

Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso

Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of April 14, 2020

ITEM 1. Call to order. Faculty Senate (FS) President Sandor Dorgo called the Faculty Senate to order on at 3:12 PM.

ITEM 2. Determination of Quorum was made by President Dorgo, who called for a motion to seat the alternate members. The motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 3. Consent Agenda: President Dorgo reminded the Senate that the minutes of the special March 28, 2020 FS Meeting were uploaded on the FS website. He moved to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

President Dorgo also reminded the Senate that the minutes of the March 10, 2020 FS meeting were also uploaded on the FS website. On behalf of the Executive Council of the FS, he made the following motion related to these minutes:

Whereas we acknowledge the importance of the new interdisciplinary research area of Data Science that combines mathematics, statistics, business, computer science, and other disciplines as noted by President Wilson's formation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Data Science to coordinate efforts of different departments,

Whereas we agree with the efforts of the Department of Mathematical Sciences in designing new courses and new programs in data science, and

Whereas the naming of the new undergraduate course, minor, and concentration proposed by the Department of Mathematical Science was not previously discussed with representatives of other related disciplines, and that the Departments of Mathematical Science and Computer Science have agreed to discuss changes in naming that considers the interdisciplinary nature of data science,

We move to separate approval of the naming of the Mathematics/Statistics course, minor, and certificate in Data Science from the UGCC report to allow the Department of Mathematical Science time to propose changes in the name with input from the Computer Science Department (which offers courses with overlapping names and content), discussion with Dean Crites who oversees the Ad Hoc Committee on Data Science, and approval by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee.

President Dorgo then proposed a motion to approve the minutes with this correction – of excluding the new Math course and the new Math minor and concentration from the approved UGCC report. Richard Langford (Science) mentioned that a related question that he raised during the March 10, 2020 FS meeting was incorrectly mentioned in the minutes, so he proposed a minor friendly amendment to correct this mention. Thus amended motion to approve the March 10, 2020 minutes passed unanimously.

ITEM 4. Acceptance or Modification of Agenda: President Dorgo proposed a motion to approve the agenda for today's meeting as distributed electronically to the Senate membership. The motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 5. Announcements: President Dorgo.

- A. President Dorgo informed the FS that the UT System 2020 Smartbook is now available in the FS website, it is item 4 on the website. The Smartbook contains useful information about all UT campuses.
- B. On behalf of the FS, President Dorgo congratulated Dr. John Wiebe on being selected UTEP's Provost. In response, Provost Wiebe expressed his thanks to all the UTEP faculty for their helpful and energetic response to the crisis that forced all the classes to be online, and for the willingness of many faculty to creatively engage with the local community in these challenging times. He emphasized that the Provost's office is willing to help the faculty in any way they can.
- C. President Dorgo reminded the Senators that at the next FS meeting on May 5, 2020, the FS will be electing the new FS leadership: the FS President, the FS Vice President, and the FS Secretary. Nominations and self-nominations are welcome, they should go to the FS Nominating Committee – e.g., via Dr. Vladik Kreinovich who is a member of this committee. At the May 5, 2020, FS meeting the Nominating Committee will present a slate of candidates, but nominations from the floor (including self-nominations) are welcome as well.

ITEM 6. Reports of Standing or Special Committees

- A. Student Grievance Committee – Daniel Tillman, Chair. Dr. Tillman reminded the FS that the committee presented its proposal to the FS during the March 10, 2020 meeting. The reaction to this proposal was mostly positive, but it turned out that the proposed changes required the changing of the wording in the UTEP's Handbook of Operating Procedures (HoOP). Because of this need, the FS decided to table this motion and to return to the discussions during the next FS meeting, after the committee proposes the exact wording of the HoOP changes. The modified proposal - including the wording of the HoOP changes - has been posted on the FS website.

Dr. Tillman reminded the FS of the proposed changes. Most of the changes are non-substantial, they make the student grievance process more consistent and transparent by editing some parts of the corresponding documents which are currently inconsistent or confusing. The only substantial change is about who will be automatically informed when a student files a grievance against a faculty member. At present, a copy of the complaint is automatically sent to the faculty member's direct supervisor (which is usually department chair), dean, Provost, and President of the Faculty Senate, to inform all of them that the complaint has been filed and is being investigated. The committee believes that this procedure creates too much unnecessary paperwork, especially taking into account that the Provost and the FS President already have full access to the database containing all the student complaints. The committee therefore proposed that copies of student complaints should be automatically sent only to the faculty member's direct supervisor.

President Dorgo asked whether there were any comments or questions. Since there were none, a motion was made to approve the proposed documents. The motion passed unanimously.

- B. Academic Policy Committee. Sandor Dorgo, committee member, presented several proposals approved by the committee: Academic Calendars for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and Holiday Schedules for 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, and 2023/24.

Emily Christenberry (Pharmacy) expressed a concern that, according to the proposed 2020/21 Academic Calendar, Cesar Chavez Day and Spring Study Day are scheduled for the same week – Cesar Chavez Day on Wednesday March 31, 2021, and the Spring Study Day on Friday April 2, 2020. Having two day with all or some classes off on the same week may be too disruptive for the teaching process. She also noticed that usually, the Cesar Chavez Day is on Friday, but in the proposed calendar, in 2021 it is on Wednesday. Since the date of the 2021 Cesar Chavez Day was marked as tentative in the proposal, she suggested that the committee take this comment into account when making a final decision on this date.

John Moya (Engineering) suggested that it may be a good idea to consider having the Cesar Chavez Day not always on Friday, since otherwise for classes and labs scheduled on Fridays, too many class hours are missed. He also asked whether the timing of the spring break was coordinated with the local school districts. President Dorgo replied that the Academic Policy Committee includes representatives of several UTEP offices who regularly coordinate the spring break schedule with the local school districts. The need for such coordination is the main reason why in the proposed 2021/22 Academic Calendar, the dates of the 2022 spring break are marked as tentative: these dates need to be coordinated with the school districts.

On behalf of the Academic Policy Committee, President Dorgo made a motion to approve the proposed documents, with the recommendation to the Academic Policy committee to take into account the faculty suggestions when forming the final academic calendar – namely, the inconvenience of having the 2021 Cesar Chavez Day and Spring Study Day on the same week, and, if possible, the inconvenience of having the Cesar Chavez Day always on Fridays. The motion passed unanimously.

- C. Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Carla Ellis, Chair, presented several proposals approved by the committee.

Wendy Francis (Psychology) expressed concern about the proposal to make Abnormal Psychology course required for Speech Language Pathology majors, since the Psychology department does not currently have the ability to regularly teach this class to a large group of students. President Dorgo assured her that not too many students take this major, so there is no need to worry about it.

Richard Langford (Science) expressed surprise that one of the proposals included the possibility for students, as part of their degree plan, to take free electives; his own Department of Geological Science tried to propose a similar wording for their own degree plan, but they were told that this was not possible: they needed to have an explicit list of allowed classes. He also expressed a related concern that, starting recently, classes that are not explicitly listed in the degree plan are not counted for financial aid purposes. President Dorgo thanked Dr. Langford for his comments and

recommended the representatives of the corresponding departments to take them into account.

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

ITEM 7. Presentations

- A. Dr. Heather Wilson, UTEP President, presented an update on UTEP's financial situation. The current fiscal year -- that ends on August 31, 2020 -- is the first year of the 2-year state budget. Because of the changes caused by the current pandemic, UTEP has recently revised its 2019/20 budget. There is some reduction in expenses -- e.g., in utilities and travel, and summer enrollment is strong: it is 4% above where we were at the same date last year. Overall, our budget for this fiscal year is OK. There were some proposals to have -- in view of the crisis situation -- a special legislative session to adjust the current fiscal year's budget, but it looks like there is not much support for this proposal, so most probably, we will be OK.

The regular legislative session will start in January 2021, and there is a strong possibility that the legislators will change budget allocations for the second year 2020/21 of this two-year cycle. The main reason for this possibility is that revenues are reduced. Oil and gas prices are down, but, contrary to what many people think, they are not the major source of revenue for the State of Texas; the major source of revenue is sales tax -- and sales taxes have strongly decreased, which is hurting the Texas budget. The second piece of challenge is that, in contrast to Summer 2020 enrollment, enrollment for Fall 2020 is not strong yet. In general, we face a decrease in enrollment. Because of these two factors, for the fiscal year 2020/21, we expect a decrease in state funding. Estimates of this decrease range from optimistic 3-4% to pessimistic 15%. Even a 15% cut will not be a disaster, since only 20% of our budget comes from the state sources; however, such a cut will be significant. To minimize the impact of this possible cut, we put a chill (not a complete freeze) on hiring, we slowed down our expansion projects.

In addition to state funding, we expect to get about 24 million dollars of federal help in accordance with the CARE act. We have started planning how to distribute this money to students in the most efficient way. Some students are disproportionately affected -- e.g., students who used to have steady jobs but are now unemployed because of the crisis. Our main objective is to keep all our students on track. An additional problem is that we have not yet received criteria on how we are allowed to distribute this federal money; hopefully the Feds will come up with some criteria next week.

Senate President Dorgo thanked President Wilson for coming to the FS meeting and giving us this informative update. He also asked her to comment on the fears that many faculty have -- that because of the forthcoming budget cuts, contracts with non-tenure track faculty may not be renewed, and that tenured faculty may face furloughs. President Wilson replied that so far our budget is in reasonably good shape, summer enrollment is high, and we had reduced expenditures in utilities and travel, but of course, longer-term there is a lot of uncertainty. At this moment, it is critically important to encourage students to enroll in the Fall. Many students are hesitant, we need to make them feel that faculty care about their success. The University will

continue to try its best to provide financial assistance to as many students as possible. We also face another problem: we expect to have about 3000 graduates this Spring, and in the crisis situations, it will be difficult even for good well-qualified students to find jobs. One way to help is to encourage promising students to go to graduate school.

Ramon Ravelo (Physics) asked if, in addition to federal help, there will be help from the state funds. President Wilson explained that, in contrast to the federal government, the State of Texas cannot print money, so its abilities are limited by its revenues. Some help is (and will be) coming from the UT System's special funds. At present, we get some help from these funds for dining and housing, more help is expected.

In conclusion, Senate President Dorgo once again thanked President Wilson for her presentation. In response, President Wilson joined Provost Wiebe in thanking the faculty for all their efforts. Everyone on campus is helping each other, and, because of the joint efforts, we are having a successful transition to online education. She encouraged all the faculty, if needed, to send questions and suggestions to her at hwilson@utep.edu.

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. The motion was unanimously approved by the Senators. The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 PM.

Note: The next meeting will be on May 5, 2020, it will be probably last for 2.5 hours, since there are many items to discuss.