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

**Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of April 13, 2021**

Meeting was held via Zoom: https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/89322071871?pwd=U0lpQWk5VytDdjRsU3ErbWU4UktwZz09

Meeting ID: 893 2207 1871

Passcode: 396519

**1. Call to Order**

Senate President Núñez-Mchiri called the meeting to order at precisely 3:00.

**2. Determination of a quorum.**

A quorum being present, the alternates were seated.

**3. Consent Agenda**

Fleck moved to approve the slightly revised minutes of the March 9 meeting. Contreras seconded.

**4. Acceptance or Modification of the Agenda**

No modifications were brought up.

**5. Announcements**

Provost Wiebe spoke on four topics. First, he commented concerning plans for a return to regular campus operations and the progress of vaccination at UTEP. Every UTEP faculty and staff member and every student has had an opportunity to sign up for the UTEP administration of the COVID vaccine; members of these individuals’ households are now eligible. Approximately two-thirds of UTEP employees have received at least one dose of the vaccine. UTEP will be changing its campus vaccine program very soon, so anyone at UTEP who still wants to receive the vaccine on campus should respond right away. The university wants as many UTEP students to sign up right away; a smaller number of students (for various reasons) seem not to have taken the opportunity to be vaccinated. For future planning: local public health statistics seem to have plateaued or be moving in the right direction. On June 1, all campus offices will be officially open again, though not necessarily with all staff on campus. There should be much more activity on campus in July and August. The expectation is a return to something like “normal” operations for the fall semester of 2021. The university is trying to create an environment of predictability and to provide as much advance notice now so that the UTEP community can adjust to a return in the fall semester. Every indication is that the vaccines available are providing strong protection against the virus. Second, Wiebe discussed the campus network outage. All central services (with the intermittent exception of MyApps) are restored. The decentralized nature of UTEP’s Information Resources (IR) structure has complicated communication efforts. Dean Steve Crites has been asked to serve as a focal point for communications between the deans and the IR division. Any individuals experiencing network problems should contact the Helpdesk (helpdesk@utep.edu), which has a ticket and case management system to make sure issues are totally resolved. A small number of faculty experienced significant data losses; the President and Provost met with those individuals to discuss possible solutions. As the university makes plans to prevent future similar issues, outside consulting agencies as well as faculty campus experts will be involved in the process. Third, on the issue of official travel, the Provost reported that the governor’s orders about national and international travel remain in effect. As a result, international travel is not possible; official travel is possible, but requires a Vice President’s approval. Such requests necessitate a safety plan; those who have received the vaccine will find it easier to construct such a plan. Fourth, the provost discussed the university’s new plan for Faculty Development Leave. The university did not have funding to support such leave in the past, but it is a priority of President Wilson and the Provost and efforts have been made to locate funding sources to support these leaves. A program is now in place, with an application deadline in early May, for professional leave beginning in Fall 2021. Wiebe credited Ann Gates and Tami Keating for helping to revive this program. Leaves will be competitive and comply with state and legislative code. Faculty who have tenure, who are about to receive tenure, or who have taught at UTEP off the tenure track for six consecutive years are eligible to apply. The number of leaves approved will depend on the university’s resources.

 Wiebe then responded to questions. Cruz asked whether the university is prepared for the immunity of those vaccinated to wear off after six months; Wiebe replied that the studies show that immunity lasts for at least six months and that it may last much longer than that. Núñez asked whether incoming students will be vaccinated. Wiebe responded that supply in the El Paso community will exceed demand by early summer, so the expectation is that incoming students will have sought out vaccination through the city or county. Nunez asked when the new leaves will be available. Wiebe responded that there is a very short deadline for this first year of the program, but that he anticipates that the program will be available on an annual basis.​

B. Land Acknowledgement. Nunez reported that the committee working on the land acknowledgement will report on their progress in May.

C. Faculty Questions about Campus Return. Nunez urged those with questions raised at the March meeting to submit their questions in connection with UTEP’s COACHE survey website.

**6. Committee Reports**

A. Undergraduate Curriculum (Duval). Four proposals from the UGCC came for a vote. Sociology/Anthropology requested new course descriptions for a large number of courses in the catalog in order to continue the College’s efforts to be more explicitly anti-racist in its language. Computer Science updated the course description for CS 4342. Electrical and Computer Engineering had two requests. It has a new course, EE 4373, Introduction to Cybersecurity. And it wants to change the title of EE 4384 to “Transmission Power Flow Control” and change the course prerequisites from EE 4387 to EE 2351 and EE 2372. All four proposals were accepted unanimously. Duval also reported that the THECB sent UTEP a list of courses that will be deactivated because they have not been taught recently. Julie Rivera in the provost’s office is monitoring the impact of these deleted courses and will insert language in the catalog about needing to consult an advisor when a student needs a lost course. The UGCC plans to consult with others about creating an “exit interview” process when a faculty member leaves the university so that courses do not get stranded/abandoned/forgotten if a program relies on those courses.

B. Student Welfare (Chacon-Silva). The committee has an advisors’ report on best practices for mentoring and engagement of student organizations during the pandemic. Faculty are invited to serve as mentors and advisors of student organizations.

C. Undergraduate Scholarship (Pastor). In fall there were 76 applications for the committee to consider. This spring the committee is evaluating 242 applications.

D. Student Grievance (Tillman). Student Grievance (Tillman). A task force working on student grievances has been meeting to revise the process. They will recommend some automation of the process so that the student grievance process. The committee is seeking the support from the Center for Faculty Leadership and Development (CFL) to request additional training for faculty on conflict resolution, particularly as it relates to student grievances. The committee would like all new faculty to complete a version of that training that specifically focuses on avoiding grade-grievance complaints.

E. Academic Policy (Badreddin). The committee recommends two policy change proposals. Current policy indicates that students who do not complete their freshman level courses before they complete 90 credit hours will not receive credit towards these courses, even though they are still required to complete these freshman-level courses. The proposal calls for the removal of the statement about not awarding credit for a required course because it contradicts with federal funding regulations. Federal Title IV funding regulations require that courses on the degree plan to contribute in credit hours towards the degree. By requiring a course but not awarding a credit, the current policy seems to be in violation with the Title IV funding regulations. Moya asked whether state law dictates this penalty after 90 hours. Wiebe replied that he was pretty sure state law no longer requires that penalty. The motion passed unanimously.

The second proposal was to change the threshold for automatic admission to UTEP from the top ten percent of graduating high school students in their cohort to the top twenty-five percent. Currently, students in the top eleven to twenty-five percent must submit scores from standardized tests, but there is no minimum score required on these tests. Moya had some suggestions for editing the grammar of the proposal. Moya wondered why standardized tests are even required and discussed his own educational experiences with standardized testing and their ability to predict student success.

F. Information Technology. Nunez reported that Dr. Eric Freudenthal the IT committee met with the Provost about faculty representation and the IT committee being involved in planning for preventing future network outages.

**7. Presentations**

A. Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory Option. (SGA Martinez) Although the pandemic is creating severe burnout for students, they recognize that it is too late in the semester to change to the S/U option available in Spring 2020 and Fall 2021. Professors would put many students’ minds at ease if they could try to reach out to students individually to check in on them. Warak observed that in art, there are many hybrid classes, and a change of the grading option would certainly create havoc. Contreras asked whether the drop deadline could be moved to the end of term, as it has been moved in recent semesters. Wiebe replied that this would create equity concerns, given that many students dropped at the recent deadline. Nunez suggested that faculty should try to be flexible and respond to students case by case as individuals.

6G. Faculty Welfare (Ashby). The committee recommends a change to ADA parking. In essence, those eligible for ADA permits should be able to purchase permits for lots/areas in central campus (red zone) at the perimeter (orange zone) rate. The proposal passed unanimously. The committee also offered a proposal for the creation of an Ombuds Office. This would be a way to resolve conflicts without escalating them formally. Emeritus faculty would be recruited to serve as ombudspersons. The provost’s office would oversee the ombuds office. Gates commented that the ombuds office would need a home and that confidentiality could still be assured if it is housed in the provost’s office. The motion passed unanimously.

7B. Temporary Campus Housing (Gordon). UTEP’s residence life has set aside a building of apartments that can be used for temporarily housing individuals with UTEP affiliations. New faculty at UTEP, visiting faculty at UTEP, those who will be on campus for a brief time, etc, are eligible for this sort of housing. Such housing can be reserved by the day, the week, the month, or even for entire semesters. There are many advantages to housing those affiliated with UTEP on campus for a brief period. This is also an affordable option. There are summer options for programs at UTEP.

Nunez wished a happy Ramadan to those who observe it.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.**