine is being built and are having problems with the pounding noise or vibrations from the placement of pylons, Buck Kelley, Chief of Facilities Management, would be willing to work with you for finding different accommodations.
- Also, the Humanities building has a problem with one of their elevators not being operational. Timeline for fixing the problem is 2026, which makes the building no longer ADA compliant. While the other elevator is working, the building structure does not allow for people to get from one side of the building to the other side without using stairs. The university is trying to make accommodations by moving classes to other buildings.

II. OLD BUSINESS: No old business to report.

III. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- *Academic Development & Mentoring (Black):*
 - The committee will be promoting the MéPLE Mentoring program (sponsored by the ILC and the FS Mentoring Committee).
- *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (Getch)*
 - Because of changes in the Alabama law AL Act 2024-34 (SB 129), the committee will cease to exist by the end of September.
 - There were several items to consider when determining the correct wording for a possible new committee's name and its charge.
 - Yvette and Laura Vrana have been working throughout the summer working with various people in the administration and with other faculty members, getting feedback and participating in discussions on what can be done to meet the requirements of the new law.
 - One of the decisions was not to go the way that the University did with "Community Engagement" since the term is too broad for the needs of the Faculty Senate.
 - The problems that the Committee wants to look at and be brought to the committee are from across experience, rank, background of the colleges.
 - It was decided that "Well-Being and Retention" of faculty should be the emphasis of the committee, therefore this will be reflected in the proposed new name of the Committee.

- The proposed committee charge will be: “The committee addresses the well-being of the university community by advocating for policies, initiatives, and changes that facilitate success and retention of all faculty. Through dialogue, collaboration, and information-gathering, the committee strives to amplify faculty voices and address concerns to promote a supportive, thriving academic community for all.”
- After a discussion about the procedures to move forward with the changes in committee name and charge, it was decided to make a motion to this effect, under New Business in this session.
- *Environmental Quality & Sustainability* (Turnipseed): No report available.
- *Evaluation* (Davidson):
 - There is plan to put out a faculty survey in the near future to find out what issues faculty are concerned about, e.g. evaluation criteria for faculty at various statuses (instructor, tenured, and non-tenured), what are the workloads for each of these positions, what are the differences between medical and academic schools, etc.
 - There was an acknowledgement that the annual survey was not done last spring. There is consideration for changing it by splitting it into smaller sections on specific themes and putting out mini-surveys throughout the year.
- *Faculty Salaries & Benefits* (Pavelescu)
 - Over the summer Andrei met with the Executive Director of Institutional Research
 - There was a long discussion about receiving some education on the meaning of the new high deductible in our health plan.
- *Research & Creative Activities* (Migaud):
 - The committee plans to continue programs from previous years, but are waiting for commitment of financial support for the activities.
 - They planned to have a program where previous recipients present their research from the past to showcase their success. Marie has already reached out to caucus leaders to help identify faculty willing to participate.
 - The committee is also looking for any faculty willing to collaborate with other researchers so it may assist them in finding partners in their research.
- *Teaching, Learning, & Technology* (Vrana):
 - Over the summer, Laura did preliminary work for the committee, making connections with the people at ILC, determining the types of support that might be needed, relating to teaching and learning gaps.
 - The committee will continue the discussions around AI and teaching that are ongoing across the university, as well as the transition to R1 status that is being pursued by the university.

- There was a discussion on how the new Alabama law restricting the use of DEI criteria will affect current federally-sponsored grants that have requirements for DEI consideration.
- *University Planning & Development (Walker):*
 - The committee is getting organized for the upcoming academic year and hopes to meet in the next few weeks.
- *University Policies & Handbook (Ní Chadhain):*
 - At the end of the last academic year, there were four bills/handbook proposals that were in front of the Council of Academic Deans/Leaders (CAD/CAL).
 - The 1st one, FS1025 “Mid-Probationary Review” which would promote the sharing of information review materials with the department P&T committees, came back as denied by CAD. The up side is that the current USA Faculty Handbook does not specifically prohibit the sharing of these materials.
 - FS1026 “Leave & Sabbatical policy revisions” which would have allowed adding a new category of external fellowship to the leave policy. CAD deleted this portion of the proposal, so the committee will review the rest of the text of the revised proposal and determine whether to submit the remaining portion to the next FS plenary meeting, or submit the changed proposal to the Compromise Committee to mediate the changes.
 - In the meantime, Sinéad met with the VP of Research & Economic Development about the possibility of adopting a process for applying for external fellowships that faculty and college deans would need to follow to make clearer for what is expected and when. This would be more of an administrative solution rather than a faculty handbook solution.
 - The two remaining handbook proposals, FS1027 “Ombudsperson policy revision” and FS1028 “NTT Promotion Policy revision” have been presented and we are waiting for a response from CAD.
 - In the upcoming year Handbook Committee will be looking into academic integrity, grievances, etc. on the consistency of those policies across various colleges.
 - There was a question about the status of a 3rd promotion tier for non-tenured faculty. This proposed policy has been stuck at “step 5” level of the approval process for five years. CAD should have voted on it, but has basically tabled it. Sinéad believes the reason may be essentially an economic one, since the cost of raises would be a big factor if implemented.
 - The point was raised about the issue of lack of response in a timely manner for proposal put before CAD. Five years is a long time to table an issue, especially since a number of people on CAD from five years ago are no longer with the university. This is true for both CAD and for the faculty senate since the latter does not meet during the summer, causing a delay in response until September.

IV. CAUCUS LEADER REPORTS:

- *Arts & Sciences*: Eleanor ter Horst brought up the issue of “brain drain” and professional leave with the Dean of Arts and Sciences. There was an acknowledgement that low salaries are an issue, but they are looking at possible non-salary benefits, such as more money for research or other incentives that could assist faculty. In addition, there is consideration for having a faculty forum in the college, either later in this semester or early spring semester.

V. UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- None available. Faculty senators are still receiving their assignments to University Committees so the committees have not yet met.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- Change in the Faculty Senate Bylaw section 3.2.9:
 - A motion was made to propose that the Faculty Senate Bylaws change the name of the current committee “Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee” to “Well-Being and Retention Committee” along with the proposed change in its charge.
 - Having a quorum, it was the consensus of the members to accept the motion and have a formal vote on the matter after the mandatory 28 days for review of the proposal at the September Plenary meeting.
 - The final vote will be taken at that meeting, where a two-thirds majority of a quorum will be needed for passage. If there is no quorum at that meeting, the committee will be dissolved, as required by the new Alabama law.
- Request for nominations for the Faculty Senate Parliamentarian.
 - Christina made a formal request for a volunteer to be our Parliamentarian for the 2024/2025 term of the Faculty Senate.
 - Nominations can be submitted to any member of the FS Executive Committee. All qualified nominations will be voted on at the next Plenary meeting.

VII. GUEST SPEAKER: Michael Chambers, Chief Economic Development Officer, Interim VP of Research and Economic Development

- Announcements:
 - On Sept. 26th at 2:00 pm, Dr. Chuck Barber, Head of DEI at NSF will be on campus. He may be able to answer any questions regarding DEI requirements for federally-funded grants

- On Oct. 29th at 3:00 pm will be the 3rd annual USA Research & Technology Showcase. Speaker will be Lt. Gen. Joe Hartman, from the U.S. Army Cyber Command.
- Mr. Chambers came to talk about I-Corps (NSF Innovation Corps).
 - The University has access to \$100,000 in participant support money from I-Corps.
 - The University has done the program for students on a regular basis for the last six years.
 - This year there will be a faculty-only program which last 4 weeks.
 - The purpose is to take a concept, or a product, or technology that is STEM-related and use the \$5,000 grant to go to conferences or to interview people.
 - The money would have to be spent by the end on this year (2024) because the money will not be available in January.
 - It is possible to collaborate on this, but the team, as a while, will only get a total of \$5,000.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Donna Streater wanted to highlight a problem with using Canvas in courses. If you blueprint your course over, or if you copy your course over from a course shell, your discussions will automatically default where your students cannot reply. To avoid this problem, you will have to go into every one of your assignments and check the box to allow discussions.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm.