

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President

November 27, 2023

via TEAMS

Members Present:

Michael Allen, Sean Alley, Megan Atkinson, Teddy Burch, Melissa Comer, Kris Craven, Mark Creter, April Crockett, Andrew Donadio, Dennis Fennwald, Mary Lou Fornehed, Steve Frye, Syed Hasan, Samantha Hutson, Krystal Kennedy, Matthew Langford, Jane Liu, Mark Loftis, Jennifer Mabry, Ann Manginelli, Lori Maxwell, Holly Mills, Wendy Mullen, Michael Natrass, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Hyewon Park, Mustafa Rajabali, Richard Rand, Christopher Reames, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Scott Smith, Troy Smith, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Amber Spears, Leslie Suters, Kyle Turner, Hannah Upole, Brenda Wilson, Kimberly Winkle

Members Absent:

Steve Canfield, Scott Christen, Yun Ding, Christy Killman, Richard Le Borne, Jeannette Luna, Twanelle Majors, Lenly Weathers

Guests Present:

Lee Wray

Senate President Allen called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

Remarks by President Oldham

The President hopes all had a great holiday and acknowledges this is a busy week for all. The annual "Lighting the Quad" will take place tomorrow, there are basketball games on Tuesday and Wednesday, a Board of Trustees meeting on Thursday, and commencement will take place a week from Friday. All projects around campus are currently on schedule.

Open Questions from the Faculty Senate:

Q: What the latest regarding THEC?

A: In preparation for budgeting for next year, Oldham attended budget meetings to represent all LGI presidents. The meeting went well, but there were indications from the Governor and the legislative session that the budget will be tighter next year; Tech should still be in good shape. Oldham met with Governor Lee to deliver specific requests for Tech, and though the meeting was good and Governor Lee was receptive, he was noncommittal. THEC has a newly-appointed director and will have a new charge that the state legislature will likely address.

Q: Is TN Promise extending from 2 years to 4 years?

A: Not aware of any changes; recent years saw an increased payout level which possibly impacted enrollment, so it's true financial assistance does yield more benefits at four years.

Q: Are companies dropping degree requirements for employment?

A: This may be a somewhat disorganized movement. Not yet a concern for us, but we must extoll the value of earning a degree. We have banded with other four-year institutions in a marketing campaign about four-year degrees (larger salaries, lower unemployment rates, longer life expectancy). It is a question of the value to the employer versus the value to the individual, and though we are concerned and aware, we are not yet worried.

Q: THEC's current role in approving concentrations – why does it have interest?

A: We don't receive approval for new concentrations from THEC, only new programs. Its interest lies in eliminating duplication of effort. Historically, the state did not want excessive duplication of degrees across the state to keep costs down; this did not necessarily apply to Liberal Arts, and this predated LGIs and local boards. It is now an unnecessary bureaucracy.

Q: What is left for it to have an interest?

A: THEC may merge with TSAC, and may continue to be the state's primary data collector; it also oversees other higher education institutions in TN.

Q: Is there any discussion about the state stopping funding for certain majors that do not lead directly to jobs?

A: We have not heard anything and would push back on this idea, but need to look at it locally; we need to offer majors relevant to the economy (so graduates have work). THEC debated this years ago and used a consultant to analyze salaries. Engineering and hands-on majors had higher salaries and humanities majors had lower, but mid-career salaries were high for all, so it's a difficult issue. Only 40% of college graduates are employed in the major field five years after graduation, but we should promote that college is still great for building community and developing problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. We hope to offer opportunities to our students to find work beyond graduation, but ultimately, we want them to excel even beyond that.

Q: When West Stadium renovations have been made, will the stadium still be Tucker Stadium?

A: This is in question and available for naming opportunities; the issue has been discussed with the Tucker family and they are open to changes. There are conversations with groups and those donating.

Q: Could it be corporate-named?

A: Yes, but we would support term limits for corporate sponsorship.

Q: Will Overall Field be renamed?

A: It has been resurfaced and retains the name, but it's possible.

Q: What's the latest on the wind tunnel in Crossville?

A: We are waiting for the state to transfer the property to our foundation. The facility has 120,000 square feet – one half is office space and the other half is workspace. It was purchased for \$3.2 million with donated funds. Whisper Arrow will lease 1/3 for their operation and Tech will occupy the rest. Engineering will conduct research (wind tunnel for GM in Detroit), and it will also serve as a high-performance computing location with the intent to expand capabilities on campus to support research. The location aids in partnering with Oak Ridge and Crossville. The process is slow, but moving.

Q: If it's state-funded, will classes be held there?

A: The opportunity will be there, but not until it's well established. There is potential, but it's premature since Knoxville and Oak Ridge provide an educational market already.

Q: What would state money be used for there?

A: Maintenance and renovation; there will be a lot to maintain with high-performance computing (staff and equipment).

Senate President Allen stated he was working on getting Provost Bruce and VP Stinson to visit the Faculty Senate.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 p.m.

Approved: 01/29/2024