

Meeting: Faculty Senate  
 Date: November 2, 2021  
 Time: 2:02 p.m.  
 Location: Video Conference via Zoom  
 Adjournment: 3:58 p.m.

**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes  
 November 2021**

**Present:** Andrea Williams, Andrew Baker, Bahar Modir, Benton Pierce, Brandon Randolph-Seng, Brock Johnson, Burchan Aydin (substitute for Jason Davis), Christian Hemplemann, Hongmei Jia, Jane Kosarek, Jason Davis, Johanna Delgado-Acevedo, Joshua Ege, Julia Ballenger (President), Kathryn Dixon, Marta Mercado-Sierra, Michael Ponton, Omar Elariss, Robert Williams, Robert Rodriguez, Samantha Klassen (Secretary), Sandy Hayes, Stephen Starnes, Thomas Boucher, Tina Greaves Lancaster, Yasemin Atinc, and Zachary Palmer

**Guests Present:** Dr. Brent Donham, Dr. Randy Harp, Dr. William Kuracina, Dr. Yvonne Villanueva-Russell, Dr. Dan Su, Dr. Guclu Atinc, Dr. Srinivas Nippani, Ms. Vicki Stewart

**Not present:** Ava Munoz, Emily Newman, Jason Davis, Michael Oldham

<b>Summary of Discussion</b>	
<p>October Faculty Senate Meeting minutes: Senator Atinc motioned to approve the September minutes, and Senator Williams seconded the motion. October meeting minutes were approved, with minor edits made to members in attendance.</p>	
<p><b>Guests:</b>  <i>Panel of Deans</i>  <i>Connecting Student Retention with Faculty Course Evaluations</i></p> <p>President Ballenger invited the Deans in attendance (Drs. Donham, Villanueva-Russell, Kuracina, and Harp) to share their perspectives about the practice of connecting faculty course evaluations with issues in student retention. She presented two points for consideration: 1) What are some of the reasons our undergraduate and graduate students are not returning, from the perspective of the deans? And 2) What was the background of correlating teacher evaluations by students to retention?</p> <p>President Ballenger also shared concerns among the faculty as to whether these were validated measures, particularly for faculty who teach more challenging courses.</p> <p><b>Dr. Brent Donham</b> (Dean of Science and Engineering) shared that there were some concerns with the quality of instruction and the level of engagement from instructors. Dr. Donham indicated that some of the retention issues in his college seem to be the lack of a “Plan B” for students whose performance is lacking, particularly for those who had a desire to go into medical school. They need to work on offering alternatives for students in these situations. Dr. Donham also stated that some of their students seem to think of Commerce as a “fall back plan” and as a second or third choice school when they are applying to college.</p>	

He also talked about issues with advising and helping students who may not be developmentally prepared to meet the rigorous academic challenges associated with their degree program. In terms of retention, Dr. Donham stated that students who register early tend to be the ones who stay, and the ones who procrastinate and register at the last minute tend to be the ones that are first out. For his college, only 46% of students who were eligible to register by the end of the semester did so. To that end, his college has set a goal that 75% of their existing students will be registered by the end of the semester. Some retention issues were noted as being related to COVID and students being unsure whether they would be returning online or in person.

**Dr. Yvonne Villanueva-Russell** (Dean of Innovation and Design) explained that their college is unique. It has only undergraduate programs, serves adult learners, and has no tenure-track faculty, only instructors and adjuncts. She indicated that her college does not have issues with retention or poor faculty evaluations due to a “culture of care and student success,” which trickles down from instructors to advisors. She reported that her college has an 84% retention rate attributed to the care, engagement, and concern shown at every level. Dr. Villanueva-Russell noted that she does not see the same issues with the quality of instruction that exists in other colleges. She attributes this to their faculty’s tremendous amount of engagement.

**Dr. William Kuracina** (Dean of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts) indicated that quality of instruction, level of engagement, and faculty responsiveness are all important to target. He stated that “classroom experience is the number one reason that students leave,” but this is not the case for his college, where retention issues typically relate to external factors such as family concerns. Dr. Kuracina indicated that his reading of the data is that we are recruiting fewer students than we lose each semester. It is our enrollment numbers, which are the retention problem. His sense of the exit survey results indicates that we do not have the structures to handle student egress. He also stated that we need to clarify university expectations for teaching effectiveness and that the student evaluations were an “inadequate measure” for determining this. Dr. Kuracina also indicated that he is talking with his department heads about department expectations for faculty within their departments.

**Dr. Randy Harp** (Dean of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources) expressed his concern about comparing student retention rates on our campus with other universities, as each institution is different. He noted that A&M Commerce has close to 11,500 students, 2,200 of which are “on campus” students. Other institutions have a much higher campus residence rate, which necessitates a measured approach for these comparisons. He stated that when we look at student evaluations of faculty, he does not believe that these are not a good reflection of retention issues, and we need to explore other ways to evaluate the courses. He also noted that annual performance evaluations of faculty should take more into account than what the student evaluations say. Dr. Harp indicated he did not see any relationship between student evaluations of faculty teaching and student retention issues. Dr. Harp stated he thinks his college’s high retention rate is related to the fact that

faculty advise their students and genuinely care about them. Dr. Harp recommended that we revisit the importance of teaching evaluations at a university like ours, and the extent to which these are reflected in our yearly evaluations.

*Dr. Dan Su, Institutional Effectiveness*

**Dr. Dan Su** shared student retention data from Institutional Effectiveness. She stated we are not alone in our retention challenges, particularly when compared with other system schools. She shared a Preliminary Enrollment Report for Fall 2022 from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. For universities in general, there was a .027% increase in enrollment, whereas community colleges had experienced a -1.45% decrease, and this was important to consider as A&M Commerce recruits students from community colleges. She also displayed data for our peer schools as appointed by the THECB and illustrated the changes in enrollment. Every single one of our peer schools had a decreased enrollment as well. She also displayed data from our top feeder schools, which had all experienced a decrease in enrollment. She then highlighted Preliminary 20<sup>th</sup> Class day headcount and Admissions Data from TAMU-C. We have decreased about 3% in headcount and 6% in certified semester credit hours. However, we have had a substantial increase in graduates as well. Dr. Dan Su indicated she had a Non-Returning Students Survey out to students who had enrolled in the Spring but not returned in the Fall. 236 students answered the survey (out of a little over 1,000 who were sampled). A big portion of students who were not returning were in hybrid or online courses. She said some of the **top reasons for undergraduate students** were: finances (22.22%), issues with Commerce (17%), personal/family (10.61%), COVID (10.61%), academics (9.60%), and their job (7.58%). Some of the **top reasons for graduate students** were: finances (21.43%), personal/family (20.71%), job (15%), academics (6.43%), COVID (5.71%), issues with A&M commerce (4.29%), and other (26.43%).

Following Dr. Su's report, President Ballenger called for discussion from the Faculty Senate. Senator Yasmin Atinc stated that while students have many reasons for not returning, their primary concerns are not related to dissatisfaction with their classroom experiences or the learning environment. Senator Atinc recommended that the administration put forward a strategic plan to determine the role administrators play as well as what the Academic Affairs office might do to increase enrollment.

Senator Mercado-Sierra asked how these statistics compared before and during COVID (Fall 2020), noting that the shift to online education could have impacted instructional quality as well as student engagement. Dr. Su stated that the IE Office did send out a COVID survey and that she would provide that information to the Senate following the meeting. Dr. Mercado-Sierra asked if Dr. Su could send the Non-Returning Students survey from Fall 2019 vs. Fall 2020 to see what things looked like in comparison. Dr. Su stated she would send this information to the Senate body.

Dr. Su will provide additional information from Institutional Effectiveness.

**Reports from Committees:**

- **The Scheduling and Facilities:** Nothing to report
- **Awards Committee:** Senator Jia informed the Faculty Senate that nominations from the senate body for the Piper Professor Award must be put forth today. She indicated that Dr. Allen Headley (Department of Chemistry) was recommended for the nomination. Senator Greaves Lancaster moved that we accept Dr. Headley’s nomination, and Senator Delgado-Acevedo seconded. Dr. Headley’s nomination passed unanimously.
- **Academic Life:** Nothing to report
- **Academic Practice:** Nothing to report
- **Budget:** Nothing to report
- **Curriculum:** Nothing to report
- **Organization of the Senate:** Nothing to report

**Unfinished Business**

*Tenure and Promotion Procedures (Associate to Full Professor) – Senator Pierce.*

Senator Pierce asked if anyone had spoken to Dr. Humphreys about the current policy and, pending agreement from the Senate body, how we might change the policy. President Ballenger stated she talked to Dr. Dobbs, who talked to Dr. Humphreys, who indicated it needed to come back to Faculty Senate for revision of the policy. President Ballenger indicated she would find a committee to send this policy to for consideration. Senator Pierce called for a conversation about the policy to determine Senate interest in making potential modifications. Senators Williams, Mercado-Sierra, and Palmer provided feedback in support of sending the issue to a committee for additional consideration. Senator Ponton recommended that this issue be taken up by the Academic Life committee and subsequently returned to the Faculty Senate for a vote, pending revisions made at the committee level. President Ballenger thanked Senator Ponton for taking up the issue within the Academic Life committee.

Academic Life committee will explore this issue and recommend potential modifications to the policy, pending their conversation.

**New Business**

*Curriculum Changes at Department/College Level – Senator Atinc.*

**Ms. Vicki Stewart** (instructor in the Accounting Dept in the College of Business and member of the COB Curriculum Committee) indicated she had contacted President Ballenger to ask that the Faculty Senate consider an issue. Ms. Stewart stated their faculty-led curriculum committee had been overridden by an executive decision regarding curriculum changes.

Ms. Stewart stated that a member of the COB Curriculum Committee

had asked to take a course out of the MS Marketing degree (ECO 595). They wanted to replace that course with another marketing course that was already being taught in the dept, because students felt they were redundant. The Marketing committee member proposed to take out ECO 595 and rename a course already in the MS Marketing degree to Marketing 595 so there would be room for another more relevant course in their curriculum (on 9/9). On 9/14, the Executive Committee of the COB voted to create a new course called COB 595 that would replace all 595 courses within each of the COB departments (MBA, MS degrees) except for ACCT 595 which they would not replace (because it was required for students who sit for the CPA exam). Ms. Stewart stated the COB Curriculum Committee had no knowledge of this new course being created; the COB dean indicated that the 595 courses were being consolidated to overcome a “resource issue” in terms of faculty availability to teach department-specific research courses.

Ms. Stewart said the COB Curriculum Committee discussed the dean’s position, solicited information from the faculty, and subsequently took a vote on changing all 595 courses to a generic course. The outcome of the vote within the Curriculum Committee was four departments (4) voting no and two (2) affirming this change. Despite this outcome at the Curriculum Committee level, the COB Executive Committee then voted against the Curriculum Committee’s recommendation, created the course, and entered it into CourseLeaf. The COB dean subsequently denied other requests to discuss this concern.

Ms. Stewart stated that the COB faculty were against the creation of a generic research course (COB 595). Dr. Nippani stated they would be unable to use their new donor-funded Finance Lab if all COB students were in the same 595 sections. He showed university procedure 11.99.99.R0.12 that indicated “the department offering the 595 course has autonomy in its organization and instructional operation,” “a student must enroll in the 595 section in the students’ major department,” and “exceptions to this policy must receive written permission from the department head and be filed in the Office of Graduate Studies.” Dr. Nippani indicated that they had done the legwork to speak with their dean but had been rebuffed. Dr. Guclu Atinc (former associate dean of COB) indicated that this policy went against their Faculty Handbook, as faculty governance is imperative in curriculum matters. Dr. Atinc indicated the primary issue at hand was administrative overreach and a lack of commitment to shared governance. Dr. Nippani agreed, affirming that we must not go against the procedures which govern our policies at the university.

Senator Pierce asked if the new COB 595 course was currently in CourseLeaf. Dr. Guclu Atinc stated the course was just created this semester and might not be in the system yet. Senator Pierce stated he would deny the change in CourseLeaf when it came his way for approval. President Ballenger recommended Senator Pierce take this course of action. Dr. Nippani indicated that he was concerned about the precedent-setting nature of this course of action, asking, “Is this procedurally proper? And if it is improper, how can we address it and ensure this is not repeated in later years?” Senator Delgado-Acevedo

<p>shared that this happened in her curriculum committee last year, but she did not think to bringing it to the Faculty Senate's attention.</p> <p>Senator Pierce stated as the university's Curriculum Committee chair, he was satisfied that this was an inappropriate academic change, and that he would deny it. Senator Bob Williams recommended that Faculty Senate draft a resolution to communicate the importance of shared governance and honoring the faculty's role educating students.</p> <p>President Ballenger called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Senator Klassen moved to adjourn the meeting. Senator Palmer seconded the motion.</p> <p>The meeting was adjourned at 3:58 pm.</p>	<p>Senator Pierce will deny the proposed COB 595 curriculum change upon receipt in CourseLeaf.</p>
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