

UNO Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes – draft for approval

September 29, 2015

Senators attending: Connie Phelps, Amanda Green, Marie Morgan, Vern Baxter, Joy Ballard, Laszlo Fulop, Molly Mitchell, Wendy Schluchter, Ken Holladay, Tarun Mukherjee, Edit Bourgeois, Christine Ikeda, Jim Logan, Lena Nuccio-Lee, Ting Wang, Cherie Trumbach, Steve Striffler, Greg Seab, Richard Speaker, Juliana Starr, Chris Day, Ivan Gill, Jeffrey Ehrenreich, Shengru Tu, Vassil Roussev, Jim Mokhiber

Due to the temporary absence of President Cherie Trumbach, Vice President Vassil Roussev called the meeting to order. Roussev opened the floor for discussion of the minutes from the previous meeting. Hearing no discussion, he entertained a motion to approve the minutes. This motion was offered, seconded and carried.

Roussev then discussed recent activities of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC).

Meeting with UL System President Dr. Sandra Woodley/UNO Presidential Search

The entire FSEC met with Dr. Sandra Woodley of the UL System on September 10 for a ninety-minute meeting. It was cordial and constructive discussion. She will recommend to the Board that Dr. Randy Moffett be our interim president, starting February 1. This will not be official until the Board votes on it on October 22. There will be an institutional review process, one that is supposed to start this week or next week at the latest. Dr. Moffett will be part of that institutional review team. This will entail, apparently, an outside look at the affairs of the university, taking stock of things both for our own benefit and for the benefit of the UL System.

In terms of the search, Dr. Woodley shared a draft of the schedule for the entire process, which was fairly aggressive. It calls for a decision to be made sometime in February. She is inclined to spend more time if necessary, though, to get the right person rather than rush to an arbitrary deadline. The new president would take over July 1. We discussed the process of the search, and Dr. Woodley assured us that she is committed to this being an open and fair search that will find a competent candidate. She has carried out three searches so far and she encouraged us to reach out and contact the faculty and get their take on the process. Cherie has gotten some initial positive feedback from Northwestern. There is reason to believe that the process will be fair, and that the result has not been predetermined.

Dr. Woodley affirmed the position that UNO is an Urban Research University. Some people on the board believe that UNO should be turned into a purely regional university and do not understand the mix of our urban and research missions, but she does not want to see our mission diminished in any way. She thinks of UNO as being on the same level as LA Tech and Lafayette. No specific personnel issues were addressed, though Woodley did say that the interim president and new president would be making decisions with regard to the upper administration.

Roussev noted that some faculty had raised the question of the granting of tenure to administrators. Woodley indicated that it was very unlikely that this would happen again in the future. The Faculty Senate is going to open a direct line of communication with the UL System to clear up any misconceptions on both sides, and to facilitate a better exchange of information. We expect to have Dr. Moffett address us at our next faculty meeting, hopefully, in October. Dr. Woodley expressed the desire to meet with us as soon as feasible as well. Roussev noted that the FSEC had thought it would be more productive for Woodley to come in November when we will be closer to the transition and she can provide more detail.

Regarding the process of the search, due to Louisiana's public information laws the UL Board has retained a private search company that has begun the process. The Board cannot see the candidates yet.

The floor was then opened to questions.

Senator: So Randy Moffett will officially take over as interim president on February 1. Is he going to be around and involved this fall?

Roussev indicated that during the transition Moffett will be "second in command," so if the president is unavailable, off-campus or taking a leave then Moffett will be the person making decisions on campus.

Another FSEC member noted that President Fos has substantial accrued leave time and Woodley had indicated that he might take time off before the formal transition, allowing Moffett to step in.

A third FSEC member added that Woodley had indicated that all major decisions would go before the UL Board. Roussev noted that this was particularly the case regarding major monetary commitments and personnel decisions.

MAMBO FEST preparations begin

Roussev then turned to the next item on the agenda. Dinah Payne has indicated that preparations for the next Mambo Fest have already started, and she urges faculty members to start considering forming boil teams and volunteering. About

\$60,000 was raised last year, with all money devoted to student scholarships, and we are hoping to top that this year.

Roussev then indicated that the agenda would need to be shuffled slightly due to the need of some senators to leave early today.

Calculation of academic distinctions for graduates

Christy Corey, Chair of Academic Procedures and Standards addressed the Senate. She asked for a vote today on one item: a recommended policy change regarding the honors status for graduating undergraduates. Regarding honors distinctions for undergraduates, she noted that this is one of the few measures that is based on a cumulative GPA, including grades acquired outside UNO. The Registrar's office has requested we change this to be in line with other degree distinctions that are based exclusively on the UNO GPA. Academic Procedures and Standards sees no great concerns in this regard. Corey requested discussion and a vote on a measure, noting the issue had been presented last time.

A Senator asked how other universities dealt with this issue. Corey indicated her direct knowledge was limited to her alma mater, the University of Georgia, where such distinctions were based on UGA GPA grades.

Another Senator asked if someone can graduate from UNO with only 30 credits, and how this would apply. It seems like some students might not have many UNO credits upon which such distinctions would be based. Corey indicated she believed that the required minimum of UNO credits had changed in recent years, and noted that just last year UNO had changed policies to require that half of all credit work in the major and minor must be completed at UNO itself. She asked to be allowed to get back to the Senate regarding specific policies. Bill Sharpton had overseen General Education requirements reform in the past.

Another Senator wondered about the effect of such a change. Would more students receive distinctions? Corey said the committee would have to look further into that issue, and would inform the Senate. Discussion of the appropriate timing and procedures regarding a vote on this issue ensued.

Senator Edit Bourgeois called the question. A vote on the calling of the question resulted in 8 ayes, 10 nays. The question was not called, and discussion continued.

Senators again discussed the significance of UNO's policies regarding the number of hours needed to obtain a UNO degree, and inquired about the other graduation distinctions that the Registrar's office claims are computed on a different basis. Corey agreed to look into these aspects further, reiterating that this measure had been suggested by the Registrar's office in the first place.

Online teaching evaluation system

Corey also discussed the issue of digital teaching evaluations. One development on this front is that students will not be required, as had been proposed, to submit evaluations so as to receive their grades after the completion of the semester. The committee is looking instead at incentive systems. For example, she noted the possibility of an early registration period open only to survey completers, and the possibility of allowing only survey completers access to previous course evaluations during the registration period. She noted that there is a need to avoid the abysmal completion rates of 20% or less that sometimes ensue, and stressed that the committee is looking for advice regarding avoiding this one major pitfall of digital evaluations. A Senator suggested the idea of a raffle. A Senator asked if this was going to save us money and Corey indicated she believed it was hoped that savings might be significant.

Senator Joy Ballard, the Student Government Association representative, wondered why the idea of withholding grades had been taken off the table, noting that UL-Monroe had done something along these lines when she was a student. Corey stated that, in the current atmosphere, it was necessary to remove any potential discouragement in terms of retention and enrollment. What state of mind do we want our students in as they complete our course evaluations too? Corey noted that there is some concern about having the system up and running this fall. A Senator noted that student ratings are essential for Chairs charged with evaluating faculty members. If the compliance rate is going to drop to 10% or less, as we see with online courses, we cannot use this measure and won't be able to evaluate teaching. It could be disastrous. Discussion of the challenges inherent in obtaining sufficient participation rates ensued, with Corey noting that her committee had believed that it was acting in accordance with the Senate's wishes by removing the threat of withholding grades from students. A Senator asked if students can submit such evaluations on their phones in class and submit at the same time, and Corey indicated that she thought that was possible through Webstar itself. Trumbach noted that the Session A online survey results might serve as a pilot study and show us what worked and what did not. Corey noted that Tulane, which uses all digital evaluations with no incentives or threats, gets about 20% survey completion rates, which she described as abysmal. Another Senator asked how and when professors would know how many students have filled out surveys. Corey stated she was unsure when that information would be available. Trumbach asked the Committee to look into the issue further and report back at the next meeting in terms of the possibilities and incentives. A Senator asked that the Senate be given a firm commitment that the surveys will be accessible using mobile devices, and Trumbach agreed, noting that an issue would be whether the accessibility would be through Webstar or through a simpler mobile app.

The Faculty Senate Moodle site

Trumbach referred Senators back to the new Faculty Senate Moodle site, noting the need to promote communication and information exchange. She indicated

that committee chairs and the FSEC have the ability to add information to the various folders within each committee. For example, if we come up with a policy for discussion at a meeting, everyone should go to that folder to examine the proposed draft. Trumbach noted that the "Questions for Administrators" function will remain on the site and available to Senators. The bylaws and roster are located here too. She has included an RSS feed for "Inside Higher Ed" -- a site with important articles relevant to us as well. Some of our committees still have not met and Senators can see what the membership of each is. The entire faculty should be able to access the site, Trumbach suggests. We want things as available to people as possible, and need to find a way to function in a more effective way. "Latest news" postings go out as a brief email to everyone on the list, as can be seen from Trumbach's posting regarding the Faculty Evaluation Policy discussions from the last meeting. We don't want to overload people with information, but this and the calendar could be effective tools for us to use.

The "Committee on Committees" and restructuring of governance

Trumbach turned to the issue of the Committee on Committees. This Committee has now met, and will meet every other week. It is currently seeking to determine what category our various committees fall under, whether they are to be seen as Academic Affairs committees, faculty committees, student affairs and so on. The Committee will seek to discuss different structures, and refining the roles of the Faculty Council and the Senate and their relationship. More committees would be brought more directly within the Senate structure itself. Trumbach noted that the goal is to increase involvement by faculty members, improve communication, and facilitate a working relationship with the Administration. Senators who have ideas or thoughts on these issues should contact Trumbach, Connie Phelps, Vern Baxter or Greg Seab.

Distance learning

Regarding Distance Learning oversight, Trumbach noted that Dr. Nicklow remains keen on this issue. The distance learning consultant who came to campus had a number of recommendations. Trumbach queried Nicklow as to the distribution of the report and he responded that he had forwarded the document to the Senate leadership and anyone who had met with the consultants but he indicated that the document could be more widely disseminated too. Trumbach reminded Senators that this was an externally-generated report. Trumbach noted that Beth Blankenship has joined the oversight committee, which is composed of a wide range of people, and not just faculty. The chair of the Senate's Distance Learning Committee is also on the oversight committee. The Oversight Committee, though, addresses a host of issues beyond the faculty's concerns with pedagogy and related issues. Dr. Sathiadev Mahesh is chair of the committee.

COLA restructuring on hold

Trumbach noted that no "Questions for Administrators" had been submitted this time around. One question that people have been asking, however, has to do

with the restructuring of the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) though. You could say, she stated, that it is "on hold." The FGC is again looking at program evaluations right now, and there are other things we need to examine more closely before any restructuring. Nothing is moving ahead unannounced, she stressed. It became clear, in our meeting with Dr. Woodley, that the system is not applying pressure in this regard; their concern is that we simply fix our budget in some way or another.

Faculty Evaluation Policy revisions

Trumbach then turned to Vern Baxter for an update regarding the Academic Freedom, Tenure and Professional Ethics Committee. Baxter reminded Senators that on August 24 the Senate resolved that departments should be encouraged to develop their own faculty evaluation procedures and policies by November 1. Those policies should involve some numerical evaluation of faculty, and reasonable evaluation criteria. Baxter said he believed that Norm Whitley had circulated a model evaluation policy to the Deans, though it is unclear if those were sent to the department chairs or not. The Committee report from 8/24 also proposed revisions of the draft evaluation policy that came from the Faculty Governance Committee. The Committee is not coming back to the Senate today with any specific language regarding these issues: emphasizing the positive role of faculty evaluation, changing evaluation category 2 "needs improvement," and rewriting some basic language in sections 2.7 - 2.11 to create a less punitive kind of a system. We're a little bit in transition here, trying to determine whose responsibility that is. The Faculty Governance Committee drafted the policy, the Senate is reviewing it and Academic Affairs is closely involved.

Baxter noted that the Committee would like a few minutes of discussion regarding what its charge should be regarding revisions of that default policy, which is separate from the departments' policy that we hope will be the standard. Trumbach offered an update in this regard, noting that Dr. Whitley has been out of town. Whitley had, she thought, believed that department chairs had all that they needed to proceed with creating departmental policies, though Trumbach noted that she has come to understand that is not the case. When Trumbach spoke with Whitley he indicated that he did not have access to the materials he would need to forward to the departments, but would forward these materials upon his return at some point this week. Trumbach advised that the Senate Committee Chair should push for the changes in the language. Trumbach suggested that it was her belief that a faculty member might be judged as "needs improvement" without being sanctioned, since it was her understanding that it was only after three years of being judged as "needs improvement" without doing any of the things that your department chair judges you need to do, then you would go into that last category.

David Beriss thanked Cherie for the clarification, but asked who was supposed to be rewriting this policy then? Trumbach stated that it should be the joint work of

the Senate committee and Academic Affairs. She asked the committee to work closely and directly with Dr. Whitley on the issue. Citing the ongoing "Committee on Committees" work, Baxter thus wanted to be certain that it would be the Senate committee that should do the rewriting, and not the FGC. Trumbach agreed, noting that the policy should simply be reported back to the FGC, which will be undergoing a change in mission. Baxter then stated that the committee would thus take up the charge for changing the language in those areas by the time of the next Senate meeting.

New UNO budget process and committee

Trumbach then invited Jim Logan to address the Senate regarding Budget and Fiscal Affairs. Logan distributed a short report to the Senators, noting that it and future documents will be put on the Senate's Moodle website. Logan expressed hope that the new budget process would result in the increased sharing of information. He noted that the Senate Budget and Fiscal Affairs Committee -- Bobby Dupont, Tarun MUKherjee, Lena Nuccio-Lee, Marie Morgan, Ting Wang and Steven Rick -- met on September 11 and elected Logan as chair. Some members also serve on the new University Budget Review Committee, a body whose creation had been recommended by the FGC. On the UBRC, President Peter Fos, Greg Lassen and John Nicklow are the co-chairs representing the administration, Cherie Trumbach and Jim Logan represent the Faculty Senate, Bobby Dupont represents the Faculty Council, Amanda Green and Carol Lunn represent the Staff Council, and Joy Ballard and Joshua Lambert represent the Student Government Association.

The UBRC will meet every two weeks. Logan reviewed the UBRC's charge. It will offer advice regarding the budget to the President and disseminating information about the budget to the respective constituencies. Logan expressed the hope that any incoming president will continue to embrace this mission and charge. The current task list includes reviewing budget requests and any modifications as well as drawing up recommendations regarding policies on vacant positions, sabbaticals, salary adjustments, and contingency funding. The UBRC also will seek to determine which units should be self-supported and how much units should pay in overhead. The UBRC has been promised it will receive for dissemination a number of documents, including copies of the quarterly financial reports that are submitted to the UL System, projected revenues and expenditures in October and April of each year, explanations of variances in revenue and expenditures on a quarterly basis, and other information as requested. We have been promised good access, and we are hopeful that will be the reality.

Logan noted that the UBRC has already met twice this semester, and Logan cited several highlights. The current budget we are operation under is \$101.2 million, whereas we had operated under a budget of \$120 million for many years. The Board of Regents has told all universities to prepare for substantial mid-year budget cuts. President Fos is interpreting this to mean cuts of about \$7million,

added to an existing \$1 million or so deficit. So \$8-9 million will have to come out of that \$101.2 million figure. Logan noted that some of this will be subject to the intentions of the new governor, who will be elected October 24. Logan noted that 81 Facilities employees have been laid off, with 55 of them rehired by the new facilities contractor [Sodexo] with some interviews continuing. Fos claims that there have been 242 terminations within the administrative side during his presidency. Logan also described the budget flow process -- starting in September of every year for the following year -- that is detailed in illustrations that will be distributed electronically to the faculty.

UNO Honors Council

Observing that there were no items submitted for consideration as "Old Business," Trumbach then turned to "New Business." Trumbach noted that Dr. Sarwar had spearheaded the creation of an Honors Council to recognize faculty who have been working with honors students. There are some awards that will be given out as well. Trumbach opened the floor to any discussion of the issue. She said that she will put electronic copies of the documents on the Moodle site in the hope that we can vote on the issue at the next Senate meeting. In terms of a resolution she offered the following language: "The Faculty Senate supports the formation of an Honors Council." A Senator inquired as to how long such appointments will last, and Trumbach said she will seek clarification in that regard, but indicated that she thought that the designation would continue as long as a faculty member continued a high level of work and interaction with honors students.

In a final announcement, Greg Seab announced that many members of the community had come to campus as part of the lunar "Eclipse Watch" last Sunday. Roughly 300 people came out to "watch" the obscuring clouds overhead -- which made the evening potentially the largest "non-event" held on campus in recent years! Seab noted that he nevertheless delivered his talk on the subject twice to the gathered crowds.

A move to adjourn was entertained, seconded and approved.

The Senate adjourned at 4:17 pm.

-- Jim Mokhiber, Secretary