

Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso
Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of February 9, 2021

Meeting was held via Zoom: <https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/89322071871?pwd=U0lpQWk5VytDdjRsU3ErbWU4UktwZz09>
Meeting ID: 893 2207 1871
Passcode: 396519

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order

Senate President Núñez-Mchiri thanked Paul Carrola and Annejanette Todd for their workshops to alleviate stress on campus. She thanked the many volunteers who are helping with the Covid vaccine program at UTEP and worried that the “digital divide” is making it difficult for some community members to sign up for vaccination. She welcomed senators back to the new academic term and new calendar year. She announced that the March senate meeting would begin with 15 unstructured minutes for faculty to connect with each other and network.

2. Determination of a Quorum

A quorum being present, the alternates were seated.

3. Minutes

Morales moved to approve the minutes. Contreras seconded.

4. Agenda

A report from the Faculty Welfare committee was added to the agenda. The modified agenda was approved (Conwell moved, Morales seconded).

5. Announcements

A. Provost Wiebe reported on UTEP efforts to prepare for Fall 2021. Wiebe acknowledged that faculty have a mixture of optimism and anxiety as they approach summer 2021 and the next academic year. Covid continues to be the issue guiding preparations. Current efforts on campus and in the community are finally bringing the disease under some control. The state’s public health guidelines limit UTEP’s ability to do more to vaccinate more broadly on campus. He noted that the University is working with the state to help with community efforts and speed the transition to broader vaccine availability. At present, the UT System is predicting that vaccine supply will meet demand by April and May. As UTEP prepares for an uncertain future, we are all urged to remain vigilant and flexible. Experience has shown that it is easier to move from in-person instruction to online instruction, compared to moving from online instruction to in-person instruction, so preparations for summer and fall 2021 instruction are moving forward with the expectation that most courses will meet in person once again. The university wants to do more to increase student engagement and get students excited about returning to campus. Funds will be made available for hiring more undergraduate research assistants in the summer, for hiring more graduate student researchers in the

summer, for adding more technology to instructional spaces, and perhaps even for assistance for child care support so that faculty can return to their research quickly. A question was asked about improving ventilation in many classrooms to address the aerosol spread of Covid. Wiebe responded that as vaccination rates increase, the threat of aerosol spread will diminish and that such costly retrofitting of ventilation would also lag behind the growth of herd immunity. Moya said that it was important to prioritize vaccines to the elderly in the community and as a matter of equity he was therefore reluctant to take the vaccine himself. Ordaz wondered if those who are uncertain about the vaccine- if they are pregnant or nursing, for instance – would be required to take the vaccine before returning to campus. Wiebe replied that there is no intention to require the vaccine of everyone. He also mentioned that UTEP is committed to doing everything it can and is allowed to do to get the vaccine to the elderly – both at the UTEP community (including elderly family members, when permitted) and, it is hoped, to other elderly people in the El Paso region who might not have any connection to UTEP.

B. Michael Williams, Director of the African American Studies Program, reported on programming for Black History Month. Four large events will take place near the end of February. Dr. Jelani Cobb will give a talk on February 23 at 5 p.m. A forum in “Celebration of Black Scholars” will take place on February 25 at 5 p.m. On February 26, there will be a “watch party” for the film “One Night in Miami.” On February 24 and 25, his program will collaborate with the Dance department on a two-day virtual symposium called “Interiors/Exteriors.” Information about all of these events can be found at the African American Studies Program website: www.utep.edu/aasp.

C. Núñez-Mchiri reported that the Women and Gender Studies Program will host its annual conference on March 9 and 10. It has issued a call for papers, with a February 22 deadline. More information can be found at: <https://wghmc2021.questionpro.com>.

6. Reports of Standing Committees

A. Senate Executive Council. Núñez-Mchiri reported that the Council had received information from Vice-Provost Ann Gates about results from the COACHE survey on campus academic climate. These results will be presented to the full Senate on March 9.

B. The Faculty Advisory Council. Núñez-Mchiri reported that this committee of the UT System has been discussing who owns online curriculum and how to restore agency in the classroom. Vice-President Tillman reported that the FAC has an ad hoc committee on equity issues that may become part of a standing committee. Núñez-Mchiri reported that Regents Distinguished Teachers will have a virtual conference, April 7 to 9.

C. Faculty Welfare. Ashby reported that the committee is finalizing two proposals to present at the Senate in March. One concerns ADA parking. The second is a recommendation for an Ombudsperson’s Office.

D. Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Duval presented an extensive collection of curriculum changes that had been approved. From Education, the Teacher Education department wanted to add five electives. From Engineering, Metallurgy proposed two

changes: adding a laboratory experience to one class and splitting a four-hour capstone course into two two-hour courses. From Liberal Arts, a proposal to reduce the amount of block electives was proposed. Also from Liberal Arts, Chicano Studies proposed a new lower division course to align with community college offerings; History proposed changes to several course descriptions; Leadership and Community Engagement proposed a new minor; Political Science proposed new, explicitly anti-racist language for several of its course descriptions; and Theater and Dance proposed changes to make a new Performance concentration. Amy Bach asked whether there had been sufficient discussion of impact of the new change in block electives in Liberal Arts. Associate Dean Herman responded that there had and that the college would keep track of the impact and revisit the change if it creates problems. Duval continued with changes from the College of Science. Environmental Studies is moving one course to upper division. Geological Sciences has several proposals to give more flexibility in Hydro Science. Environmental Studies also proposed a correction to an oversight in its fast-track program. Seeing that there would be extensive discussion about the change in block electives proposed by Liberal Arts, Duval made two motions. In the first, he proposed that all of the other changes recommended by UGCC be approved. They were approved unanimously. He then moved that the Senate approve the change in block electives from Liberal Arts. Extensive discussion followed. Rohrleitner expressed concern that the change will harm the Languages and Linguistics department. Herman replied that that department will not be harmed. Dean O'Hearn noted that of the four final proposals considered, the one being considered would have the least impact on Languages and Linguistics. Rohrleitner worried that the impact on smaller programs would pit these programs against each other as they compete for students and resources. Herman replied that the small programs have footing in different parts of the Liberal Arts curriculum and would therefore not necessarily compete directly against each other. O'Hearn noted that the new course approved in Chicano Studies was a way to have lower division requirements that would protect such small programs. Herman added that more lower-division offerings would encourage students to declare minors and majors in the smaller programs earlier in their careers. Bach asked about data on impact on small programs. Herman said it's not possible to gather such data yet. O'Hearn assured us that he will support these programs and keep them sustainable and that if any problems arise, the change will be revisited to correct and protect the programs. This will allow the programs to plan and be sustainable. Rohrleitner expressed concern that these small programs will get lumped together. O'Hearn says that he recognizes that danger and that the programs will have many options. Herman pointed out that this change is a response to state higher education mandates (Fields of Study; Programs of Study; SB25) and that many, many options were considered before a smaller slate was considered and one option was advanced. Rohrleitner asked that we monitor the health of these programs. O'Hearn agreed to monitor and revisit. He noted that this change will increase student flexibility and graduation rates in departments (since many students get nudged into the Multidisciplinary Studies degree at present). Moya asked about the status of Fields of Study. Associate Provost Blum reviewed the present situation and noted that we must still address FOS issues. Moya asked whether community colleges are doing their part to contribute to the efficient graduation of students. Blum said that UTEP is doing its best to keep community colleges informed of best practices, but community colleges have their

own autonomy. Duval called the question. The proposed change in Liberal Arts curriculum passed, 40-1-8.

E. Academic Policy Committee. Badreddin offered a policy for Non-Traditional Educational Experiences. It passed unanimously.

7. Presentations

A. Native American Land Recognition. Yolanda Leyva presented a proposed statement of land recognition. Jeff Shepherd explained the rationale for this proposal. It would build capacity and outreach to local communities. Having a statement is in line with many institutions in Texas, in North America, and in the world. It would be voluntary. It could be incorporated into the strategic plan. A policy will come to the senate for approval in March.

B. Vaccine Rollout. Amanda Loya presented information about UTEP's efforts as a Covid vaccination center (a PDF of the PowerPoint presentation is available on the Senate website and is attached as a PDF at the end of these minutes). UTEP received approval from the state to administer the Covid vaccine. The Interdisciplinary Research Building (IDRB) is used as the location to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech version of the vaccine. UTEP is administering the vaccine to High Risk Groups (in tier 1A and 1B) by appointment. The program has expanded to reach out to high risk individuals associated with UTEP and in the community including faculty emeriti. UTEP has held 3 clinics and has administered approximately 3500 first doses. UTEP is exploring the capacity to expand the vaccination program if the state approves. Loya reviewed FAQs and offered the website and email address for those with questions about UTEP's vaccination program. Warak asked whether the vaccine can safely be administered to children yet. Padilla responded that studies are ongoing but children cannot yet get the vaccine. A faculty member asked if students should get the vaccine if they already have had Covid. Padilla replied that generally that is true, with a few exceptions. Moya urged that UTEP reach out to those who may not be reachable digitally. Wiebe replied that President Wilson has asked for resources to allow UTEP to be aggressive and proactive in vaccine outreach.

The meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

Note: Meeting agenda will be sent out Friday evening March 5th, 2021 via email. If you do not get the email with the agenda, please inquire with Gina Nunez-Mchiri ggnunez@utep.edu or Andrew Fleck at ajfleck@utep.edu