

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President, March 31, 2025

Meeting called to order at 3:35PM.

Present: Michael Allen, Megan Atkinson, Teddy Burch, Scott Christen, Melissa Comer, Kristine Craven, Mark Creter, Andrew Donadio, Ciana Bowhay, Mary Lou Fornehed, Jerry Gannod, Ka Grimes, Syed Hasan, Amy Hill, Colin Hill, Krystal Kennedy, Matthew Langford, Richard Le Borne, Jeannette Luna, Jennifer Mabry, Twanelle Majors, Ann Manginelli, David Mann, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Hyewon Park, Yi Peng, Mustafa Rajabali, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Leslie Suters, Dennis Tennant, Thomas Timmerman, Kristen Trent, Kyle Turner, Lenly Weathers, Brenda Wilson, Kimberly Winkel, Kexin Xu

Absent: Wei Chang, Yun Ding, Joshua Field, Melissa Geist, Alfred Kalyanapu, Christy Killman, Holly Mills, Michael Nattrass, Amber Spears, Hannah Upole

Guests: President Oldham, Lee Wray

1. Longevity Pay for C&S

- a. Pay increases based on longevity? Some are feeling overlooked. **President Oldham:** Seeing some second or third order effects after implementation of Mercer Plan. When we made adjustments, based on the Mercer/market, there were adjustments made that brought them in close to staff that had more experience in that role. We made some additional adjustments based on recommendations, based on years of service/experience. This is part of the Phase 3 that the board has approved and will be implemented on July 1. These changes were based on current position. Ones who had moved positions or had a change in status were not included in that.
- b. The message coming from HR is different. Several people have been affected by this, and we can understand why they are upset. **President Oldham:** Send me specifics. If they change to a different job or it's a reclassification, that can make a difference. I will be happy to make sure cases are looked at. We always want to do the right thing. It's hard when employees feel like they have been looked over.
- c. Other units are dealing with this. If HR could roll something out about this being fixed, that would be great. **President Oldham:** The board has approved changes, but we don't have state budget approval yet, so the communication to those affected won't happen until that is all finalized. It's about 85 people.

2. Wind tunnel in Crossville

- a. Plans and benefits? **President Oldham:** There are three major components to what we're doing in Crossville. All this is funded by the state and has positive implications but no budget impact. This "Crossville Research Center" will have three parts – wind tunnel, high performance computing, and high-tech business incubator. The space has 120,000 sq. ft. – 60,000 office space; 60,000 shop type

space. Some of the space is currently under lease to Whisper Arrow (designing and eventually will build airplanes). The wind tunnel is a “gift” from GM in Detroit we will have to pay to relocate and rebuild, out of state dollars. It is less than 10 years old, state of the art – a ¼ scale wind tunnel primarily used for aerodynamic studies. Will be an important resource for the university and region. Will take about 18 months to relocate and rebuild. Potential benefits include: computing – for research and academics, to increase the scale that we can do on campus; high tech business incubator – to connect more faculty with startup opportunities; commercialization opportunities; to grow regional economy around high tech areas; benefit to students – opportunities for students to get involved in original research and access state of the art facilities as well as startups; will support graduate students through additional stipend, research opportunities. Faculty in computer science and mechanical engineering working with us on the projects. Infrastructure and economic impact plays a role. Faculty will be involved going forward as well. Still in early stages and will hear more in the future.

- b. Will we have a satellite campus there? **President Oldham:** We have thought about it. We have good local partnerships. The question is what are the right academic offerings that would work in that setting. Many scenarios are possible- could have on ground faculty, hybrid classes. As this gets fleshed out there will be many opportunities; early to tell what it would look like. Comments: The proximity to Oak Ridge increases the possibility of partnerships there. It will open up opportunities.
- c. Programs are usually based on student interest and faculty need, but this seems to be opposite of that. What about the director that was hired? **President Oldham:** (Jeff Bordner sp??) is an expert on wind tunnels, had a career in that area, and is retiring from GM. He has significant expertise we need. This is a staff position and will be an important part of helping get this going and helping faculty with opportunities. Tony Skjellum is running the high-performance computing center at UT Chattanooga, and he is coming here; ASCEND is the new university center for advanced scalable quantum computing. This positions us prominently. The center is a big deal for the university. It will serve us well. Faculty are involved and heavily engaged and helping make decisions on what it look like, how it’s used, student benefit, etc.
- d. Is the goal to create a research facility rather than an educational/teaching facility? **President Oldham:** We were not looking to establish a presence in Crossville. We were looking for ways to engage tech-based companies and give faculty/ students greater experience, like SAIC and computer science. A really good model that was affected by COVID. Whisper Arrow approached us and wanted to know if we were interested in a wind tunnel. Then we found out about the available building in Crossville. The state said they could help

financially. All the pieces came together so that we were able to do this without any financial risk to the university, a great opportunity to leverage to the fullest. If we are able to add business opportunities to the state, they may continue to fund those kinds of opportunities.

3. Promotion and Tenure Process –

- a. How to reduce bias in the workflow? **President Oldham:** I am hesitant to weigh in too much while Policies 205 and 206 are being revised. In general, having more meaningful involvement with faculty would be helpful in the process. Out of all the cases we review annually 95-98 % are pretty straightforward and everyone is in agreement. Meaningful faculty involvement earlier in the process would be helpful. **Comments:** the committees on 205 and 206 should know that this is still a concern. This is a new conversation stemming from the last business meeting. Will share the information with the committee

4. General Education Implementation Committee Decisions

- a. Recent recommendations reducing required science credits (8 hours to 4 hours) would place TTU last in the state for gen ed science requirements. Does this align with our mission? **President Oldham:** Gen ed is a complex thing to deal with. We have to satisfy a lot of different expectations and requirements. We will likely spend a lot of time on these questions and will likely not move the ball a whole lot. We have to comply with state law, transferability of credits, etc. The essence of your question is what is unique about gen ed at Tennessee Tech. We need to meet core expectations but it doesn't need to look like everyone else. We may disagree on the right mix of what it should be. A third of students' education is gen ed, and they will tell you it is a waste of time, of little benefit. They take them because they have to. The effort to revitalize gen ed is and continues to be a faculty led conversation. I have just encouraged them to be bold and revitalize gen ed in meaningful ways.
- b. How to connect the courses? **President Oldham:** My belief is that students don't need the content as much as the relevance, the 'why' behind what they are learning. We need to help them understand how it connects to other things. **Comments:** There were no science chairs on this gen ed committee, seems like STEM didn't have a seat at the table. We are cutting out sciences when we are a STEM infused university. Students want flexibility, fun classes with unique names. Gen ed does seem like something students have to get through; they don't enjoy it all. **President Oldham:** We are required to work within the 41 CR requirement. We do need to make gen ed more relevant, but we have to work with that.
- c. Was there a prioritization for digital and financial literacy? **President Oldham:** I encouraged the committee to make our gen ed as relevant for students as possible. I had no advice to give them of preferences of one over another. I do appreciate the addition of digital literacy and financial literacy. The composition

of the committee – disciplines were represented; All disciplines were represented on the gen ed committee, and all categories were adjusted for flexibility. What was passed leans on the side of flexibility.

- d. Programs will determine what the balances will be? Advising level? How will it be implemented? Do departments guide this or do we do this on an individual student basis? Part of the excitement is the newness of the flexibility. With the cut in requirements do we risk making some depts low producing? If students were engaging with gen ed, they would get a wholistic approach. **President Oldham:** Honors as a model, what we want gen ed to be. If faculty senate or any group of faculty have come up with a better way of doing gen ed, I would love to be able to promote that at the state level and get the opportunity to pilot something.
- e. Part of this has been the push to get this done now. Is it more important to get it right or done? President Oldham: The committee did what they were tasked to do. I don't know about the time frame. I would rather get it right but I don't know what is driving the schedule.

Such Other Matters:

- Roteract Club is meeting tomorrow in front of Foundation Hall for campus cleanup.