

Faculty Senate Minutes

7 December 2022

Trinity Hall 104

Senate Leadership in Attendance

Jackie Fay, Chair

Andy Milson, Chair Elect

Venkat Devarajan, Parliamentarian

Kathryn Warren, Secretary

Senators in Attendance, followed by the unit they represent

(Department for TT, College or School for NTT)

Ishfaq Ahmad	Computer Science
Georgios Alexandrakis	Bioengineering
Jonathan Asaadi	Physics
Amy Austin	College of Liberal Arts
Karabi Bezboruah	Public Affairs
Alan Bowling	Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
Lauren Brewer	College of Business
Jivas Chakravarthy	Accounting
Wei Chen	Physics
Imre Demhardt	History
Sarah El Sayed	Criminology and Criminal Justice
Sergio Espinosa	Music
Doug Grisaffe	Marketing
Andy Hansz	Finance and Real Estate
Michael Holmes	College of Nursing and Health Innovation
Aimée Israel-Pelletier	Modern Languages
Song Jiang	Computer Science
Theresa Jorgensen	Math
Douglas Klahr	Architecture
Andrzej Korzeniowski	Math
David Levine	College of Engineering
Qing Lin	Psychology
Fred MacDonnell	Chemistry and Biochemistry
Jeff McGee	Management
Joyce Myers	College of Education
Anne Nordberg	Social Work
Taner Ozdil	Landscape Architecture
Mark Pellegrino	Biology
Cynthia Plonien	College of Nursing and Health Innovation
Stefan Romanoschi	Civil Engineering
Brent Sasley	Political Science
Aaron Smallwood	Economics

Amy Speier	Sociology and Anthropology
Christy Spivey	College of Business
Amy Tigner	English
Jodi Tommerdahl	Curriculum and Instruction
Margarita Treviño	College of Nursing and Health Innovation
Regina Urban	Nursing
Nilakshi Veerabathina	College of Science
Shouyi Wang	Industrial, Manufacturing and Systems Engineering
Jeffrey Witzel	Linguistics
Ling Xu	Social Work
Leaf Zhang	Education Leadership and Policy Studies

Ex officio Members in Attendance

Jennifer Cowley, UTA President

Guests

Jeff Jeter, Vice President for Government Relations

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Call to order by Jackie Fay 2:32 pm

UTA Faculty Senate version of “The Night before Christmas,” by Jackie Fay

'Twas the day after classes ended, when all through UTA
 Not a person was stirring, because 'twas a student study day.
 The assignments submitted; the deadlines all made,
 Waiting on Canvas for a professor to grade;
 The students all nestled snug with their coffees;
 Heads bursting with opinions, with numbers and theories;
 When on the Trinity lawn arose such a clatter,
 I sprang from my desk to see what was the matter.
 Oh look, that's cool
 It's 62 representatives of seven colleges and one school,
 "It's Business! and CAPP! Social Work and Engineering!
 Liberal Arts! and, Education! and, Science and Nursing!"
 As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
 Faculty senators streamed festively by,
 Though classes were ended and exams to be written
 All these senators would instead be found sitting
 In room one oh four of Trinity Hall
 Heeding faculty governance's call.
 So please join with me now in this season's greeting
 "Many thanks to you all, and to all a good meeting!"

Remarks from President Jennifer Cowley

- Thanks Faculty Senate leadership for the Inaugural Joint Senate Summit on the Future of Higher Education in DFW, held on December 2, 2022
- Upper administration is in the midst of strategic planning
 - 86 dreams for UTA collected from Faculty Senate (in addition to others)
 - Formulating strategic planning committee with two representatives from Faculty Senate
 - Kickoff retreat in January
- NRUF funding
 - One priority was to help support proposal development
 - Advertising for proposal development manager
 - Focusing on large grants, particular those geared toward URM-supporting institutions
- Salary adjustments
 - Staff
 - Salary adjustments impact about 1/3 of UTA staff
 - Minimum wage for full-time custodial workers raised from \$13.50 to \$15/hr (a new base across the university)
 - People receiving notifications in mid-January
 - Faculty salary study
 - Data processing complete for salary studies
 - Diverse faculty committee will work on priorities/decisions on how to allocate resources (\$1M being put toward these salary adjustments)
 - Graduate students
 - Formal announcement about graduate tuition program (moving from covering 80% to covering 100%) coming out in next few weeks
 - Intention to capture students in terminal degree programs
 - HR titling for graduate students receiving support is heterogeneous, which makes this process tricky.
 - Health insurance still a topic of conversation
 - UTD has just secured health insurance for their graduate students; getting information from UTD to see how they were able to do it.
 - Would like to implement that for the next academic year; need to see what total cost would be.

Questions/Discussion

Senator: Regarding the Provost's Faculty Fellows Program for Equity in Student Success (see email sent from Provost's office December 5) – the deadline is December 15, but it's difficult for faculty to prepare during this time of the semester (and to secure a letter from the Dean in time). It's frustrating to have such an immediate deadline.

President Cowley: Provost Brown really wanted to get something launched for spring. This program will happen every year. I will just decree that if you can't get your Dean's letter by December 15, go ahead and submit your application. There will be longer timelines in the future.

Senator: I want to thank you for these moves you've been making. It's a breath of fresh air and a sea change.

President Cowley: People and culture is our top priority for this year, and while these investments won't solve all our problems, they're meant to demonstrate a meaningful commitment.

News from President Cowley: Stephen F. Austin (SFA) is joining the UT System – exciting development

- It is one of the last independent public universities in the state.
- It's very expensive to operate as an independent university (outside of a system).
- They needed to join a system because they've struggled financially. (Things are easier to pay for via shared resources in a system; e.g., UT Share, an \$100M+ system.)
- Had courtship conversations with several Texas systems.
- Within UT System, worried about geographic proximity to UT Tyler. But Chancellor pointed to UTD/UTA and their proximity. So not to worry.
- One benefit to us: SFA is in our athletic conference. UT-SFA, UTA, UT-Rio Grande Valley will all be in the same conference. And SFA is really good at athletics (and they invest in it: 16% of their budget).
- Looking forward to having a new partner in the system.
- We'll be sharing resources with SFA, as we do with other System schools.
- UT System has three categories of institution: health science institutions, research institutions (e.g., UTA, UTD, UTSA), and regional-serving institutions (UT-Permian Basin); SFA will fit into this last category. When it comes to various resources we have access to – e.g., startup funds for faculty – the regional-serving institutions get a lot less, because they're not research institutions.
- Amount of money flowing into the PUF has been growing at a rapid rate because our landholdings are oil and gas, solar, and wind, as well as cattle grazing. Energy been doing well, and the PUF pie is growing. (E.g., we received extra money last year from the PUF to support the life science project.) There's room to share with another partner. (Austin gets access to additional resources through a fund called the AUF.)

Jeff Jeter: Legislation will follow to make the change official.

Senator: Is SFA primarily an undergraduate institution?

President Cowley: Yes. So we can work on recruiting their students into our graduate programs.

Senator: How about the budget as it relates to mineral rights?

President Cowley: Any revenue generated from the use of those lands, that goes into the PUF endowment, which supports both A&M and the UT System.

Senator: I think we may find some opportunities to fuel their research, to offer them technology and support. When are we going to get over this preferential treatment for UT-Austin?

President Cowley: I would say we are extraordinarily lucky that we got a land grant that had value and that that value has created sustained momentum. What transforms our institution is

going to be the level of the state's investment in higher education and in valuing emerging research universities. Legislative delegations understand that we are a key economic development engine, and if we want our economy to be strong, then it is critical that every metropolitan area in Texas have a research university on the caliber of AAU institutions. There is almost uniform agreement that research universities need to be supported. Optimistic this legislative session because of budget surplus. Statistic she learned from one of our Senators: 53% of state budget goes to K-12 through higher ed education (more than half!). We're not seeing the outcomes yet, but there's been substantial progress in the level of state funding. We have a supportive environment for us to continue to make progress.

Senator: We are perceived nationally in a way that hurts us – for example, TxDOT (Texas Department of Transportation) often chooses to fund UT-Austin instead of us.

President Cowley: The issue is how to make inroads in specific areas of expertise. Reputation is a lagging indicator. By doing outstanding work now, you are building the reputation that we'll have in 20 years. There's a lot of opportunity.

Jeff Jeter: We have a good relationship with agencies like TxDOT. For the longest time, one of their chief engineers was a UTA grad. So we have good relationships; we just have to keep working to help you succeed in the area you're working in.

Senator: Texas is the second-largest state in terms of economy. Someone from the top should establish some cultural change (so that we can compete with education systems like California's).

President Cowley: The California experiment is 50 years in the making. We are only 20 years into the emerging research university experiment. And Texas is a different kind of state, fiercely independent.

Five Things Faculty Should Know about Government Relations
with Jeff Jeter, Vice President for Government Relations

Five questions were posed to Mr. Jeter

1. *What is the Office of Government Relations?*

It's the office at UTA that works with the Office of Government Relations at UT System. We oversee strategic engagement with UT System, as well as federal, state, and local administrative agencies and community organizations, to advance our priorities across the state and nation. We are a team of five (grown from one). Most of us have backgrounds in the political world, or backgrounds in political budgets.

2. *How does the OGR communicate its strategies and accomplishments to strategy and the broader UTA community?*

Our accomplishments are the accomplishments of leadership. The more money we get translates into the money UTA gets. We don't really take credit for these things. We could take greater advantage of social media, but we're not about promoting what we do; we're about promoting what you do.

3. *Does UTA have "lobbyists" in Austin and DC (people or firms who champion our institution and interests with our political representatives)?*

No, not lobbyists per se; that's not legal in Texas. But we are here to inform. We're working on getting representation in Washington, DC, to help promote research capabilities and our relationships there. Two of us do work and live in Austin. The state government is our largest donor, 15-16% of our funding every year, outside of UT System.

I'm your government relations professional. We represent students, faculty, leadership, alumni. Our main job isn't to say, "give us more money," but to say, "what you're proposing, this is how it affects us." There are a lot of bills in the legislature that affect higher education. We are in conversation with leadership to gauge how critical the impact of particular bills might be.

President Cowley: On the federal front, Kate Miller has identified a firm that can serve in a lobbying type of capacity, and we're in the process of seeing if this is the right fit. That person would be in DC all the time and could help connect faculty to federal agencies.

The UT System federal office was almost eliminated, and it's being reconstituted. They have a policy person doing federal relations. They are seeking a federal relations consultant. They're trying to rebuild that office. They're a complement to what we need.

4. *What advice do you have for faculty who want to advocate for our interests? How can we be most effective and influential?*

Get involved in the area you're specifically engaged with. Get involved with the associations and agencies that regulate your area. Get appointed to boards. We can help you with that. The governor has a ton of commissions that need appointees. I also urge you to contact your legislators. Let them know who you are. You live in their district; tell them you're a faculty member at UTA. We want to know more about what you're doing so that we can put you in touch with the right people.

Senator: Should we approach our legislator based on where we live or where we work?

Jeff Jeter: Where you live.

Senator: Can you clarify – there are guidelines for political participation for UTA faculty. Where does this fall?

Jeff Jeter: I'm talking about contacting them personally, for you as an individual.

5. *What is your forecast for higher education issues in the upcoming legislative session? Specifically, how do you expect the legislature to respond to our requests for increased funding?*

There's a \$27 billion surplus (and there will be an update to that in January). There's also a spending limit imposed by the legislature, so we can't spend it all. There's generally a conservative approach to spending on the part of the legislature.

Issues in the upcoming session: energy grid stability, budget, public safety, border. The more we know what you're doing in areas of public policy, the more we can advocate for funding. Generally there's a workforce shortage in education and nursing, so we'll see initiatives to address those problems. Property tax reductions will be a big topic.

Regarding tenure – UT Austin's Faculty Senate put out a statement about tenure and academic freedom that attracted the attention of the Lieutenant Governor, who started talking about ways to revoke tenure from faculty who were teaching specific things. When you hear about it, try not to overreact on social media.

Chair Elect: That's kind of where question #4 came from. When tenure or CRT (critical race theory) comes up, we read the news and get worried, and we want to know how best to respond.

Jeff Jeter: There are people in the legislature who support tenure. And Jennifer Cowley has done an amazing job of reminding legislators that we have processes in place to deal with tenure. The most important thing to do is to create a relationship.

Chair Elect: How do we know when something's really a threat or when it's someone making a political statement for their base that's going to eventually blow over.

Jeff Jeter: With this specific issue – CRT – we're going to communicate directly with leadership and Faculty Senate to let you know where things are in the process, just as we did with campus carry. If you want to know, ask me.

President Cowley: We should protect tenure because it's an important part of how we attract top talent and operate as academic institutions. I'll be in Austin once a week starting in January to advocate for our viewpoints on various issues.

Jeff Jeter: In the state there is a long process that is meant to slow things down.

Budget-wise we're in a good position. Formula funding: we want them to drive the rate up. If they returned to 2011 rates, it would bring in an additional \$35 million. But the way it works is the rate gets backed in after the legislature decides how much they want to spend.

Generally in the legislature there's an event (like the winter storm) that shapes the session. We like to stick to our goals and keep out of the crossfire for issues that don't involve us.

Senator: How does it all work – does each institution individually knock on the legislators’ doors, or do institutions work together within systems?

Jeff Jeter: There are 6 systems in Texas. For non-UT systems, everything is run by the system. UT System has 13 big institutions. We work with UT System to echo our message on things, but sometimes we have different needs, so every individual institution within UT System has its own team as well.

Senator: UT System has an office in DC; do we have a good relationship with them?

Jeff Jeter: Yes, we do. We’re working on getting our own consulting firm to help us, but we have a good relationship with them.

President Cowley: Kate Miller is working on a program to train our faculty to make connections with federal agencies and support travel to go to DC to meet with program officers. Our consultant will also be looking at identifying larger-scale opportunities (e.g., corporate contracts that can utilize university partners).

Senator: To what extent do you consider these legislative issues and their connection to UTA – for example, property taxes. If the state is continually increasing property taxes, that’s kind of like imposing a pay cut and might be discouraging people from coming here. There’s an indirect link . . .

Jeff Jeter: The state wants to buy down property taxes, spending a huge amount to do that (and it will affect people differently). There’s a lot of issues we look at how they affect quality of life. The property tax issue is a complex one.

President Cowley: \$1billion property tax buy-down is like \$80 per household. A more effective tool would be on the policy front. These issues become much more complicated. This is a once in a generation surplus. It’s an extraordinary opportunity to invest in infrastructure, and education is infrastructure. Those will have generational impacts. Property-tax buy-downs have two-year impacts, and then they’re gone.

Senator: What can I tell my colleagues (or prospective job candidates) when they approach me about their worries about what the Lt. Governor has been saying about CRT? Can they teach what they want to teach, or will my colleagues’ classes be canceled because of the content? What’s the official word?

President Cowley: We are anticipating CRT bills. The question is what is in those bills and what happens to them over time. My takeaway for you is that we’re going to be monitoring the issue closely.

Senator: So, sit tight and don’t write letters?

President Cowley: Yes. We have teams, like Jeff’s, that know how to navigate the process.

Senator: There's one group of people in between the legislators and us, and those are the staffers. Maybe that's where we could help?

Jeff Jeter: That's what we spend a ton of our time on. We educate staff. If you're ever working in public policy, let us know. If there's an area that you can speak to.

Chair: On the UTA government relations website, there's [a place to subscribe to the newsletter providing a legislative update.](#)

Faculty Senate minutes from the November 2, 2022, meeting approved by acclamation.

Committee Reports

Sergio Espinosa, Ad Hoc Committee on DEI

- Met with Jewel Washington to explore future collaboration.
- Meeting to be scheduled in January to unify various DEI committees from across campus.
- Ad for Assistant VP for TCI – position has been announced; Jewel Washington has a good understanding of HR but wants someone with experience in the academic arena. Could be of interest to faculty.

Amy Austin, Ad Hoc Committee on Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Issues

- The committee discussed developing programs within colleges and seeing about how to connect NTT faculty
- Discussing NTT title conversion – what's been done at other UT System schools, gathering information so that Faculty Senate can make a recommendation. Usually that decision is made at the college level. It involves going through the titles and putting people in the track they should be in, given their qualifications.
- Also looking at NTT nomenclature – i.e., a term other than “**non-tenure track**”
- Investigating the unevenness of the communication about the promotion process across the colleges. There was a high degree of variation in how the process was enacted. Thinking about how improvements could be made.

Jonathan Asaadi, Ad Hoc Committee on Research

- Committee meeting scheduled for Dec. 20
- Plan to meet with Kate Miller (VP for Research and Innovation) to develop a relationship between Faculty Senate and that office.

Stefan Romanoschi, Tenure and Academic Freedom

- Haven't met yet
- In past, the committee gathered information on how T&P process is enacted across University.
- Other differences in how process has been enacted. Would make sense to work with Division of Faculty Affairs, but it's hard to partner with them until they have a VP for Faculty Affairs in place.

Theresa Jorgensen, Equity and Ethics

- Meeting next week.
- Phase 1: Charged with making recommendations for best practices for all competitive awards on campus (grants, fellowships, teaching awards, competitive faculty development of any kind)
- Phase 2: Develop a process for an award in the Faculty Senate for outstanding service to the Faculty Senate
- Goal to have recommendations early in the spring in order to be able to give the award in April.

Douglas Klahr, Operating Procedures

- Delegating charges among members
- Big charge: revising bylaws.

Academic and Student Liaison, Brent Sasley

- Not met yet

Dave Levine, Information Technology and Information Security Committee

- Some met with OIT group (which is undergoing leadership changes)

Senator: Could you see to get it on the agenda to see that OIT responds to issues not only M-F, 9-5? There is academic activity going on outside those hours.

Imre Demhardt, Budget Liaison Committee

- Met with John Davidson
- Most important thing is that we're with a new budget model: RCM (Responsibility Center Management)
- Previously, there would have been a budget taskforce already underway in each college. With transition to the new model, by early, mid-January, Deans will get global funds allocated to them, and colleges will start hearing plans for the funds. Should you encounter problems by the third week of January, contact your Dean, and if that doesn't help, then contact us.
- Major takeaway: John Davidson very open and looking forward to a cooperative approach.

Senator: Maybe organizing some timelines and dates will help faculty participating in the budgeting exercise to organize their schedules early in the process.

Chair: For those of you who don't know, we're talking about the "Budget Oversight Shared Governance Exercise." It took us a long time to pass this piece. It's very structured. Most people who've participated in it on Senate (in the past) have not found it to be as meaningful an exercise as it could be. We'd get documents that weren't legible to us as faculty and not financial experts. Also, most of the decisions had already been made.

In an effort to make it a more meaningful exercise, we're proposing two meetings with John Davidson each long semester. He will sit down with the Budget Liaison Committee and answer any questions. And then, with Deans, each representative from each college would have one or

two meetings with their Dean. Has to happen in spring because of when we find out we get state funding.

Senator: Have you considered the composition of the committees? Maybe people can stay on the committees longer so that they can gain knowledge.

Chair: Yes. We've discussed that the Budget Committee would be a two-year commitment. It would be a professional development opportunity for people.

Imre Demhardt: John Davidson is preparing more accessible documents for Senators on the BLC.

Taner Ozdil, Special Projects – no update

Chair's Report (Jackie Fay and Andy Milson)

- Open Faculty Forum (November 14, 11:45-1:15) went well; 86 dreams
- Joint Faculty Senate Future of Higher Ed Summit was held December 2
 - Discussion and outreach with members of the legislature and their staffs, the presidents, and members of the administrations of UTA, UTD, and UNT
 - President Cowley, President Benson (UTD)
 - Chris Turner, representative for Texas House for District 101
 - Business meeting: what happens next? Decision to hold one joint meeting per semester that will rotate among the campuses. UNT is next. Internally, externally facing.
 - One way to structure meetings would be to focus on a particular issue (e.g., NTT faculty issues or graduate student support)
 - It was an effort to create a different kind of engagement, a conversation as opposed to issuing a statement.
- Senate history intern
 - History department has interns, historical study in a semester, idea occurred to have a History intern to study the faculty senate, particularly as we're coming up on 50th anniversary.
 - Graduate student has been identified who is well-suited for this.
 - Outcome: some kind of presentation in April or May.
- Ombuds – expect to see movement soon
- Meeting with Jewel Washington
 - Discussed faculty compensation study and the faculty committee being formed
 - Committee will be meeting relatively soon to look at data and make recommendation about how money should be distributed.
- University committee on tenure and promotion: Jackie on the committee ex officio, Andy is on the committee; meetings have been scheduled. They are the final review stage before the dossiers go to the Provost and the President (41 dossiers, 30 minutes discussion per candidate). Not a rubber stamp committee; this university-level committee was a Faculty Senate initiative.
- Next in the “5 Things Faculty Should Know About...” Series: Shelby Boseman, UTA Chief Legal Officer.

- Ongoing leadership search: Dean of the College of Liberal Arts
Faculty Senators on the search committee are Amy Austin, Sergio Espinosa, Andy Milson, Chunke Su, and Kathryn Warren
- Ongoing leadership search: Chief Information Officer (CIO); Venkat Devarajan is on committee; good candidates; F2F meeting next week; decision will be made before Christmas.

Senator: Will there be a leadership search to replace Lisa Nagy [VP of Student Affairs; she resigned right before Thanksgiving, and her deputy, Stephanie McAlpine, also resigned]? That came as a surprise.

Chair: As far as I know, there hasn't been an announcement. But there will be a search. There will also be a national search for the VP of Faculty Affairs.

- Reminder about Faculty Senate Chair and Vice Chair Office Hours, aka "Chat with the Chairs" – to be resumed next semester
- COACHE (a three-year project; faculty survey and data analysis and response) is ongoing
 - Infographic on retention coming to our inboxes soon

Adjourned at 4:48 pm

Next Meeting: February 1, 2023