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Faculty Senate Chronicle for November 6, 2014

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Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting of November 6, 2014
3:00 – 4:05 p.m.

The regular meeting of the Faculty Senate took place Thursday, November 6, 2014 in room 201 of Buckingham. Senate Chair William D. Rich called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

Of the current roster of 62 Senators, 43 were present for this meeting. Senators Cutright, Dejbord-Sawan, Fant, Freely, Howley, Huss, Klein, Landis, Lazar, Lillie, Osorio, Otterstetter and Scotto were absent with notice. Senators Braun, Ducharme, Quinn, Schwartz and Youngs were absent without notice.

I. Approval of the Agenda

Senator Lashbrook moved to adopt the proposed agenda. The motion was seconded by Senator Raber.

The agenda was adopted without dissent.

II. Approval of the Minutes

Senator Bouchard noted that the September minutes need to be amended to read that the senate approved the April minutes rather than the September minutes.

The minutes were adopted as amended without dissent.

III. Remarks of the Chairman

Chairman Rich remarked as follows:

We have a light agenda today. There are some curriculum proposals that have been reported out by the Curriculum Review Committee.

The President has informed me that, in response to the resolution passed by the Faculty Senate last May, the maximum teaching load for part-time faculty members will be increased from eight to nine credit hours per semester starting in the Spring 2015 Semester. Part-time faculty members teaching more than four credits per semester will, however, continue to be required to report the number of hours they work each week, and will not be permitted to average more than 29 clock hours per week.

All but one of the general education learning outcome committees have either met and elected chairs or scheduled a meeting for next week. The next step is for the chairs of the eight learning outcome committees to develop a template for academic departments and schools to submit courses for learning outcome approval. We are somewhat behind schedule at this point.

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As promised, President Scarborough met with department chairs and deans to hear requests for approval to proceed with faculty searches to meet “critical needs,” and approved eleven such searches, of which two were tenure-track positions and nine were non-tenure-track positions. I have suggested to the President that he explain to this body the basis for these decisions and their relation, or lack thereof, to his ideas about the future of public higher education or of the University of Akron in particular. I expect that he will speak about this in his remarks later in this meeting, and that there will be an opportunity for discussion during the question and answer period immediately following his remarks.

This concludes my remarks.

III. Special Announcements

Chairman Rich reported the deaths of two members of the University community:

Dan Peters, former Director of Basketball Operations, died on Monday, Oct 27, 2014.

Dr. H. Kenneth Barker, Dean and Professor Emeritus in the College of Education died November second at the age of 92.

The Senate stood for a moment of silence in memory of our deceased colleagues.

IV. Reports

Executive Committee

Senator Schulze reported as follows on behalf of the Executive Committee:

Since we last met on October 2nd, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee met on three occasions by itself and once with the President, the Senior Vice President and Provost, and Vice Provost Ramsier.

The EC met on October 8th for regular senate business. The EC appointed members to the University Review Committee and the Learning Outcomes Committees. The EC was updated on University Council business. The EC also discussed preparations for the upcoming HLC visit.

The Executive Committee met on October 16th to prepare for the meeting with the President and Provost. Immediately afterward, the EC met with the President, the Provost and Vice Provost Ramsier to discuss the Provost’s contract extension, part-time loads, general education reform, “critical needs” faculty searches, the college strategic planning process, the review of deans, the criminal justice program proposal, an update on Central-Hower swing space, the process of deciding whether to consolidate libraries, and teaching load limits for contract professionals.

The Executive Committee met on October 30th to prepare the agenda for the November Senate meeting.

Remarks of the President

President Scarborough thanked Chairman Rich for the opportunity to address the Senate. He distributed some written materials that he thought would aid discussion. He discussed his priorities for his first 12 months. The first 12 months have been spent meeting people, getting to know “the team,” researching the finances of the institution, and understanding the university culture. He believes he has learned a great deal in his first three months, but still has much to learn.

The President has begun conversations with each of the colleges and the library division, with the goal of updating each college’s strategic plan. The process involves meeting with the leadership of each college on three separate occasions, then meeting with all of the faculty in each college over two meetings. Over 60 such meetings are scheduled over the nine-month period of time. It is important to emerge from this process with a shared vision for the challenges and a coherent plan for moving forward. Beginning in January, the third three-month period of time, the goal will be to resource those plans. That will be the time the administration will work on the university’s annual budget. The goal of the budget will be to move each of the college’s plans forward.

President Scarborough acknowledged Chairman Rich’s suggestion that we discuss the university’s critical hiring needs. The original plan was that funding for faculty positions would be part of an overall budgeting process that would be informed by the strategic planning process (which is still ongoing). The deans and department chairs agreed that this is a logical approach, but that the hiring timeline associated with some of the requested positions required that decisions be made sooner to avoid missing an entire year’s hiring cycle.

In response, the administration began an “exceptional process,” a process independent of the strategic planning process, to deal with those requests that had such a critical timeline that delaying even two months would cause irreparable harm to the program. A high bar was set to determine which requests would be entertained. Fourteen departments stepped forward to request critical positions. The administration scheduled 14 meetings over the course of three days to hear these requests.

The President and Provost met with representatives from each of the departments. They heard requests for a total of 23 critical faculty hiring needs. In the end, two of the tenure-track positions and nine non-tenure track positions were approved. These decisions were “department-specific” and “case-specific.”

When a department could show critical competencies in academic programs of which there are retiring faculty that only a tenured or tenure-track faculty could possibly

provide, then a tenure-track position was approved. There were some cases in which departments requested non-tenure track positions, such as in Engineering, and the requests were approved when it was shown that the ability to deliver the curriculum would suffer if we didn't fill the position.

When the requests were for faculty to teach lower-division or undergraduate courses, they were approved for non-tenure track positions because it seemed that the main need was to cover classes. The administration tried to ensure that adding a non-tenure track position didn't fundamentally change the "faculty mix."

The requests that did not get approved simply did not meet the standard of being an immediate, emergency need that had to be considered outside of the strategic planning process. Some were possibly critical needs, but they didn't rise to the standard of taking it outside the strategic planning process.

There were some cases that weren't approved because they just didn't meet the standard of proving that there was a need to hire a faculty member. For example, if a department once had 22 faculty members and is now down to 19, that is not a sufficient case for making the decision based on the "very high bar" was set for this moment. Those can be revisited during the college strategic planning and budget process, and perhaps a more substantive case can be made in those decisions.

Some are concerned that this low number of approvals for new faculty hires is a new precedent. The President assured us that it is not. These are "department by department, case by case, very critical, high standard of decision making" about immediate hiring needs. Nothing can be inferred about the future. The President stated that he hasn't learned enough about the institution to be able to reliably predict or project much as this point.

The written material he provided the senate were "other people's thoughts about what the future looks like." These were articles that he received from faculty senators. These articles begin to address some of the issue about what the future may hold and why the "faculty mix" has changed so dramatically over the last 30 years. He encouraged the senate to read the articles and other books or literature. He encouraged us to continue the conversation in the context of institutional planning.

The President added that the annual budget planning process is a critical time. The issues of resource allocation, because they are linked to core values and institutional goals, are critical. The President assured us that he is trying to "gear up" for that moment, representing the most important set of decisions that he is likely to make in his first 12 months. It's important that we reexamine the process by which we adopt the annual operating budget.

The President said that we have a wonderful tradition, which is the University Council Budget and Finance Committee. This committee comprises representatives from the faculty, from the students, from the deans, and from administration that meet regularly to provide input and feedback on the development of the university's annual budget and other issues related to its finances. That process will continue, and we'll hope to build on the improvements that were experienced in the last cycle.

In January through March, we plan to begin "budget hearings" in which each college and administrative unit presents their budget and requests. In these hearings, representatives from each unit can have a conversation with the President and Provost. In addition to that, there is an informal process in which Bill Rich, Chair of Faculty Senate, Steve Weeks, President of Akron-AAUP, and Matt Lee, a representative on the University Council Budget and Finance Committee, meet regularly with the President, and CFO when needed, to discuss the budget. These informal meetings will continue until the recommended budget is completed.

The President believes in following the spirit as well as the letter of shared governance. He is hopeful that this process will result in shared goals and a budget that reflects our institutional priorities and resources.

The President ended by addressing a question that was posed to him earlier in the week. He was asked whether his vision for the university is simply to fix its finances. His answer is absolutely not. The finances are a means to an end, not the end. They are not the vision of the university. The vision of the university is that which we collectively determine through the processes he described. We aspire to be a great public university, and all that entails, in terms of teaching more than the top 50%, not the top 1%. He talked about the importance of research that "solves local problems, builds regional economy, generally improves the human condition here and around the world, and, as our finances allow, perform services to the community." He emphasized the importance of the phrase "as our finances allow."

Remarks of the Provost

The Provost thanked Chair Rich. He reported that the Higher Learning Commission report is well underway. He expressed his thanks to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and to the Steering Committee for the University Council for working together to develop the draft document. That document will be distributed to the campus in the near future for feedback. The Board of Trustees will have a chance on that document as well. All of the input will result in the document that will be submitted to the HLC in advance of their visit in February of 2015.

In its last meeting, the Board of Trustees endorsed the University of Akron Completion Plan for transmittal to the Chancellor. The Provost thanked Chair Rich for his guidance and advice on that document. He also thanked the University Council for their feedback

and endorsement of that document prior to the Board's action. The document is now posted on the Board of Regent's website.

The Provost discussed general education reform. It is an exciting opportunity for us to reimagine and re-envision our curriculum and the learning outcomes expected of our students that make them citizens of the world who will do great things.

Assessment of general education is important. Faculty Senate is going to reform and revise the general education curriculum. The Provost hopes that the outcome will be one where students are easily guided to a collective of courses that meet the outcomes of the general education categories and create an assessment process that demonstrates a continuous improvement in the quality of learning.

As the President mentioned, the college strategic planning visits are going well. The Provost believes that we have all the third visits scheduled for every college by the end of November. The fourth and possibly fifth meetings will happen soon thereafter. These meetings will inform the budget process for fiscal year 2016.

With adjustments that have been made for the Dean of the Graduate School and Vice President for Research, we are going to pull the Achieving Distinction Initiative back under the Office of Academic Affairs. We'll seek a report on both of those initiatives, and we'll assess the reports, the progress on those initiatives, and readjust as appropriate to assure that our investment in those areas of focus provide the return that is appropriate for that kind of investment.

The Provost's Office will be communicating with the deans in the near future. They will be informed about decisions that have been made with regard to part-time faculty teaching so that planning for the spring can be rapidly undertaken.

The Provost thanked the Health Services Group and University Communications. They've done a great job keeping the campus community updated on issues related to communicable diseases such as Ebola.

In addition to the dean searches that have been approved, a new Dean of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering, Eric Amis, recently joined the university. Matt Wilson came in recently for the School of Law. We are also pleased to announce that David Gordon joined us this past week as the inaugural Dean of the College of Health Professions.

Finally, we have three colleges in which deans reviews have started. Bargaining unit faculty from the respective colleges will select their representatives to serve on the committees for Deans Haritos, Krovi, and Midha.

V. Committee Reports

Curriculum Review Committee

Vice Provost Rex Ramsier reported for the committee. The Curriculum Review Committee brings a list of curriculum proposals that came through the system without objection for final approval (Appendix A).

The motion to approve the curriculum proposals was adopted without dissent.

Faculty Research Committee

The Faculty Research Committee submitted a written report (Appendix B).

Part-time Faculty Committee

The Part-time Faculty Committee submitted a written report (Appendix C).

VII. Report from Faculty Senate Representatives to University Council

Senator Erickson reported that the University Council next meets on the 18th. There was no major issue brought up at the last meeting.

VII. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

VIII. New Business

There was no new business.

IX. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 4:03 pm.

Any comments concerning the contents in *The University of Akron Chronicle* may be directed to the Secretary, Pamela A. Schulze (x7725). facultysenate@uakron.edu