

Faculty Senate Meeting with the President – April 21, 2025

Meeting started at 3:35 pm.

Present: Michael Allen, Megan Atkinson, Melissa Comer, Kristine Craven, Mark Creter, Andrew Donadio, Ciana Bowhay, Jerry Gannod, Melissa Geist, Rene Grimes, Syed Hasan, Colin Hill, Amy Hill, Alfred Kalyanapu, Krystal Kennedy, Christy Killman, Richard Le Borne, Jeannette Luna, Jennifer Mabry, Twanelle Majors, Ann Manginelli, David Mann, Michael Nattrass, Linda Null, Brian O'Connor, Joseph Ojo, Hyewon Park, Yi Peng, Mustafa Rajabali, Steven Seiler, Lee Ann Shipley, Sandi Smith-Andrews, Amber Spears, Leslie Suters, Thomas Timmerman, Kristen Trent, Kyle Turner, Lenly Weathers, Kexin Xu

Absent: Teddy Burch, Wei Chang, Scott Christen, Joshua Field, Mary Lou Fornehed, Matthew Langford, Holly Mills, Dennis Tennant, Hannah Upole, Brenda Wilson

Guests: President Oldham, Lee Wray, Troy Smith, Kimberly Winkle

Topic 1: Leave accrual for faculty (Pres. Oldham: All benefits are governed by the state. We have very little control over that. Exempt employees have flexibility on setting schedules.)

- Any more discussion about chairs moving to a 12-month contract? Pres. Oldham: It's a continuing conversation. It might depend on complexity of appointment, expectations, etc. I probably would defer to the provost to do that in a way that makes the most sense.
- Is how the sick leave can be used strictly defined by the state? Pres. Oldham: It applies to the individual and immediate relatives that needed to care for. I believe that does come from the state.

Topic 2: New signage (Pres. Oldham: The two new signs just off I-40 (Willow and Jefferson) are a 50/50 partnership between Tech and the city. It was important for the university to have the city express that level of pride in being part of the community.)

Topic 3: Severe weather planning with new construction (Pres. Oldham: Great question. Should be part of the project planning process.)

- Storm sheltering capabilities? It's nearly impossible to fit people in areas – hallways, bathrooms – and in the last 4-5 years we have had a lot of wind weather. Pres. Oldham: I'm not sure to what extent the campus could accommodate storm shelter requests for everyone on campus. This is an area we need to improve.
- What do other universities do? Pres. Oldham: My experience is that our efforts are comparable to what I've seen in other places. A lot comes down to training. We could do a better job.
- Centralized emergency management communicating with building coordinators? Pres. Oldham: We have centralized emergency management but building coordinators aren't selected for that kind of function (more light duty responsibilities). We are having conversations about being better organized and functioning at a higher level.
- General discussion: We should be doing drills more often. Maybe include a syllabus statement regarding emergency procedures. Improve Signage.

Topic 4: NASCAR sponsorship (Pres. Oldham: We've had very little direct interaction in regard to NASCAR. No one has approached us, but we could look into it. We do have a relationship with Titans where we get some advertising.)

- General Discussion: Many departments could leverage or connect with such a sponsorship – the Baja team, history of NASCAR, alumni connections, parking garage funding, etc. (Lee Wray will have info for us by the first of fall.).

Topic 5: Current controversy with Harvard and political administration; Tech and national/state legislature (Pres. Oldham: We have not had that experience at TTU. I don't anticipate being at odds with the federal or state governments around what we do here.)

- Bills to dismantle DEI and eliminating DEI offices on campus are making it through the state level. The message is that universities are hiring unqualified people and that is a bad message to send. (Pres. Oldham: We don't hire unqualified people regardless of where they're from or what the look like. We do want a diverse educational experience, broadly speaking. We do not give preferential treatment, and we follow the law. Consistently the feedback we get is that TTU is a great institution for serious minded students. We don't have a lot of activity that tends to distract from the educational value.)
- Cuts to science funding; how are you with promoting research funding? (Pres. Oldham: Promoting research activities/funding is a high priority. A lot of my job is to educate policy makers and general public on the value of research and what those activities are. It is a constant conversation.)
- Do our legislators understand the difficulty in keeping pace globally, while cutting the workforce and freezing grants? (Pres. Oldham: We are working on 5-10 year horizon on impact value. This gives us the ability to help people see benefits and tangible outcomes. We need to continue to promote/show the community and legislators what we are accomplishing.)
- How can we prepare our graduates for the workforce – with grant funding frozen, it impacts scholarships and internships? (Pres. Oldham: We have a little more leverage with the state recurring dollars. An idea of the impact and relevant value on cybersecurity jobs needed.)
- We need to do more on getting the word out on what we are doing. (Pres. Oldham: Yes, it doesn't matter how much you communicate, it's never enough. You can never overcommunicate.) Should we bump up that on a campus level? (Pres. Oldham: Our best asset is Jonathan Frank in communication and marketing. He is excellent and can help us tell the stories.)
- We could promote departments of education and the value of public school systems. Difficulties in trying to find teachers, changes at state and national level of ed changes, voucher bills, etc. (Pres. Oldham: We graduate the largest number of school teachers, and I am very proud of that. Most legislators are well aware of the value of public education, but there has been a trend of undervaluing those careers. Educators not encouraging potential educators.)

Topic 6: Removing the French and German programs even though the university is in a strong financial position (Pres. Oldham: Provost and I have discussed this off and on. This is not a new situation and there have been efforts for at least 5 years to correct this. It has been openly discussed for a long time and hasn't gotten any better. True, we're not in a budget crisis situation, but we prefer to make decisions with objectivity as opposed to responding to a crisis. It is important to do the right thing.

- Why are we eliminating a program and two tenured faculty lines, while we are hiring more administrative positions, etc. (Pres. Oldham: We are actually pretty lean administratively, compared to other institutions. Higher ed is one of the most regulated industries there is, lots of audits and compliance reports that have to be followed. We have to have people to do those things. There are definitely areas where we need more people (ADA compliance, emergency management, health services, campus police, etc.). It doesn't mean faculty are getting shorted. This is the first time in my time here that we have had to let faculty go because of a program closure. This is really about concentrations that historically have extremely low enrollments.
- So other programs with low enrollments could be eliminated? Do we look at how we could operate leaner? (Pres. Oldham: THEC does publish a list of low performing programs, and we have to justify continuing those programs. Sometimes there are mitigating factors. In this case – overall impact and value hasn't been there, and not for lack of effort on their part. It's just a reality. We have closed other concentrations to consolidate or restructure, usually on the request of the department.)
- We are R2 (research level 2) university, and we talk about aspirations. How does it look to have only 1 foreign language? There are a lot of fields that, to go on to grad school, require a foreign language. To get rid of French and German seems ridiculous. (Pres. Oldham: In principle I agree, but in reality, it's not practical. The relevance should speak for itself.)
- Other general discussion: The optics of the situation look bad. Getting rid of French and German is embarrassing. The new general education curriculum does include foreign languages in humanities. Having a foreign language is important in a liberal arts and science institution, and in a global society. Taking away these programs hampers the ability to get into grad schools and pursue other humanities programs.

Such other matters:

- Thanks to Senator Rajabali for his service this year.
- Thanks to Dr. Oldham.
- Request for 1 more meeting about AVP compliance, probably next Monday.