

Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso

Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of May 5, 2020

ITEM 1. Call to order. Faculty Senate (FS) President Sandor Dorgo called the Faculty Senate to order on at 3:01 PM.

ITEM 2. Determination of Quorum was made by President Dorgo, who called for a motion to seat the alternate members. The motion was made by Gina Nunez-Mchiri, FS Vice President, seconded by Jay Stratton (Liberal Arts). The motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 3. Consent Agenda: President Dorgo reminded the Senate that the minutes of the April 14, 2020 FS Meeting were uploaded on the FS website. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was made by Luis Contreras (Engineering), seconded by Ana Schwartz (Liberal Arts). The motion 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. Elections.

- A. Election of officers for 2020-2021 academic year. On behalf of the FS Nominating Committee, Vladik Kreinovich, member of the committee, proposed to elect:
- Gina Nunez-Mchiri, currently FS Vice President, as 2020-2021 FS President,
 - Daniel Tillman (Education) as the next Vice President, and
 - Andrew Fleck (Liberal Arts) as the next Secretary.

There were no nominations from the floor, so President Dorgo proposed three motions to approve each of these three candidates. The motions passed unanimously. President Dorgo congratulated the new leadership team that will take over at the start of the Fall semester.

- B. Election of UTEP representatives for the Faculty Advisory Council (FAC). President Dorgo reminded the FS that each campus of the UT System elects two representatives for the UT System-wide Faculty Advisory Council. This council meets three times a year -- one time in the Fall and two times in the Spring -- to discuss issues of interest to all UT System faculty. One of the institution's representatives is usually the FS President. In the past, the second UTEP representative was the FS Vice President. However, as Gina Nunez-Mchiri – who is currently one of UTEP's representatives at FAC – observed that most UT schools have the Past FS President as the second representative – at least for the first year -- to allow continuity. In view of this observation, she proposed that, in addition to the FS Senate President,
- for the first academic year 2020-2021, the Past FS President Sandor Dorgo be selected as the second representative, and
 - in the second academic year 2021-2022, the FS Vice President Daniel Tillman will become the second UTEP representative.

She proposed a motion to approve this slate. The motion passed unanimously. In accordance with the UT System regulations, the FS recommendation will be forwarded to President Wilson for the final approval.

ITEM 6. Announcements: President Dorgo.

- A. President Dorgo reminded the FS that the Recovery Task Force was recently established at UTEP, chaired by Dr. Stephen Crites, Dean of the Graduate School. This Task Force has representation from faculty, students, staff, and administration. Its main task is to recommend guidelines and policies to President's Cabinet for returning to campus in the Fall – to the extent to which this return will be possible.

The committee met for the first time on April 27, 2020, President Dorgo was invited to attend as an observer. During this meeting the Task Force decided on its structure, and formed subcommittees focusing on specific items. Seven such subcommittees are being formed, based on the following tasks:

- Safety, security, and community impact
- Course scheduling, course formats, and teaching excellence
- Physical presence on campus
- Faculty and staff support and welfare
- Students support and welfare
- Communications

President Dorgo emphasized that these are the names of the tasks, not the official names of the subcommittees. In addition to these tasks, other important issues were discussed at the April 27 meeting such as budget and financials.

On behalf of the FS, President Dorgo and Vice President Nunez-Mchiri requested more faculty representation on the Task Force. One of the concerns of some FS members was that while the current Task Force has three faculty members: Stella Quinones (Engineering), Alvaro Gurovich (Health Sciences), and David Griffin (Liberal Arts), all three of them are chairs, in this sense they represent administration as well as faculty, so it is desirable to also have a direct representation of faculty. Vice President Nunez-Mchiri mentioned that faculty have specific concerns. For example, many faculty have vulnerabilities – age, illnesses that they do not want to disclose, vulnerable relatives living with them – because of which they are reluctant to go back to campus.

Also, the Task Force need expertise, and UTEP faculty have a lot of expertise. It is desirable to identify faculty who has related expertise, especially evidence-based expertise, and who are willing to serve on the appropriate subcommittees – taking into account that this requires a very serious time commitment. President Dorgo and Vice President Nunez are currently actively looking for faculty members with such expertise. So far, they have found one such volunteer: Dr. Douglas Watts (Biological Sciences), a specialist in biohazards. Dr. Watts is currently Director of Biosafety Level 3 Laboratories and Director, Infectious Diseases and Immunology and Cancer, of the Border Biomedical Research Center. He seems like a perfect match for the Task Force. There definitely are many other faculty with expertise who can help. President Dorgo and Vice President Nunez suggested that we contact them with any information about such faculty. Meanwhile, they proposed a motion to recommend including Dr. Nunez-Mchiri (as the incoming FS President) and Dr. Watts into the Task Force.

In the discussion, David Zubia (Engineering) informed the FS that many colleges have started similar task forces – for example, he is a member of such a task force in the College of Engineering. In his experience, these task forces are not well coordinated with task forces from other colleges, and not well coordinated with the UTEP-wide task force; a better coordination is needed. Vice President Nunez-Mchiri agreed that a better coordination is needed, and she is willing to help with this coordination. She emphasized that we need to share best practices coming from different colleges and different departments – but we also need to take into account that different colleges have different needs. For example, while faculty from many colleges are understandably reluctant to immediately go back to campus, schools of Pharmacy and Nursing, who are on the front line of the battle against the disease, need face-to-face presence to better train their students.

In the resulting voting, the motion to recommend Dr. Nunez and Dr. Watts for inclusion in the Task Force passed unanimously.

- B. FS President Dorgo informed the FS that a few days ago he was invited as a guest to an online meeting of department chairs, where Mark McGurk, UTEP VP for Business Affairs, gave a presentation on the budget. VP McGurk confirmed what President Wilson said during the April 14th FS meeting that the budget situation is uncertain, that in the next academic year we may expect budget cuts: optimistic predictions are 5% cuts, pessimistic up to 15% cuts. VP McGurk confirmed that there are no plans for position cuts, no plans for furloughs – in good contrast to several universities across the U.S. that are already implementing furloughs. What we do have is (soft) freeze on new hires.

VP McGurk reiterated that the critical thing is the Fall semester. Summer enrollment is good, better than at the same period last year, but in terms of Fall enrollment, we are somewhat behind. It is important that faculty encourage students to enroll in the Fall classes.

VP McGurk also emphasized that while we are in the middle of the 2-year Texas budget cycle (which is normally fixed for two years), this time we expect that the second year budget will be changed, and in January, discussions will start about the budget for the new 2-year period.

UTEP lost additional revenues from special events. We also had to pay back about 750K to students to reimburse the corresponding parts of their parking fees, meal plans, etc.

Good news is that we will receive about 24 million dollars of the CARES Act money. Half of this amount will go directly to students in need, the other half can be used for the institution's usage.

At the end, Mark McGurk volunteered to repeat such a presentation to other audiences if needed.

Provost Wiebe supplemented the information about the CARES Act money. He informed the FS that UTEP already has access to the part of that money that needs to go to students. However, the Department of Education warned all the institutions that they have to follow the Department of Education guidelines on how to distribute the money, otherwise we will have to pay all the money back – and the Department of Education have not yet come up with the guidelines. UTEP is prepared, we have all the infrastructure in place to distribute the money, but we need to wait for the guidelines.

Several FS members expressed interest in budget developments, so President Dorgo asked Provost Wiebe and President Wilson whether it is a good idea to have a special FS meeting -- or even a townhall meeting -- so that VP McGurk can repeat his presentation to the faculty. President Wilson replied that the budget situation did not change since the last townhall meeting and since her presentation at the April 14 FS meeting. So, in her opinion, it would be more productive to have such a presentation when something changes. The UT System postponed submissions of institutions' budgets. Hopefully, the situation will become clearer in mid-July or even earlier. President Dorgo invited her to give a presentation to the FS on the budgeting issues if there are any changes, to which she agreed.

ITEM 7. Reports of Standing or Special Committees

- A. Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UGCC) – Carla Ellis, Committee Chair, presented seven proposals approved during the April 27 meeting of UGCC. During the discussion, noticing that in the short report, only one line was devoted to the College of Engineering's proposal of a new BSc degree in Aerospace Engineering, Vice President Gina Nunez-Mchiri asked whether all relevant documentation has been presented. In reply, Jack Chess (Engineering) assured the FS that all the supporting documents are in place, and President Dorgo showed to the FS the supporting materials as posted on the FS website. The motion was made to approve the report. The motion passed unanimously.
- B. Graduate Scholarship Committee – Fernanda Wagstaff, Committee Chair, presented new guidelines on deciding who gets the graduate scholarships. In the past, the Graduate Scholarship Committee provided the ranking of all the proposals, but as the number of proposals have grown, the committee no longer has manpower and expertise to thoroughly consider each proposal. The committee, in consultation with the Graduate School, decided to give more power to academic units, where faculty know each of their students and can therefore meaningfully decide which students are more deserving.

According to the proposed guidelines, each unit should set up a graduate scholarship committee, develop its own rubrics, and regularly submit the ranked list of applicants – with rationale for ranking – to the FS Graduate Scholarship Committee. The FS Graduate Scholarship Committee will no longer make decisions itself. Its new role will be to oversee, to audit the unit's decisions, to make sure that the unit's guidelines have been followed and that there is no perceived or real conflict of interest. In the discussion, several faculty – Luis Contreras (Engineering), Gaspare Genna (Liberal Arts), Vladik Kreinovich (Engineering), Richard Langford (Science), and Ana Schwartz (Liberal Arts) -- expressed the need to clarify the proposed guidelines: (1) to explicitly mention that the ranking submitted to the FS Graduate Scholarship Committee should be made at the college/school level, (2) to mention that these guidelines are limited to scholarships overseen by the Graduate Schools (and are not intended to complicate awarding of scholarships which are usually decided on the level of department or college), (3) to mention that in colleges with diverse programs – such as College of Liberal Arts – it is probably desirable to form committees in individual programs so that a college-wide committee would combine

rankings of students from different programs, and (4) to explicitly describe how should interdisciplinary programs be handled.

President Dorgo suggested that the motion to approve these guidelines be tabled, so that the committee can present the clarified guidelines at the next (June 9th) FS meeting.

- C. Teaching Effectiveness Committee – Laird Smith, Chair, presented the committee report. The committee met with Angela Lucero who is in charge of Open Resources at UTEP Library. The committee is currently analyzing how to best develop and use these resources.

During the discussion of this report, Vice President Nunez-Mchiri mentioned that the issues related to developing and using open resources were discussed at the past online meeting of the UT System Faculty Advisory Council (FAC). Several UT campuses – e.g., UT Dallas – give credit to faculty for developing open access materials. FAC decided to form an ad hoc committee on open access materials. This committee has been working for some time, and in 2-3 weeks it plans to generate UT System-wide recommendations and guidelines.

Deepanwita Dasgupta (Liberal Arts) informed the FS that some UTEP departments are actively working on developing such materials, and in this, they would like to have advice, help, and support. For example, every two years, Department of Philosophy teaches ethics classes to MARC students. As part of this course, students write essays commenting on specific problems. The department plans to edit these essays and store them in a special depository that would help future students studying this topic. President Dorgo recommended that interested folks should get in contact with the Teaching Effectiveness Committee.

- D. Research Committee – Thenral Mangadu, Committee Chair, presented a committee report. The committee has reviewed proposals for Research Institute funding. This time, there were only funds to support 12 projects. The funding decisions were made based on the rubrics that were agreed on by this committee some time ago.

The committee also emphasized that research is – and should remain -- one of our main priorities. This semester, with a sudden switch to online only teaching, teaching was our main focus, but we need not to forget about research.

The committee also expressed concern that as of now, all requests to Dodson Graduate Student funding involving human subjects are automatically rejected, but this is not the right approach: researchers worldwide have adapted human subject research to the new situation, so if a researcher can convincingly explain how his/her research can be adapted, then this research should be considered for funding together with other proposals.

In a discussion, Russell Chianelli (Science) suggested that we specifically need to focus on interdisciplinary research and teaching. He also emphasized that some research skills require face-to-face interactions, e.g., teaching students how to give presentations. Dr. Chianelli also asked to which committee should we send requests and ideas that involve both teaching and research. President Dorgo suggested that all such requests should be sent to the FS leadership who will then forward it to the appropriate committees.

Rene Contreras (Engineering) suggested that, to get a better picture of Research Institute funding, it will be helpful if the report should state how many proposals from each college/school were submitted and how many were funded.

ITEM 8. Presentations

There were no presentations.

ITEM 9. Old or Unfinished Business

None.

ITEM 10. New Business

John Moya (Engineering) expressed concern that the experience of people who successfully taught online is not always taken into account when proposals for effective teaching are made. As a result, some of the seriously considered proposals are not realistic and/or are not fully thought through. For example, proposals on cleaning labs and classrooms after each session do not explain who will do the cleaning, where cleaning supplies would come from, etc. Proposals to teach some classes partly face-to-face and partly by teleconferencing do not take into account that most labs and classrooms do not have videoconferencing equipment. On the other hand, there are reasonable experience-based proposals which are not implemented: e.g., for some specific labs that take only a few weeks for each student, instead of requiring each student to buy the corresponding equipment – that will be rarely used – it makes more sense to have students borrow this equipment from UTEP for a few weeks. In general, faculty who have talked labs online learned what to do and what not to do. It is desirable to take their expertise into account when planning future teaching.

President Dorgo appreciated these concerns and ideas, and suggested that faculty who have such an experience and/or ideas should share them with the Teaching Effectiveness Committee and with the Recovery Task Force.

ITEM 11. 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 5:00 PM.

Note: The next meeting will be on June 9, 2020.