

Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso
Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of September 14, 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

President Núñez-Mchiri called the meeting to order at 3:01.

2. Determination of Quorum and Seating of Alternates

A quorum being present, the alternates were seated.

3. Modifications to the Agenda

Maldonado moved to accept the agenda. Curry seconded.

4. Consent Agenda

Fleck moved that the minutes of the previous meeting be approved. Padilla seconded the motion and they were accepted.

5. Announcements

a. Núñez-Mchiri announced that COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) is searching for partners to build bi-national curricula in collaboration with Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). She has a list of twelve professors looking for UTEP partners. The program offers training and is supported by the State Department and the US Consulate to encourage binational collaboration. Núñez-Mchiri is currently teaching one binational course this fall semester and is willing to mentor faculty interested in this binational collaboration.

b. Provost Wiebe made several announcements. On the academic end of things, the university welcomed 30 new tenure-track faculty, six new chairs, and numerous non-tenure-track colleagues. Multiple faculty searches have been or will be approved and national searches for three new deans will soon be underway. Students are reported to be deeply engaged. Remote learning necessitated by the pandemic took a toll on students and this is reflected in current enrollment. Enrollment at UTEP is down about 3.5% and semester credit hours are down about 6.6%. Academic Affairs is working to facilitate greater engagement, such as by using remaining federal funds to increase advising and help promote student retention. However, direct faculty focus on student engagement is crucial. Wiebe also reported that a redesign of core curriculum is getting started under Blum and Olimpo's leadership. This effort will provide resources to interested faculty, including summer salary support and staff support in community engagement, instructional technology, and supplemental instruction. Wiebe also reported on the campus monitoring and response to the COVID crisis. El Paso has been fortunate, compared to other parts of our state, with a higher percentage of vaccination and no crisis in COVID hospitalization. Case numbers seem stable and represent a decline from late summer when the delta variant produced some amount of concern. The county has been at about a 2.9% positivity rate in COVID testing;

among students testing on campus that number is about 1.59%. Wiebe reported that the university can support official travel, for conference participation for instance, but such travel requires approval and approval is contingent on the hospitalization rates at the destination; if a UTEP community member were to suffer a car accident or heart attack in a city with overwhelmed hospitals, that would be terrible and that goes into the thinking around travel approval. Fleck asked: does UTEP have data about the test result percentages from the “UTEP Lane” of the “mega-site” for testing on Mesa. Wiebe explained that UTEP operates a dedicated lane for its community within that site but that the results are reported to the county rather than to the university.

c. Julius Simon responded to Núñez-Mchiri’s request that he explain his success with encouraging students to make use of masks when in class. Simon described a mindfulness meditation technique he uses to start each class. The mindfulness technique involves slowing down, being present, attuning to self, and considering the welfare of others. He successfully encouraged two students to make use of masks in his class. Simon shared his practice with members of the Faculty Senate as part of his presentation.

d. Marc Cox announced the beginning of the new cycle of the State Employee Charitable Campaign. Last year, UTEP set an increased goal, even in the pandemic, and though it fell just short of the goal, it still contributed a significant amount to the region. Cox remarked that the charities served by the campaign reach our own UTEP students’ needs. He asked everyone to contribute to the campaign and asked senators to bring that request back to their departments. A flyer will be distributed with a QR code to make contributions easier; please do not give the code to students, since they are already so financially stretched that they should not be encouraged to contribute to the campaign. Kreinovich asked about the system of departmental campaign ambassadors that used to promote the campaign; Cox replied that the campaign’s new “champions” are not department-specific. Leyser-Whalen asked about receipts for giving to the campaign; Cox said that an email goes out to serve as a receipt.

6. Committee Reports

A. Executive Committee: Núñez-Mchiri reported that the committee has recruited a new member to represent the College of Health Science, Sudip Bajpey. His appointment was approved unanimously by the senate.

B. Committee on Committees: Duarte reported a new slate of nominations to senate committees. Maldonado seconded the motion to approve the slate. The motion carried unanimously.

C. Undergraduate Scholarship: Han reported that the committee has revised its rubric for evaluating applications for undergraduate scholarships for the coming year. She also reported that the committee approved \$267,000 in scholarships in Fall 2020 and almost \$800,000 in scholarships in spring 2021.

D. Student Grievance: Leyser-Whalen reported briefly on the committee’s role in resolving grievances about final grades. The committee is searching for up to seven tenured faculty to join the Student Grievance committee.

7. Reports

a. Arely Hernandez and Elisa Chaides presented information about UTEP's Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education (CARE) program. The program assists those in the UTEP community impacted by violent crimes. The services are confidential. CARE offers advocacy, counseling, and education/outreach. It can help UTEP community members with navigating processes and programs, including compensation for those affected by crimes. CARE's offices are on Campbell, downtown, but they are happy to come to the main campus to meet with anyone in need.

8. Old Business

There was none.

9. New Business

The senate is considering moving its regular meeting time to noon or 1:30 to accommodate senators with childcare commitments. A vote will be held soon to gather input from Faculty Senators for the spring as a way of responding to faculty's requests for family-friendly practices in higher education.

10. Adjournment

The senate adjourned at 4:31 pm

The next meeting will take place in-person in the Tomas Rivera Conference Center in the Union on October 12.