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

**Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of November 10, 2020**

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 3:02 p.m.

**I. Announcements**:

Senate President Núñez-Mchiri began by acknowledging that our national political landscape seems to have changed as a result of recent elections. She expressed appreciation for the diversity and variety of political viewpoints of UTEP’s faculty and urged us to try to hear all perspectives. She also wanted to express gratitude for the patient and compassionate way in which faculty and students are relating to each other as our local epidemic context becomes increasingly bleak.

**II. Determination of a Quorum and Seating of Alternates**

A quorum being present, the alternates were seated.

**III. Consent Agenda**

Fleck noted that revised minutes reflecting a clarification from UGCC (that Psychology’s change in mathematics requirements applied only to their B.A., not their B.S. majors) had been posted. These revised minutes were approved unanimously.

**IV. Review and Approval of the Agenda**

Núñez-Mchiri announced that Luis Hernandez had been added to the agenda with information about the new Learning Studio being created on campus.

**V. Announcements**

1. Núñez-Mchiri and Poblano reported that a survey is being sent out to learn about faculty preferences between Blackboard’s Collaborate feature and Zoom. Collaborate is integrated into our Blackboard system; the university has paid a hefty subscription to make Zoom available for online instruction (and other uses). The university needs to learn whether the subscription to Zoom should be extended. Some concern was expressed that the survey may not arrive at reliable results if respondents have not tried both platforms.

2. Núñez-Mchiri thanked Marc Cox for his leadership on the State Employee Charitable Campaign. The campaign exceeded its goal this year in support of local and state organizations.

3. Provost Wiebe reported on the roundtable the Provost’s Office helped facilitate on November 6. The roundtable was intended as a way to help faculty locate resources for responding to ways in which individual courses are being affected by the local epidemic context (e.g. that many students and faculty are directly or indirectly dealing with the spread of COVID-19). He reported that it was well attended. The roundtable was recorded and will be posted to the Provost’s website. Resources for handling matters at the end of this present unusual semester are also available on that website. CFLD will have faculty available for problem-solving with individual faculty trying to deal with unusual circumstances as the semester moves to a conclusion. If these posted resources do not help faculty, they should feel free to contact the Provost’s office directly for help finding answers to their questions.

4. The System’s Faculty Advisory Council received a presentation on budget matters. Núñez-Mchiri offered to forward the powerpoint to anyone who would like to dig more deeply into the complex funding discussions that were presented. Things may become clearer after the next state budget is available.

5. Tillman reported on the Task Force being prepared to address Student Grievance procedures at UTEP. These procedures seem to be in need of an update. A task force has been assembled to examine procedures and best practices at peer institutions across the System.

6. A second Mindfulness meeting will take place on November 18 at 4:30 pm. Link is posted on the agenda. The first meeting was beneficial for those who attended.

7. Luis Hernandez reported on the new Learning Studio. Since so many courses have switched to online instruction, the university is developing a Learning Studio with many, many excellent high-tech resources that will allow faculty to create professional-grade resources for their students. The hope is that the new Learning Studio will be fully functional once equipment is procured in time for the spring semester.

**VI. Committee Reports**

1. From the Executive Committee: In response to concerns from the Student Government Association (and in light of the worsening local conditions of the COVID-19 epidemic), a proposal has been developed to allow students to change the grading option for their undergraduate courses from letter grades to Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. This option would only be available in programs that do not need to have letter grades to comply with accreditation issues (in other words, this would be available to most undergraduates, outside of Nursing). The Graduate Council supports this move, though there is probably going to be a different/more specific policy for graduate students. Unlike the Spring 2020 emergency change to S/U, this policy will NOT require Faculty to agree to the S/U option before students avail themselves of it. Students will be strongly encouraged to consult with advisors before making a switch in the grading option – it may have unintended negative consequences for students, so they should be certain they want to make that change. There were a few questions about the change: Ravelo hoped that faculty would have more guidance about what would constitute a “U” or unsatisfactory grade in an individual class. Others asked whether students receiving U grades would be required/able to take the course again for a grade. Kendall expressed concern that since we all knew the epidemic would get worse this semester, other measures should have been pursued rather than falling back to the S/U option. Ravelo worried that the withdrawal deadline for spring 2021 is already going to need revision. Wiebe noted that this epidemic is unfolding in unpredictable ways and that the university should respond to the situation as circumstances evolve. The question was put to a vote. Of those recording a vote, 34 approved and 4 disapproved of the policy.

2. For the Committee on Committees, Duarte reported a slate of individuals to take seats on a variety of committees. Edna Martinez to serve on Teaching Effectiveness, Song An on Technology Committee, and Jose Maria Herrera on the Library Committee. These were unanimously approved.

3. For the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Duval reported a series of changes that had been recommended. For the COBA, these mainly involved reverting to a previous prerequisite for the Business Core. For Engineering, the main change came from Engineering Education and Leadership, which has a new course (EL 1301) entering the core curriculum. In COS, quite a few programs made changes to their fast-track (as had a few in Engineering) in response to changes in the MBA program.

4. Núñez-Mchiri reported that the Research committee is reviewing URI applications that have been received.

**VII. Presentations**

1. Dean of Students McCorry-Andalis presented on the efforts to support students in the midst of the worsening COVID-19 epidemic. Compared to last year at this time, the Dean of Students’ Office has received a massive increase in the number (701 this year compared to 33 last year) of “students of concern” – students that have been identified as at risk to lose touch with their coursework and the university. The risks they face include housing and food insecurity, mental health issues, and access issues, among others. The university’s food pantry is serving many students who are food insecure along with other resources, such as personal hygiene and academic supplies. The library has technology that can be loaned to students who need access to computers and portable wifi hotspots (for internet connections) to participate in online classes. The university has wonderful counseling resources available 24/7/365 (at all times, all days, all year long) and these can be accessed online or at (915) 747-5302.

2. For the Recovery Task Force, Dean Crites reported that the university is considering the next four phases of recovering operations. From now until Thanksgiving is the first phase. From Thanksgiving, when no operations will happen on campus, to the end of the semester represents the second phase. The brief, intense period of January-term courses represents the third phase. The resumption of classes in January for the spring semester represents the fourth phase. The Task Force is hard at work, but they always welcome suggestions or ideas from outside their committee.

The meeting adjourned, briefly, at 4:23 p.m.

Kreinovich convened an emergency session at 4:23 p.m.

The minutes relating to the new Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grade policy were read. That section of the minutes was approved unanimously.

This emergency session adjourned at 4:25 p.m.