

## Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso

### Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting of March 10, 2020

**ITEM 1. Call to order.** Faculty Senate (FS) President Sandor Dorgo called the Faculty Senate to order on March 10 at 3:04 PM in the Blumberg Auditorium of the UTEP Library.

**ITEM 2. Determination of Quorum** was made by President Dorgo, who called for a motion to seat the alternate members. That motion was made by Luis Rene Contreras-Sapien (Engineering) and seconded by Gina Núñez-Mchiri (Liberal Arts). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 3. Consent Agenda:** President Dorgo reminded the Senate that the February 11, 2020 FS Meeting minutes were uploaded on FS website. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Levi Martin (Liberal Arts) and seconded by Omar Badreddin (Engineering). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 4. Acceptance or Modification of Agenda:** President Dorgo requested a motion to approve the agenda for today's meeting as distributed electronically to the Senate membership. The motion to approve this agenda was made by Esther Al-Tabaa (Liberal Arts) and seconded by Paul Carrola (Education). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 5. Announcements:** President Dorgo.

- A. President Dorgo reminded the FS that every year at the May FS Meeting new Senate Officers are elected. President Dorgo's term expires in August 2020, so he cannot be reelected. Gina Núñez-Mchiri (Liberal Arts) is currently Vice President and President Elect, but election is open to any faculty. The positions of FS Vice-President and Secretary are also open. The FS Nomination Committee plans to nominate candidates for these positions, but other nominations are also welcome. President Dorgo encouraged FS members to ask colleagues for possible nominations, and to send these nominations to Vladik Kreinovich, member of the FS Nomination Committee.
- B. President Dorgo updated the FS on the Provost Search. The FS Executive Council was scheduled to have breakfast meetings with all the candidates, where members of the Executive Council could ask questions about FS-related issues. For each candidate, there was also an Open Forum that all the faculty was encouraged to attend. President Dorgo encouraged all FS members who attended these forums to share their opinion of the candidates, and to invite their faculty -- who attended these forums -- to share their opinions as well.
- C. President Dorgo informed the FS that the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) faculty survey is still open. He asked all FS members to encourage faculty in their departments to participate. The more faculty participate in this survey, the more representative it will become, the more reliable the results will be, and the better chances that these results will be acted on. He also re-emphasized that all the replies are strictly confidential. Some faculty who have started filling the survey noticed that it is often possible to uniquely identify a respondent since the survey asks about the department, the year of PhD, ethnicity, and other information based on which a person can be identified. However, this is administered by a third party – namely, by

Harvard staff, they are retaining unique identifiers, and only aggregate data will be released – and only for units with more than 5 participants. The whole procedure of the new survey has been designed by Harvard researchers who specialize in this survey format. This procedure has been successfully used at many institutions with no confidentiality breaches. At UTEP, the anonymized data will be handled by CIERP, by the same center that handled the last FS survey of administrators two years ago, when confidentiality was strictly preserved. The Center's staff is trained and regularly re-trained in preserving confidentiality. Interim Provost Wiebe assured the FS that the administration is interested in honest opinions and replies that reflect the true opinions and concerns. Because of this, it is in the administration's best interest to make sure that the confidentiality of the participating faculty is guaranteed.

- D. President Dorgo and Interim Provost Wiebe updated FS on the coronavirus situation. A special task force has been organized at UTEP, it works on the corresponding issues in close collaboration with UT System and with the local health authorities. At present, the focus of the task force is on prevention and planning. Already 62 universities nationally canceled all face-to-face classes, we need to be prepared. Resources are available to faculty, including OneDrive and Blackboard. A special Blackboard Essential website will go live tomorrow, this website will make it easier for faculty who are new to Blackboard to learn how to use at least its main features. Contingency plans are being developed, the deans are working on them. Interim Provost Wiebe encouraged faculty to start thinking on how they will teach their classes online if needed. For example, student presentations can be done online, some faculty are doing it already. If a class has a strong lab component, a good idea is to have as many labs as possible now. Some things cannot be done online. In some such cases, we may even extend the teaching beyond the semester. We will need to be as flexible and as creative as we can be. For example, a good idea may be to pair faculty who are not very skilled in online teaching with faculty who already have an experience in it. John Moya (Engineering) suggested that for some classes with labs, a good idea is to have labs open during the Spring break; the problem is that by regulations, there must be a TA in a lab at all times, and normally TAs are not available during the spring break. Interim Provost Wiebe suggested to take all such requests to the deans. The situation is different in different colleges, the deans know this situation better than outsiders, and UTEP administration is willing to help each dean with whatever measures the college decides is appropriate.

#### **ITEM 6. Reports of Standing or Special Committees**

- A. Gina Nunez, FS Vice President, presented to the FS the final report on the Faculty Forum that was held on January 24, 2020. The report is posted on the FS website. At this Forum, all colleges were represented, as well as faculty of all levels. The results will be shared with upper administration. The results of this forum will be also discussed with the Provost and the President during their forthcoming meetings with the FS Executive Council. These results will be supplemented by the results of the Women Faculty survey and by the results of the COACHE survey – this is one more reason to encourage all the faculty to participate in the COACHE survey.
- B. Student Grievance Committee – Daniel Tillman, Chair. Dr. Tillman explained that currently there are three different documents that describe the student grievance

process. These documents are placed on the FS website. The problem is that there are some inconsistencies between these documents: for example, when one document says that a chair *must* be informed, another says that the chair *should* be informed. The committee decided to eliminate these inconsistencies; the committee's suggestions are also placed on the FS website. Most proposed changes are minor editorial changes. In addition to these changes, the committee also proposes a substantial change. At present, when the student's complaint against an instructor is assigned to a conciliator, a notification is sent to the instructor's chair and dean, to the FS President, and to the Provost. The committee believes only the chair should be notified -- otherwise, even if the complaint is later dismissed, the instructor may still be negatively impacted by the very fact of such a complaint. Interim Provost Wiebe informed the FS that the notification of the Provost was added to the rules, so that the Provost will be able to nudge in case the complaint is not processed fast -- before this notification was added, some complaints were not acted on for up to 2 years. It was noticed that the student grievance procedure is also described in the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HoOP), which also needs to be adjusted if we change the wording in other documents. The FS therefore decided to table this motion, and to resume discussions when the committee comes up with the proposed changes in HoOP as well.

- C. Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Lori Acosta, committee member, presented several proposals approved by the committee. Richard Langford (Science) asked whether the proposals affecting Math and Computer Science departments were agreed upon by both departments. Dr. Art Duval from Department of Mathematical Sciences and Dr. Vladik Kreinovich from Department of Computer Science assured him that the Computer Science's proposal of a new Discrete Structures course was indeed agreed on by both departments.

A motion was made to approve all the proposals approved by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The motion passed unanimously.

## **ITEM 7. Presentations**

- A. Tami Keating, Office of the Provost, informed the FS about the Faculty Grievance procedures as described in the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HoOP), Section V, Chapter 7. Ms. Keating distributed leaflets containing the corresponding parts of the HoOP -- the same leaflets that she distributed to the chairs when she gave a similar presentation to them.

Jorge Aguilar Cruz (Liberal Arts) suggested that people may be reluctant to use this procedure because of fear of retaliation. Interim Provost Wiebe explained that retaliation should not be tolerated, it is a completely different issue, not covered by these rules. Any complaint about retaliation should be reported to the Equal Opportunity Office, where these complaints are investigated by different people. Similarly, any complaints about discrimination and any Title IX complaints follow a completely different procedure.

Vladik Kreinovich (Engineering) asked to clarify the relation between this part of HoOP and the possibility to complain to the Faculty Welfare Committee as described in another part of HoOP -- the FS bylaws. Ms. Keating explained that both venues are open, but the complaining faculty should know that if he or she plans to also file an

official grievance, there are strict deadlines for this. Interim Provost Wiebe explained that the current dual procedure was introduced by the FS when he was FS President. In his opinion, the role of the Faculty Welfare Committee is to not so much to investigate the complaints – the committee does not have the power to do it, but rather to think of how to avoid such conflict situations in the future – and of course, if needed, report to the President if the committee believes that the decision concerning a specific grievance did not take into proper account some important aspects of the situation and is, thus, perceived by the committee as not fully fair.

Meagan Kendall (Engineering) suggested that 5 working days may be too short a time for a person to file a grievance. President Dorgo emphasized that this regulation was proposed and approved by the FS, and, if needed, it can be modified by the FS. This issue is within the jurisdiction of the FS Faculty Welfare Committee. This committee is scheduled to discuss this issue at its March 11 meeting and, if needed, at the following meetings. All interested faculty are encouraged to send their suggestion to Vladik Kreinovich, Committee Chair.

Interim Provost Wiebe also mentioned that since this policy is applicable both to faculty and to staff, it may be a good idea to discuss related issues with the Staff Council as well.

Gina Nunez (Liberal Arts) asked what the typical faculty grievances are that are handled by the Provost's office. Ms. Keating explained that most issues are resolved before they get to the Provost's office, but not all of them. Usually, it is a conflict between two faculty members. Some administrators falsely believe that if they do not do anything, the conflict will somehow get resolved, but this usually does not happen. Instead, the conflict festers, and, as a result, some faculty leave UTEP. Fast resolution is one of the reasons why the timeline in the grievance procedures is so compressed.

- B. Azuri Gonzalez, Center for Community Engagement, made a presentation on the community engagement in general and on the recent UTEP's Carnegie Community Classification. The information is available on the FS website.

#### **ITEM 8. Old or Unfinished Business**

None.

#### **ITEM 9. New Business**

None.

**ITEM 10. Adjournment:** There being no further business before the Senate, President Dorgo entertained a motion to adjourn. So moved by Phillip Hill (Liberal Arts), and seconded by Paul Carrola (Education), and unanimously approved by the Senators. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM.

Note: The next meeting will be on April 14, 2020.