

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Feb. 07, 2023

Time beginning and ending: 2:10 p.m. to 3:40 p.m.

Present: Hongmei Jia, Joshua Ege, Christian Hempelmann, Stephen Starnes, Samantha Klassen, Kathryn Dixon, Julia Ballenger, Jason Davis, Mark Moreno (Secretary), Tina Lancaster, Sawyer Magnus, Yasemin Atinc (President), Nikolay Sirakov, Benton Pierce, Marta Mercado-Sierra, Zachary “Zak” Palmer, Thomas Boucher, Andrea Williams, Matt Wood, Johanna Delgado-Acevedo, James Devlin, MaryJo Dondlinger, Maggie Salem

Not Present: Omar El Ariss, Tami Morton, Michael Oldham, Brandon Randolph-Seng, Jane Kosarek, Ozum Yesiltas

- **The Senate unanimously voted to approve the minutes for Dec. 06, 2022, Senator Salem moved, seconded by Senator Williams**

1.) University Provost Dr. Tammi Vacha-Haase addresses the Senate:

The provost reiterated the need for inter-college and university communications and the “silo” effect; advocates for cross-university initiatives and interdisciplinary programs: “academic affairs and student affairs go hand in hand.” Since faculty members have daily contact with students, “We want you (students) to feel confident and comfortable.” This could be accomplished with communications via email for after-class talks.

There also exists a need for colleges to familiarize themselves with one another, she said, and Dr. Vacha-Haase continues talks with Dr. Cephas Archie on DEI priorities. Budget priorities for now are those items that comprise most of the budget. She believes enrollment will continue to grow.

Other priorities include evaluating university hiring processes, and that there are two dean searches and 40 faculty searches currently underway. The goal was “hiring (a diverse pool of) faculty that will set us on a path to the future.” She requested that faculty reach out to others in the field for recruitment purposes and list the top three reasons for choosing TAMUC for employment. She requested the assistance of faculty members in setting priorities for the university. On faculty salaries, the provost noted that the status, of what many senators regard as relatively lower pay, “didn’t get (there) overnight,” and that it would take strategic allotment of resources to address faculty grievances regarding salaries. In addition, it is important to ensure the success of the Dallas campus, she said, in the interest of strengthening TAMUC’s interests and boost enrollment numbers. Complete academic programs eventually will be offered in Dallas. Senator Pierce asked who would be teaching new classes in Dallas. Dr. Vacha-Haase stated that the administration is reviewing which would be sensible to offer at that campus. New faculty lines are an option under discussion. President Atinc asked whether it was possible that the TAMU flagship will take over the Dallas location, and the provost said no, it is not. The

campuses in Commerce and in Dallas necessarily complement one another. University President Rudin envisions TAMUC as the university serving the greater North Texas region.

2.) Senate Committee Reports

Senator Palmer and the Senate Committee on Academic Life and Practice proposed a system of merit based on allocations to colleges based on the number of faculty members in the department – rather than the current system based on salaries within colleges. This would benefit the colleges of education and humanities, social science, and arts, while not being as beneficial to the colleges of business, agriculture, and Innovation and Design. However, the solution is more “egalitarian,” as Dr. Palmer stated, since merit allotments by consensus among faculty members are disproportionate, and some salaries are way below “market level.” One example is within Dr. Palmer’s own college (CHSSA), where there is relatively limited funding for merit. Several senators opposed the measure on technical grounds, for now. Senators commented on the fact that each department (and college dean) awards merit funds on their own basis, and that because of that such a such a measure is ineffectual. President Atinc likewise agreed that a merit system based on head count would make no difference in the distribution of merit funds from the university. She and others argued that since merit is based on performance, such an alternate system would not alter any inequitable distribution of merit pay. Senator Ege commented that new hires should be paid more than they are, which could bring other faculty salaries up; others commented on TAMUC salaries in comparison to market rates.

Senator Davis suggested to Dr. Palmer that the Senate should have the data involving comparative salaries at its disposal before a vote regarding merit pay. The matter was tabled (unanimously) pending such information. The issue of a Senate presence at administrative budget meetings also arose with the discussion of merit pay. President Atinc continues to advocate for that.

Administrators state that it is not within “tradition” to allow for that. (Atinc added that the new draft of the Constitution is at the provost’s desk awaiting approval.)

Senate Finance Committee: Senator Jia reported that all faculty award applications were received and the announcement of winners soon.

There were no further Committee reports announced.

3.) Faculty Senate Summit (sound governance) in collaboration with TABPHE and the Latinx Faculty Staff Association on April 19th

President Atinc proposed the awards ceremony for the morning followed by early-morning sessions and distributed a list of food options with prices from Sodexo. She still seeks a keynote speaker. She proposed also a panel focused upon awareness on what the Faculty Senate can do for university faculty, with a question-and-answer session. She is ordering plaques for the awards and spending much time organizing the event. It will likely commence around 8:30 a.m. with a breakfast. Atinc said the Senate needs to organize a budget per instructions from the provost.

Senate President Atinc announced the open Senate position for Faculty Athletics Director, who would receive a stipend and who senators need to elect. The position requires some travel and

attendance at conferences. She sent out a proposal and job description to the provost. Senator Davis advised advance meal reservations to control expenses. Senator Ege commented that Commerce campus events are not travel-friendly to Dallas site faculty members.

4.) Faculty Athletic Representative Candidates

Dr. Atinc reported that Provost Vacha-Haase received her and the Senate's proposal outlining the duties of a future Faculty Athletics Representative and is soliciting candidates for the position. She stressed the need for a search process that would narrow the field to three or four candidates, and that there should be some type of advisory panel to oversee that search.

5.) Updates from Senators on the Revision of University T&P policies.

Both non-tenure track and T&P policy revisions are under way. Senators note that some deans wish to terminate fourth- and fifth-year reviews. Senator Mercado-Sierra reported that policy senate policy visions were revised, and that Senator Behar is about to submit the proposal to the provost. There is still discussion around fourth- and fifth-year review revisions.

President Atinc inquired as to when the proposal will come before the senate, and suggested there should be a university-wide T&P committee in existence. Senator Dondlinger said the proposal will be voted upon within the colleges regarding their own faculty members. Senator Williams reiterated that fourth-year reviews are unnecessary.

6.) Deans' meetings with Senators - College Structure and Communication Issues

The topic was tabled for later discussion.

7.) Expectations during campus closures

President Atinc reported on complaints regarding automated messages generated by the university— there. Deans and department heads are informing departments regarding expectations during campus closures, and that faculty are responsible for keeping in touch with students. The President's earlier announcement on such communication was meant to clarify expectations of faculty during campus closures.

- **Senator Williams moved to adjourn the meeting; Senator Salem seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously by the Senate.**