

The University of Tennessee Faculty Senate
MINUTES
November 19, 2007

Those absent were: Gary Bates, Roberto Benson, Doug Birdwell, Donald Bruce, Max Cheng, Carol Collins, Paul Crilly, Steven Dandaneau, C. A. DeBelius, Joel Diambra, Bethany Dumas, Becky Fields*, Bruce Fisher, Patricia Freeland, Randall Gentry, Lee Han, Robert Holub, Roxanne Hovland, Scott Kinzy, Ramon Leon, Catherine Luther, Sam MacMaster, Murray Marks, John McRae, Wesley Morgan, Jay Pfaffman, Lloyd Rinehart, W. Tim Rogers, Molly Royse, Gregory Sedrick, Anne Smith, Montgomery Smith, Karen Sowers, Ken Stephenson, Jeannie Studer, Patricia Tithof, Gary Ubben, Klaus Van den Berg, Tse-Wei Wang, John Wodarski, Tim Young

*Alternate Senators: Carol Myers for Becky Fields

D. Patterson called the meeting to order at 3:32 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INTRODUCTIONS

Establishment of Quorum (S. Kurth)

Kurth confirmed that a quorum was present.

Senate President's Report (D. Patterson)

Interim Ombudsperson. The two applications received were reviewed by the Executive Committee and forwarded to the Provost. The person selected will serve until a decision is made about restructuring the Ombudsperson position. Patterson has engaged in conversations with various administrators about the possibility of hiring a professional ombudsperson. The belief is that faculty and staff complaints that could be handled by an ombudsperson. The Faculty Affairs Committee is considering this possibility and the requisite changes to the Faculty Handbook.

System/Campus Organization. President Petersen's memo represents a holding action. It has been described as a "road map without a destination." The Board of Trustees charge was to establish a plan. Discussions about organization are continuing. There are several key issues. The organizational structure of IT is unclear and thus remains an unresolved issue. Patterson clarified that the lack of confidence in resolution of the IT situation is not intended to be a critique of IT staff, as they have struggled to operate effectively while there is a leadership vacuum. Another issue is the Cherokee Farm. The Executive Committee's perspective is that the system's actions are circumventing the 2001 Master Plan approved by the Board of Trustees. A third issue is the unidirectional nature of communication. As directed by the Senate, Patterson has communicated Senate resolutions to the President and Board of Trustees. There has been no response from the President. It is crucial that system/campus organizational issues be resolved soon. Our campus is anticipating significant growth in its faculty and student body. Strategic planning is underway. The Senate supports our Chancellor and the interests of our students during the negotiations.

Patterson announced that Senate resolutions have lead to action (formation of task forces) on safe zones and wellness.

R. Bayer's 60th birthday was recognized.

Chancellor's Report (L. Crabtree)

The Chancellor was out of town.

Provost's Report (R. Holub)

The Provost was not available.

MINUTES

Faculty Senate

Minutes of the Faculty Senate meeting of October 22, 2007, were approved.

Faculty Senate Executive Committee

The minutes of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting of November 5, 2007, were available as an information item.

MINUTES POSTED ELECTRONICALLY

Undergraduate Council (J. Romeiser)

The proposal to add minus grades and to establish the quality points associated with each grade reported in the September 18, 2007, minutes was approved unanimously by the Undergraduate Council. The October 30, 2007, minutes contain subsequent actions to address catalog issues associated with the addition of minus grades and clarification that a C- is not a satisfactory grade. In addition to Romeiser, T. Diacon was available to answer questions. N. Cook inquired about "housekeeping" details associated with the change, specifically courses for which the grading scale is A, B, C, and no credit and the A or B grade specification for Honors English. She asked whether there would be an opportunity for departments to address these details in time for the revisions to appear in the Undergraduate Catalog at the same time as the new grading scale. Diacon said there would be an opportunity for departments to make change and for colleges with policies requiring that students obtain a C or better in major courses to address the C- grade.

L. Gross reported that students in his class wanted to know if there would be a dual system for three years. Diacon stated that there would be no conversion of previous grades. Gross indicated that a poll of his students indicated that they overwhelmingly failed to support the proposed change in the grade scale. Gross distributed his calculations of changes in GPA that would be associated with the new policy. His calculations support the assertion that others have made that there would be a reduction in the number of students with 4.0 averages. His analysis was not historical, as was Diacon's. Diacon said he talked to the Vice Provost at the University of Georgia who reported a slight GPA drop. At Western Kentucky the addition of plus and minus grades produced limited change. He said other schools, such as Wake Forest, reported similar results. Romeiser pointed out that individual faculty members have the choice of using or not using minus grades. For those holding Hope Scholarships, B- averages would not meet the requirement. Other state schools already have B- grades. SGA representative Jennifer Buntin directed attention to the bill attached to the packet of materials distributed to Senators, specifically the concern expressed about Hope Scholarships. She also inquired about an A+ grade option. Diacon stated the A+ grade was considered, but there was virtually no

support for it. B. Blass asked students in his Astronomy class for their views. There was virtually no support for the change and the question of the impetus for the proposed change was raised. Diacon noted that he had consistently reported the lack of student support for the proposed change. It was pointed out that other schools added both plus and minus grades. Diacon replied that he identified only one school (University of Nebraska at Kearney) with plus grades that added minus grades and it reported a grade increase.

J. Malia asked why the change was being proposed. Diacon provided two reasons: a) adding minus grades provides a "more finely tuned instrument" and the campus has already recognized the advantages associated with more grade choices and b) the majority of schools that utilize a 4.0 scale have plus and minus grades. Romeiser added that most institutions have plus and minus grades and new faculty members who come from those institutions perceive not having minus grades as a negative. Heller asked Diacon why he thought students were so opposed. Diacon thought students only imagined the possible negative consequences and did not recognize that while some would receive minus grades, others would receive plus grades. Gross said the Provost had given another reason at an Executive Committee meeting, namely that professional schools reduce GPAs for schools without the full range of grades. Diacon said that was anecdotal information and he could not say that was the case. He asked J. Heminway for confirmation and she indicated she did not know. T. Handler noted that he keeps hearing that students are a product. It appears we are not considering them as our consumers.

Another Senator commented that the proposed minus grades could be coordinated with faculty grading standards, e.g., a C- less than 70. B. Lyons commented that the Undergraduate Council has four student representatives and he would like to know what they thought. Romeiser said the proposal was tabled last spring to allow for more feedback. At the September Council meeting there were new student representatives and he did not recall that they voted against the proposal. M. Parker reported that percentage points were mapped using the current and the proposed system to ascertain possible impact. Diacon pointed out that only the College of Nursing has a specified grading scale and reminded faculty members in other colleges that they should put their scales on their syllabuses. M. Wirth came from an institution that added plus and minus grades at the same time. Cook asked to speak to the addition of the A+ grade proposed by the SGA resolution. Such a grade would be a rare event, but it should be possible leaving aside the issue of quality points. Diacon said schools give A+ grades, but few provide an additional "bump" in points. Senate Graduate Assistant S. Simmons reported that the Law School uses the whole range from 0 to 4.3. Parker raised the historical question of why plus grades were added but not minus grades. O. Stephens said he wondered that at the time it occurred. Other schools like the University of Georgia did not have minus grades, so the campus adopted what was the conventional approach at that time. Diacon stated there has been a massive shift in recent decades away from whole grades. M. Breinig said it simply involves the number of breaks being made. V. Alexiades brought up keeping an A at 90. Diacon pointed out there is no agreement on grading scales now. Malia responded that the grades may be calculated differently, but we have a standard translation of them into numbers. Some of the question revolves around the point at which a faculty member sets an A. We are already converting a 100-point scale to a 4- point scale. Cook said when she joined the faculty the Catalog used numerical equivalents for grades, so a big shift was the removal of those from the Catalog.

The minutes of the September 18, 2007, Undergraduate Council meeting were approved. There was confusion about the fact that voting on their approval was in fact a vote on the proposed grade policy change. Parliamentarian Stephens explained the meaning of the vote. A motion to reconsider approval of the Minutes was made and seconded. The motion passed. A motion to approve the grade policy change proposed in the minutes was made and seconded. The question was raised about whether Senate action would be a recommendation or would it be an enactment. As the Senate is the governing body, the policy would be enacted with a positive vote. Blass argued "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." R. Ellis perceived little benefit in changing. J. Stiebert perceived great benefit in changing the grade policy, as there would be a greater spread in grades. Another Senator recalled her shock when she discovered when she went to make out her final grades, there were no minus grades. The motion to approve the grade policy change was approved (36 for, 19 against, 2 abstained). The September 18, 2007, Undergraduate Council Minutes were approved. The October 30, 2007, Undergraduate Council Minutes were approved.

J. Hall asked if there would be a separate vote to approve the A+ grade. It was clarified that there was no motion on the floor. N. Magden clarified that no motion is needed when minutes of Senate bodies, such as the Undergraduate Council, come to a Senate meeting. Diacon asked that any necessary changes to the Undergraduate Catalog be sent to him and/or M. Anderson.

Graduate Council (M. Murray)

The minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of April 26, 2007, were approved.

The minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of August 30, 2007, were approved.

The minutes of the Graduate Council meeting of October 4, 2007, were approved.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Committee on Campus Environment (J. Nolt)

"Focus the Nation"—the resolution calls for Senate endorsement and asks faculty members to participate in events on campus where faculty will give presentations in areas of their expertise and a Baker Center program. The Executive Committee has approved the resolution. A friendly amendment deleting "to" in the first line was accepted. The resolution was approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

UT Relay for Life (M. Johnson)

Matt Johnson was seeking support from the faculty for the event benefiting the American Cancer Society to be held April 18 and 19 in Circle Park. Student organizations are forming teams and the organizers would like faculty teams as well. Breinig asked if the event web site explains what the teams do. Johnson said the teams celebrate lives while participating in a 24-hour (relay) walkathon. Johnson was asked if people needed to solicit sponsors and responded that they have people who engage in that task. Patterson requested that anyone interested in being captain of a team to contact him.

PREVIOUS BUSINESS

A+ Grade

Malia asked to have previous business considered, specifically what happened to the C grade in major courses. Diacon replied that the College of Engineering leaves the decision to individual departments. The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources simply requires a 2.0 average in major courses. The other colleges require a C in major courses. Malia asked what happened to the A+. Patterson said he thought the Senate could send a recommendation. Gross saw two options: passing a motion for the Undergraduate Council to consider it or talking personally to the Undergraduate Council Chair. Malia moved that the Senate request that the Undergraduate Council consider the A+ grade and report back to the Senate. Handler seconded. Diacon said the grade was considered, but the Undergraduate Council has not met since then. N. Mertz raised a point of information, namely, whether the Senate can only vote on motions sent to it. Gross replied the Senate has the option of making resolutions. Malia stated that her motion asked that the Council report back. J. Shefner said it seemed like that would be a waste of time; that it would be better to make a motion. Malia said she wanted the Undergraduate Council to consider the A+ because of the different calculations. Magden argued that the advantage of utilizing standing committees is that they can engage in more discussion. He encouraged referring consideration of the A+ grade to the Undergraduate Council. S. Thomas noted there were two issues: use of the A+ and the numeric value assigned to it. It was clarified that the Undergraduate Council had considered the A+ grade as over 4.0. The motion to have the Undergraduate Council consider the addition of the A+ grade and report back to the Senate passed.

Listserv

Patterson announced that at the request of Past Presidents Gross and White, he opened up the Senate listserv so that Senators can post messages and offer responses.

NEW BUSINESS

Review of Long Term Associate Professors

Malia reported that she had to meet with her department head to discuss her plans to go up for promotion from Associate Professor to Full Professor. She wanted to clarify the status of Associate Professors and any relevant policies concerning those who have been in rank for an extended period of time. S. Martin said that what was transpiring was fact finding in conjunction with the Faculty Affairs Committee. The matter was previously discussed at the Senate Retreat. She said the hope is that everyone will move forward (in rank). Patterson indicated that anyone with questions about the initiative should feel free to contact him.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne B. Kurth, Secretary