

**Faculty Senate of the University of Texas at El Paso
Minutes of the Online Faculty Senate Meeting of December 8, 2020**

Meeting was held via Zoom: <https://utep-edu.zoom.us/j/81619723329?pwd=blJlb2dZYnhwSEdXTVJMNitmRDRwZz09>
Meeting ID: 816 1972 3329
Passcode: vN4vFWLN

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 p.m.

I. Announcements:

Senate President Núñez-Mchiri began by remarking on the end of a very challenging semester. Our faculty reinvented their courses, innovated new techniques to teach their courses online, and deserve thanks for this effort. They had much more input and support on managing the online instruction than faculty at many other institutions. Still, it was evident that there is a digital divide, with many students and faculty needing to play catch up as the technology for teaching online picks up speed. She hopes that all faculty, students, and staff will find the break before the next term restorative.

II. Determination of a Quorum and Seating of Alternates

A quorum being present, the alternates were seated.

III. Consent Agenda

The previously posted minutes were approved.

IV. Review and Approval of the Agenda

Núñez-Mchiri adjusted the agenda to reflect that the Research Committee has completed its work and would report its results.

V. Announcements

1. Núñez-Mchiri asked Provost Wiebe to comment on lessons learned from the fall semester. Wiebe congratulated and thanked the faculty for its perseverance during the challenging semester. The faculty was resourceful. They offered innovation in their own work and volunteered to help colleagues shoulder new burdens. The success of students remained at the center of these efforts. Like many other universities, UTEP is facing declines in enrollment this spring. Those declines will have negative impact on student progress and on the University budget. The ongoing question remains how to engage students together and promote student success, since online teaching definitely took a toll on students' feelings of connectedness and purpose. Faculty are uniquely positioned to urge students to persevere and register for spring classes. If they are not equipped to help students deal with any particular challenge, they may refer to the Student Support Help Desk. Connecting with that resource creates a "ticket" or file that remains open – with all sorts of support and material resources offered to students—until the student's issue is resolved. Other attempts to improve engagement will come in the form of additional Teaching Assistants for spring courses, so that students receive more personal attention. The university improved its COVID testing and became quite efficient near the end of the semester. The hope is that such success may make it possible for the university to serve as a center for administering

the COVID vaccine as it becomes available. It will be important for the university community to be proactive and exercise strong health behaviors to help slow the spread of the virus until the vaccine is widely administered. Another challenge relates to communication. How can the university foster healthy communication and control the rumor mill? Fortunately, the spring semester will begin with a sense of optimism and hope, since the availability of the vaccine makes it likely that the virus will be under control soon and something like “normal” operations may resume this summer. Wiebe was asked whether vaccination will be mandatory and responded that a task force has been assembled to consider this question among many others. Wiebe was asked whether it would be productive to have aggressive advertising to increase student enrollment. He responded that advertising for new enrollment in the spring will be less effective than bolstering retention efforts, and that a strategic enrollment plan with a strong marketing component is in development and will be rolled out to boost fall enrollment.

2. Senate Vice President Tillman reported from the Student Grievance Task Force. The task force has already had productive meetings, examining peer institutions’ process for student grievance. Some institutions allow students to seek mediation from department chairs and give chairs more authority to change a grade. Several other universities in the UT-system such as UT-Austin give Dept. Chairs authority to override a grade -- in contrast, UTEP is seeking a process where no single person in the instructor's College is responsible for the decision (to avoid retribution and politics). Options under consideration: (1) the Dept. Chair plus the Dean both must sign-off on the grade-change, or (2) the Dept. Chair recommends that the Dean of Students investigate and then Dean of Students has authority to override the grade, or (3) the process remains essentially the same as currently except we add uniformity to the currently inconsistent role of Dept. Chair and Dean so that each College follows same process (currently each has unique policies or lack thereof).

VI. Committee Reports

1. From the Executive Committee: Faculty Senate President Núñez-Mchiri and past Faculty Senate President Dorgo requested the recent surveys of university administration, including the Harvard-administered COACHE survey be made available to UTEP faculty and that upper administration inform faculty of their plan on how to address the survey results, particularly faculty concerns regarding department and college-level administrative behaviors. We also seek a discussion of how results from the spring 2021 faculty forum have been addressed by administration Ann Gates is processing the results and Wiebe reports that CIERP is working on data, all of which could be released in January. A vote to make results available was passed unanimously.

2. Committee Chair Duval reported on the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee recommendations. The Music department requested a number of changes, in response to accreditation needs. Psychology proposed a change to its minor, to add a class that better serves minors than the class required of majors. The senate approved these changes unanimously.

3. Committee Chair Jimenez-Arevalo presented a statement on behalf of the Teaching Effectiveness Committee. The statement reminds decision makers that online surveys of student satisfaction should be considered holistically, given that many faculty were not

prepared to dive into online instruction. This flexibility in faculty evaluation is to be shared with chairs, deans, and evaluation committees throughout campus to encourage they embrace a flexible and holistic approach to measuring faculty effectiveness. This recommendation applies to all faculty, full or part-time, tenure-track or non-tenure-track. The senate voted to approve this statement unanimously.

4. Committee Chair Kim reported on behalf of the Research Committee. The committee evaluated URI proposals and has made its selection on funding distribution. The senate voted unanimously to approve the committee's recommendations.

5. Committee Chair Chacon -Silva reported on behalf of the Student Welfare Committee. The committee is concerned that student organizations are having difficulty locating faculty advisors. They hope the Senate can encourage faculty to help serve as advisors to student organizations, since students receive mentorship and learn leadership skills when they join effective student organizations as extracurricular activities that impact student experiences

6. Committee Chair Baddredin reported on behalf of the Academic Policy Committee. The committee has revised the existing policy on Credit for Non-Traditional Educational Experiences. The revisions are intended to create ways for non-military students to earn credit. The Academic Policy Committee is asking faculty senators to share this proposed policy with their departments and programs to see what the impact of this policy will be on their programs. Senators are asked to share their feedback before the Faculty Senate will be asked to vote on these changes.

VII. Presentations

1. Dean Crites reported from the Recovery Task Force. This task force is starting to wind down, having reported to President Wilson resident on what went well and what could have been improved. A lot remains to be accomplished, but much remains uncertain. As the vaccine is rolled out, some of this ambiguity will become clearer. Dorgo asked whether the task force has taken a position on whether some forms of in-person instruction might resume in the spring semester. Crites reported that the task force recommended against a move mid-semester from online to in-person instruction; in other words, online instruction will be the norm for classes as they begin the spring semester and will be recommended for those classes through the entire semester.

VIII. Other Announcements

Carrola announced that a Burnout and Compassion Q and A would be held on Wednesday December 9 from 1:00-2:00.

The senate wished President Wilson an early happy birthday.

The meeting adjourned at 4:17 p.m.