

# **\*\*TSU FACULTY SENATE MEETING\*\***

**5 MAY 2011**

## **MINUTES**

**HOWARD BEETH, SECRETARY**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Edieth Wu (Chair); Lalita Sen (Vice Chair); Howard Beeth (Secretary); Rasoul Saneifard (Treasurer); Alexis Brooks de Vita (Editor, *The Faculty Speaks*); C.J. Tymczak (Parliamentarian); Macaulay Akpaffiong (Pharmacy & Health Sciences); Thorpe Butler (COLABS); Kiran Chilakamarri (COST); Robert Ford (COST); Daniel Georges-Abeyie (SOPA); Doris Jackson (Pharmacy & Health Sciences); Anna James (TMSL); Emlyn Norman (COLABS); Byron Price (Graduate School); Andrea Shelton (Pharmacy & Health Sciences); Sara White (COLABS); Mammo Woldie (Business). **TOTAL: 18.**

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Demetrius Kazakos (Asst. Secretary); Wei Li (COST); Zivar Yousefipour (Pharmacy & Health Sciences). **TOTAL: 3.**

**VISITORS:** Provost Sunny Ohia and staff; Professor James Opolot (SOPA).

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3:05p when a sufficient number of senators were present to constitute a quorum. She then introduced Provost Ohia.

### **SENATE CONVERSATION WITH PROVOST OHIA**

Provost Ohia indicated his willingness to discuss a range of topics in continuing his April 2011 dialogue with senators. A summary with highlights of this discussion follow.

Editor Brooks de Vita began by expressing on ongoing concern about deans and department chairs who did not follow university rules, procedures, and protocols. She wondered how the provost would insure that the administrative chain-of-command was compliant in these matters.

She specifically mentioned that the Committee on Textbook Policy had worked hard hard to establish procedures that some administrators were not following, thus causing continuing problems for students and faculty alike. Provost Ohia replied that he would expect our university to operate in “a normal way”, as at other institutions of higher education. He noted that many deans have already been replaced and that all deans understand that they are subject to replacement for non-performance. He urged faculty to “hold to the fire” the feet of errant administrators and reminded faculty that they had the power to pressure administrators and should use it. Senator Georges-Abeyie noted that he had seen recent improvement in the behavior of administrators in his college (SOPA).

Editor Brooks de Vita also noted a related problem, namely that some of the newly appointed administrators merely continued the problematic procedures of administrators they replaced, perhaps indicating a deeper problem of institutional or bureaucratic culture. She added that faculty and students who complained about this and related problems sometimes encountered “an intimidation factor”. Provost Ohia responded that faculty have a collective power and should act “in a united front” with deans and chairs rather than “cower in a corner”.

Senator Georges-Abeyie raised the much noted problem of student retention and graduation rates, and he volunteered to head a committee to continue studying this problem, which offer Provost Ohia acknowledged in the short discussion that followed.

Senator Robert Ford brought three issues to the table: TSU’s low national ranking, the concept of “shared governance”, and low producing programs that are at risk of being eliminated. Discussion of these three issues was lively and prolonged.

Concerning program evaluation, Provost Ohia asserted that all programs had to have numbers adequate enough to indicate market friendliness and had to pass a reasonable cost/benefit evaluation. He said that while the TSU Board of Regents continues to study programs, faculty had to take the responsibility to defend them. “It’s up to you”, he said.

Concerning TSU’s low national ranking, Provost Ohia said that by gradually increasing student admission standards and recording higher student passage rate in courses, TSU’s ranking would improve

Concerning “shared governance”, Provost expanded his April 2011 assertion that it meant faculty were just “in the know of what’s happening” about governance matters to that they were actually included in the process of policy formation.

## **NEW POSITION OF UNIVERSITY OMBUDSMAN**

The Chair introduced Professor Andrea Shelton, who recently became Ombudsman at our institution. She began by saying that there were some problems involved in setting up a new position but that progress nevertheless had been made. Although she has not yet managed to acquire a phone number, for instance, she had established a new email address, Facultyombudsman@tsu.edu. She said she is busy establishing operating procedures and perimeters for her work. For instance, her job will be to give advice only. Confidentiality will be the general rule, although with limited exceptions. No note-taking or taping will be allowed. She is devising new forms and procedures to successfully operationalize her new office.

## **SENATE ELECTION**

Senator Doris Jackson, who chaired the Senate Election Committee, began her report by thanking several members of the Senate for their election help. She was pleased to report no major problems with the election, which she described as “clean”. She relied on *The Faculty Manual* to resolve such problems as did occur, and turned over the final vote tallies to the Senate for safekeeping. She concluded by saying that she expected no financial reimbursement for her out-of-pocket election expenses and was glad to contribute to a successful election. Notwithstanding, she added that she would probably not be returning to the Senate. Senators applauded her for a job well done.

Senator Butler wondered if future elections could again utilize voting machines but paid for in some other way than by the generosity of an individual faculty member. After brief discussion, this important question was deferred for future consideration.

## **NEW BUSINESS: BLACKBOARD ISSUES**

Issues related to Blackboard stimulated an extensive, energetic discussion in which most senators participated. Vice Chair Sen ` began the discussion. She reported that in SOPA, two persons were listed on Blackboard courses, the professor teaching the course plus an administrator. In addition, Editor Brooks de Vita said that in her college (COLABS), faculty were instructed to post their syllabi only on Blackboard and were expressly forbidden to distribute hard copies to students, although in other colleges this latter requirement has not been stated; testimony from senators, in fact, indicated that they have received conflicting orders from the provost and some deans. Thus, Brooks de Vita complained that when students could not access Blackboard and could not be provide with hard copies, they were effectively prevented from receiving any kind of copy of their syllabi. She said that students have naturally protested this situation. In a related issue, Senator Byron Price added that in his college (SOPA), a sub dean had been ordered to attend the classes of some faculty about whom there was some administrative concern regarding their high failure rate. He said that faculty received no prior notification that an administrator would be in their classes. Both Sen and Brooks de Vita claimed that these administrative practices constitute

an unwarranted intrusion into faculty affairs and course practices, and are an infringement of academic freedom. Sen added that in her college (SOPA), a majority of the faculty had already voted that such practices constituted an infringement of academic freedom and had urged that the Faculty Senate recognize it as such.

In proposing action, the Chair reminded her colleagues that it was a State of Texas requirement that they post their syllabi on Blackboard, but she nevertheless suggested that administrators in SOPA be contacted and asked “to cease and desist” their aforementioned behavior. She further suggested that issue also be raised in the next Deans’ Council meeting and that further discussion take place in the Faculty Senate as needed. Although no vote was formally taken to do these things, none spoke against this proposed course of action.

### **PROPOSED CHANGE RE: EDITOR OF *THE FACULTY SPEAKS***

Secretary Beeth introduced a resolution he prepared that, considering the importance of this flagship faculty publication and the time, effort, and skill required to edit it, the editor “be renumerated by TSU in exactly the same fashion as the Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary of the TSU Assembly/Senate” and that “the TSU Faculty Senate shall forward its recommendation about this matter to the TSU Faculty Assembly for further discussion and action”. A somewhat contentious discussion followed during which Vice Chair Sen made the case that the Treasurer of the Faculty Assembly/Senate should also receive the same remunerative compensation as was being proposed for the editor of *The Faculty Speaks*. One senator noted that inasmuch as the resolution involved budget considerations, administrative consultation and approval would be required. The Chair took the position that nothing regarding these positions could be voted on by the Faculty Senate until they had been discussed and approved first by the Faculty Assembly. Eventually, however, after additional back-and-forth, the Senate voted unanimously to pass the original resolution and forward it for further consideration to the Faculty Assembly. As well, Editor Brooks de Vita was thanked for her efforts as editor. She took the occasion to remind Senators that she still needed a laptop computer for her duties as well as a key to the Senate suite in Hannah Hall where her office was located. She was promised both.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Senator Georges-Abeyie, noting that meeting time was running out, nevertheless raised the persistent problem of faculty not getting reimbursed for professional expenses after meeting all the requirements for same, and he urged that this issue be addressed at the next meeting of the Faculty Senate. He also said in the future that a separate Faculty Senate committee needed to examine the issue of student retention. Senator Butler added that blaming the faculty for the student failure rate was to focus on the symptom of the problem rather than the causes of it and was an attack on faculty integrity and academic freedom. He urged that the Faculty Senate establish a series of committees to examine a wide range of problems involving both students and faculty. Senator Georges-Abeyie argued that blaming the faculty for high failure rates

ignored the reality that there was a strata of students who would not read and did not study. He said that if faculty alone were held responsible for the failure of such students, and threatened with punitive, retaliatory action by administrators, more might be driven to award a D- grade to students instead of an F grade to avoid trouble, as some already have. Senator Ford reminded his colleagues that university administrators were concerned about student grades in part because state funding of our university was partially based on the student success rate. However, he maintained that some students failed because they simply were not prepared for university-level learning. However, two senators defended students and were critical of faculty. Senator Jackson reminded her colleagues that TSU was “a special purpose university” where students showed up day and night to learn. Without them, she warned, faculty would not have jobs and the university would not have funding. In her college (College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences), faculty tutors were paid \$800 a month—and as a result the student failure rate increased rather than decreased. Thus, she concluded, it is obviously some faculty who are failing—faculty who are not properly credentialed, who don’t show up to meet classes, who have several other jobs in addition to their TSU job. Editor Brooks de Vita also noted that there was a strata of faculty who were remiss in their duties and attitude toward students.

As Vice Chair Sen ended the Faculty Senate meeting at 5p, Senator Butler distributed a flyer re: the new parking regulations, which he said do not favor the faculty. He asked senators to distribute it to the wider faculty, to encourage all faculty to read it, and provide he and the Parking Committee with feedback.