

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

### Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of July 14, 2020

**ITEM 1. Call to order.** Faculty Senate (FS) President Sandor Dorgo called the Faculty Senate to order at 3:02 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 Meagan Kendall (Engineering), seconded by Jay Stratton (Liberal Arts). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 3. Consent Agenda:** President Dorgo reminded the Senate that the minutes of the June 8, 2020 FS Meeting were uploaded on the FS website. Based on several clarifying emails that he received, several corrections were made. He asked for a motion to approve the corrected minutes. The motion was made by Gaspare Genna (Liberal Arts), seconded by Ana Schwartz (Liberal Arts). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 4. Acceptance or Modification of Agenda:** President Dorgo asked for a motion to approve the agenda for today's meeting. Vice President Nunez-Mchiri suggested to add a report from Committee on Committees. The motion to accept the modified agenda was made by Hugo Gutierrez (Science), seconded by Natalia Villanueva (Engineering). The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 5. Announcements:** President Dorgo informed the Faculty Senate that UTEP Title IX Office needs faculty to volunteer as Faculty Standby Advisors. Volunteers will be trained and, when needed, asked to serve in the hearing process. The training will be held on August 5 and 6, the new duties start on August 14. President Dorgo encouraged Faculty Senate members to volunteer themselves and also to spread the word with the faculty of their departments.

#### **ITEM 7. Reports of Standing or Special Committees**

- A. Executive Council – Gina Nunez-Mchiri, Senate Vice President and Faculty Senate Representative on the UTEP Recovery Task Force, presented the proposed Faculty Guidance on Wearing Mask documents: a longer 4-page document and a shorter 2-page short version. The purpose of the shorter version is to print it and to keep a copy in our offices. These two documents summarize the advice of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as evidence-based recommendations provided by UTEP faculty specializing on viruses, aerosol, and related issues. It is imperative for faculty to serve as models in following health recommendations, to ensure that until the threat is gone, UTEP will continue to be a mask-only campus. Signage will be posted everywhere, on elevators, etc. These documents have been discussed with the Staff Council, with the Student Governance Association. Dr. Nunez-Mchiri proposed that the Faculty Senate approve these recommendations, to show to the faculty (and to the university as a whole) that this is not just something coming from a task force, it is a document that the whole faculty approves – via their representatives on the Faculty Senate.

Melissa Warak (Liberal Arts) asked whether students will be required to wear masks when on campus. Dr. Nunez-Mchiri replied that the answer is yes. Everyone coming back to campus will have to go through the corresponding compliance training, the modules of this training are being worked on. Every unit will get a care kit with masks, cleaners, etc. Students who cannot afford to buy masks will be supplied with masks by UTEP.

She also emphasized that anyone who has special needs should communicate these needs to Human Resources Office. No one should be forced to be on campus if health concerns does not allow this person to come to campus.

Ana Schwartz (Liberal Arts) commented that these documents can help departments develop their own return-to-work policies. Dr. Nunez-Mchiri recommended that appropriate parts of these documents should be copied into the syllabi, to emphasize the importance of these issues. These are issues of safety, there are issues, ultimately, of life and death.

Carla Ellis (Nursing) asked whether wearing masks is a requirement or a recommendation, and how it will be enforced. Dr. Nunez-Mchiri and Dr. Wiebe replied that wearing masks is a requirement already, it is clearly stated so on the Recovery website. This should be enforced by collective commitment, similarly to non-smoking policy. President Wilson confirmed that the main way to enforce this policy is to create and maintain the culture of safety. If someone violates the policy, we should remind this person in a positive way.

President Dorgo asked for a vote on these guidelines. The motion passed unanimously.

- B. Committee on Committees – Maria Duarte, Committee Chair, informed the FS that for many committee members, their term expires in 2020. We need volunteers to serve on these committees starting Fall 2020. We need to start the process early, since committee members need to be approved by the Faculty Senate, so it is desirable to have representatives of all colleges on all the committees proposed before the next Faculty Senate meeting – which will be on September 8.

## **ITEM 8. Presentations**

- A. Gina Nunez-Mchiri, Vice President of the Faculty Senate and Faculty Senate Representative on the Recovery Task Force, informed the FS about the Task Force activities. The Task Force is currently reviewing the corresponding compliance modules; the Task Force is asking the faculty on advice on how best to communicate the appropriate information to faculty, staff, and students. Dr. Nunez-Mchiri also asked the faculty to check the UTEP recovery website; if some information is missing there, we need to inform Dr. Nunez-Mchiri or other task force members. 28 members of the Task Force are doing a lot of work, any help and advice is appreciated.
- B. President Wilson started her presentation by thanking all the members of the Recovery Task Force and everyone who helped put together the Fall schedule. We have 3200 sections, and putting together a 3200-piece puzzle was not an easy task.  
President Wilson informed the FS that UTEP continues to monitor health conditions. By end of July, decisions will be made on athletic and extra-curriculum activities.

On budget: the budget proposal for 2020/21 has to be submitted later this week. An 11-page document explaining the proposed budget was sent to all deans and chairs; at the request of President Dorgo, this document will be posted on the FS website. UTEP has tried to minimize the effect of 5% cuts in state funding (for 2019/20 and for 2020/21) on teaching and research. UTEP has saved some money on travel; utilities saved  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million on water and electricity during the lockdown, we also creatively used the CARES act funds, this allows us to partly absorb the funding cuts. As a result of this, we are able to propose a budget with no salary cuts (salaries are flat), and even include some funding for new developments. The budget includes support for the new nursing programs: in psychiatry and in neonatology, two areas very needed for our community.

We also plan to get support for several facilities-related projects. Our priority is the renovation of Liberal Arts Building and of its IT center LACIT, and the new Student Success Center that would bring together all student-helping services.

UTEP also submitted several special requests: for Interdisciplinary Institute for Study of Hispanic Health and for West Texas Water Institute, both proposals are capitalizing of the expertise that we have in different departments, and both are targeting issues which are very important for the local communities. Another special request is to continue support of our Pharmacy program.

We also make two smaller-size requests: to host US Census Restricted Data Center, one of the secured data centers that would be able to process restricted census data (i.e., data protected from public release by privacy concerns), and to support Legal Studies.

Provost Wiebe shared good news about the international student status – that the Federal Government went back on its original decision to require these students to take some face-to-face or hybrid courses, so this is no longer a problem. He was glad to see how many faculty stepped up with active support and suggestions when this issue arose.

President Dorgo opened the floor for questions. He asked the first question: that while the Provost's Office recommends using Blackboard and MS Teams for online learning, many faculty prefer Zoom. Provost Wiebe explained his office's recommendation: UTEP IT has spent a lot of money on Blackboard. It also has a contract with MS Teams. As a result, IT can provide support for these two platforms, but it does not have enough staff to also support other platforms such as Zoom. Also, limiting the number of possible platforms makes it easier for students: this way, they do not have to learn many platforms. The platform uniformity also helps when a faculty member is sick or has to leave for a week or so – this way, another faculty can pick up the course without needing to learn a completely new platform.

The Provost's Office has received many complaints about technology, but most of these complaints are about connectivity, not the platforms themselves. UTEP tries its best to help, students can borrow computers, hotspots, etc.

The currently supported platforms have limitations, but the companies are working on them. For example, we are expecting soon an improved new version of MS Teams, which will enable, e.g., to see up to 49 faces on the same screen.

Also, it is important to emphasize that what is required is only that the basics are on Blackboard: course syllabus, course calendar, and gradebook. Instructors can use other platforms for the actual online teaching.

Ana Schwartz (Liberal Arts) recommended that UTEP also support Zoom. In her experience, MS Teams has problems for students with disabilities – e.g., for visually impaired students, while Zoom is much more accommodating. Also, many faculty are involved in joint research efforts with faculty from other institutions, and many of these institutions use Zoom.

Provost Wiebe replied that he was not aware of any problems with Blackboard or MS Teams. He recommended that we report such problems to helpdesk. Helpdesk knows of some ways to overcome the platform limitations, and if they cannot be overcome – there would be a record of a remaining problem. As of now, when he asks IT, they say that helpdesk does not get any unresolved complaints about the recommended platforms, so he was under the impression that all problems were solved. Secretary Kreinovich commented that we usually report to helpdesk when something is not working, not when a platform has limitations; it is important to inform faculty that reporting to helpdesk is a proper venue to report limitations of the recommended software as well.

Gaspare Genna (Liberal Arts) complained that Blackboard Central closes at 5 pm and is not open on weekends; he asked the Provost if it is possible to extend the hours. Provost Wiebe explained that the central is understaffed, they have very few folks. As of now, they are triaging the situation with helpdesk – helpdesk tries its best to answer all routine questions, so the central's help is needed only for complex questions for which the helpdesk cannot help. Provost Wiebe said that he will see what can be done.

Vice President Nunez-Mchiri reminded the FS that an instructional support staff member is assigned to every department or program, she recommends asking questions directly to this person instead of sending it to helpdesk.

Provost Wiebe informed the FS that coordinating online-learning help is, at present, one of the main goal of UTEP's Center for Faculty Leadership and Development CFLD, so we can also contact this Center, and, if needed, the Center's new Director Cigdem Sirin.

#### **ITEM 9. Old or Unfinished Business**

None.

#### **ITEM 10. New Business**

None.

**ITEM 11. Adjournment:** There being no further business before the Senate, President Dorgo reminded the FS that this is the last meeting of this academic year – and his last meeting as FS President. He entertained a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Note: The next meeting will be on September 8, 2020.

