

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Sept. 6, 2022

Time beginning and ending: 2:05-3:10 (approximate)

Present: Hongmei Jia, Joshua Ege, Christian Hemplemann, Stephen Starnes, Omar El Ariss, Samantha Klassen, Kathryn Dixon, Julia Ballenger, Jason Davis, Mark Moreno (Secretary), Michael Oldham, MaryJo Dondlinger (for Michael Ponton), Tina Lancaster, Sawyer Magnus, Yasemin Atinc (President), Brandon Randolph-Seng, Nikolay Sirakov, Benton Pierce, Avril Knox (for Marta Mercado-Sierra), Zachary “Zak” Palmer, Thomas Boucher, Andrea Williams, Bahar Modir, Tami Morton

Not Present: Johanna Delgado-Acevedo, Brooke Clemmons, James Devlin, Emily Newman, Jane Kosarek, Ozum Yesiltas

1.) Approval of the Minutes

Senators unanimously approved the meeting minutes of May 3, 2022; Senate President Atinc moved to approve, seconded by Senator Williams.

2.) Introduction and Welcome of New Senators

President Yasemin introduced incoming Senator Sawyer Magnus, who replaces Sandra Hayes (Library); MaryJo Dondlinger, temporarily replacing Senator Ponton (likely a permanent replacement, Higher Education and Learning technologies); Dr. Nikolay Sirakov, (Professor, Mathematics); Dr. Avril Knox, substituting for Senator Mercado-Sierra.

3.) New Constitution of the Faculty Senate

The faculty senate met over the Summer to discuss the final draft of the constitution and it was decided that the final draft prepared by Senator Palmer was ready for general distribution to the Senate, for one final review.

President Atinc said a Senate vote on the new constitution after review is possible over email as well but since we have quite a few new senators, it is best to let the Faculty Senate review one more time. Once the voting at the Senate is completed, the Compliance office, Provost and the President will be reviewing it as well.

One of the things the committee wished to change, she added, was that the Faculty Senate should directly be tied to the president’s office and have more presence and influence on campus. The Senate can move forward with the new constitution once all the process is completed.

In response to questions, Senator Palmer stated that the committee based the new constitution on all of the other such documents throughout the A&M system, so there is “nothing strange” about it. Senator Sirakov asked if the constitution needs alignment with that of the main campus at

College Station. Senate President Atinc added that that was not necessarily the intention but that the Faculty Senate needed references to justify certain changes and that the constitution is reviewed every five years, “so it was time.”

The final draft of the constitution follows the basic structure of that of the main A&M campus along with other institutions. In response to a question by interim Senator Dondlinger, Drs. Palmer and Atinc said it is possible that original document go to full Senate for comparison. President Atinc suggested sending the old constitution to senators alongside the new draft, so it is possible to review changes.

4.) On scheduling a meeting with the New Provost Dr. Vacha-Haas

Senate President Atinc scheduled a meeting on behalf of the Senate with the incoming Provost, Dr. Vacha-Haase. She solicited any suggestions for discussion at the meeting. She will invite the provost to a future Faculty Senate meeting. Senator Pierce asked if the full Senate should wait to ask the provost questions, or if we should leave that up to President Atinc in her meeting. Senator Palmer suggested a lunch meeting with the provost. Dr. Atinc said, “we need” to work on establishing the importance of the Senate, and that the senate should not only hold a lunch meeting the provost, but also with the university president. Such meetings can be either with the Executive Council of the senate or the full senate. Dr. Atinc will bring the issue up in her meetings with both Drs. Rudin and Vacha-Haase.

She asked if anyone needed to bring something up to let her know before the meetings.

5.) Periodic meetings with President Rudin

The Senate will request periodic meetings with President Rudin, as reiterated by Dr. Atinc, who will talk further about that at the next full Senate meeting.

6.) Changes to Faculty Evaluations/Course Evaluations.

General discussion occurred regarding questions of diversity awareness as an item on future faculty evaluations. Dr. Atinc commented on how that criteria would be judged by upon administrators when they do not have such criteria on their evaluations. Senator Starnes remarked that it was an item discussed in committee at an earlier date. President Atinc asked if there was a “functioning committee” working on the issue of diversity. Dr. Starnes asked if the Senate sought an overhaul of such evaluations, and that “different departments are doing different things.”

Dr. Atinc commented that, for example, in course evaluations for the College of Business do not list questions related to diversity issues. Senator Pierce asked about initiating discussions with other schools in the system, and if they are discussing the same things: “Is this going to be a better thing for faculty and students?” Perhaps, he suggested that, there could be two student evaluations, one at the beginning and one at the end of the semester.

The issue here is making the evaluations as truly representative and bias free as possible. “No evaluation is going to be 100 percent perfect,” said Dr. Atinc. Senator Davis asked for clarification on what type of evaluations were under current discussion (annual faculty

evaluations student course evaluations?). Some faculty members raised questions on biases emerging in student-faculty evaluations, such as biases against women of color especially. Dr. Atinc suggesting meeting with Dr. Vacha-Haase about faculty evaluations. The committee on faculty evaluations initiated by Dr. Archie, which includes two faculty senators, is still to meet this semester, although administrator evaluations are not yet part of those discussions,

Some senators raised concerns regarding bias and the “popularity contest” aspect of evaluations. Senator Williams added that faculty members tend to incorporate diversity into their classrooms. Senator Ballenger noted that expectations for faculty members, as they pertain to evaluations, should have a place in discussions, and stated this to at least three administrators.

7.) Updates from “Texas A&M System Faculty Senate Council” meeting with Chancellor Sharp

President Atinc said “as we move forward” the system Faculty Senate Council will have the opportunity to meet with Chancellor Sharpe regularly. She is working in a subcommittee on developing the council’s mission and constitution to outline what the council’s purpose is, and the scheduled session in College Station for Sept. 9 includes attending a football game. The Council worked on its constitution throughout the summer, Dr. Atinc said.

Senator Pierce asked if the chancellor was “accelerating” scheduled meetings with the system-wide council. Dr. Atinc said initially it was proposed to have two representatives from each campus to form the council but, there has been a discussion of whether that would make the group too large. There are 11 campuses, and the assembly would end up having 22 members, so there has been concerns that it might become too large of a group.

She will report to the full Senate on developments arising from the Sept. 9 meeting, The System wide Council is very important for the sake of “checks and balances in place.” The system and the Chancellor seem to be very supportive of this group.

. It will also push these institutions to work further on creating sound governance as well as bringing similar issues and problems to the attention of the system and finding resolutions together. The system-wide council also wishes to bring up the issue of faculty members voting for department heads. There will be “more to come,” Dr. Atinc said.

8.) Forming Senate Committees

For the sake of new Senators, Dr. Atinc briefly summarized what each committee entails: Current chairs were acknowledged. Dr. Atinc stated that a chair the Academic Life is open (Dr. Ponton is outgoing chair). She suggested incoming Senator Dondlinger, who accepted (although technically an interim Senator, about to turn permanent) and will obtain an email list of members. For Academic Practice, Dr. Starnes is willing to step down as chair and move into a new position. Dr. Atinc asked Senator Palmer if he is willing to trade his position of chair of Organization of the Senate for that Academic Practice. Senator Randolph-Seng is willing to act as parliamentarian and new Chair of the Organization of the Senate committee. Dr. Palmer suggested combining the Academic Life and Academic Practice committees.

For the Budget Committee: Senator Delgado-Acevedo is the outgoing chair, as Dr. Atinc stated, adding that the Budget committee chair is not by custom invited to university budget meetings. Dr. Ballenger will take over in this position.

Dr. Jia is willing to serve one more term as the Awards Committee chair. Senator Davis agreed to assist on the Awards Committee. Based on his expertise, Dr. Starnes agreed to be the chair of Student Retention. Dr. Ballenger said there needed to be faculty representation “at the table.” Senator Livingston stepped down from the Webmaster position and Interim Senator Dondlinger agreed to take over.

Hybrid meetings?

President Atinc wished to continue with the Senate’s hybrid format (face-to-face and Zoom) for meetings, and she is willing to bring snacks for face-to-face meetings. She will send out the dates for Faculty Senate Executive Council meetings this fall semester.

Any questions?

Senator Davis stated that; faculty members wish to have designated parking spaces especially now that faculty has returned to campus and added that parking has been an ongoing issue for faculty. Dr. Palmer agreed that the Senate should take up that issue in the future.

Senator Williams also wished to know if it is possible to have formal Adobe Creative Cloud trainings, while also noting that is difficult to apply such trainings when the Theater Arts classroom is an auditorium with unique features unlike most standard classrooms.

Senator Moreno mentioned such training that faculty members from history department were engaged in – although formal trainings are infrequent on campus.

- Senator Palmer moved to adjourn. Senator Williams seconded.
- Meeting was adjourned at 3:10pm. (approximate)