

March 4, 2020

## UT Arlington Faculty Senate Report

The Faculty Senate at the University of Texas at Arlington has long-standing concerns regarding the central administration of the university (the President, Vice Presidents, the Provost, and their offices specifically) that have not been adequately addressed despite years of discussion in the President's Advisory Committee (PAC), Senate, and open forums. Therefore, we provide here a summary of the most pressing current faculty issues at UTA. We hope that concrete steps are taken to address and follow up these concerns in the near future.

This document is not a response to recent events, but has been in discussion and development by the Faculty Senate since fall 2019. We see our role as the Faculty Senate as an important part of the process of ongoing shared governance to advance the strategic mission of the university. In light of recent developments, however, the Faculty Senate would like to express a desire for a broader university community and elected faculty governance to be involved in the selection of the next president. We would also like to provide feedback on the performance of our administrators to the UT System.

We appreciate the following programs that have been supported by upper administration: the university tenure and promotion committee; greater attention and support for our NTT faculty; standardized raises associated with faculty promotions; faculty involvement in the college budget process in terms of the college budget advisory task force; proposed increases in support of the Faculty Development Leave (FDL) program and commitment to increases; and increase of support of Faculty Senate travel funds.

We hope that a more comprehensive set of issues will be collected through a formal faculty satisfaction survey in the near future. We appreciate that Dr. Karbhari has indicated support for this formal survey process. We do appreciate that the administration has participated in the new open faculty forums organized by the Faculty Senate that have taken place during each of the past two years. These have been constructive in identifying a range of issues, both short term and more sustaining issues. We also note that the administration has made concrete efforts toward shared governance.

As the concerns listed are of sufficient seriousness, the Faculty Senate would like to start a formal shared dialogue to address these issues below without delay. While this document focuses only on faculty concerns and does not discuss explicit solutions, in the spirit of shared governance and a mutual desire to improve the university, we look forward to joint problem-solving to address the issues here.

We categorize our concerns, gathered through data-collection efforts of Faculty Senate, into a few themes in order to begin the process of open communication and shared problem solving. The themes are: leadership and communication issues; budgetary issues; bureaucratic burden;

inclusion and diversity; external affairs; and information technology issues. A common theme running through our concerns involves communication, implementation, and accountability.

**Leadership and Communication Issues:** The Faculty Senate recognizes a decline in faculty morale and efficiency, which faculty attribute to administrative issues at UTA. A lack of effective communication has led to issues of faculty distrust of central administration. Information assumed to go from the Provost to deans to chairs to faculty often does not. Continuous changes and turnover in the management team have made it more challenging for faculty to maintain focus on campus priorities and the strategic mission. Frequent turnovers along with experienced people leaving UTA have eroded institutional knowledge and effectiveness. This can be seen in vacancies in key positions on campus, such as the VP for Advancement, the VP for Research, and the Dean of Honors College. The lack of urgency in filling these positions is problematic. Moreover, ineffectual central administrative leadership has led to mid-level administrators often appearing confused about initiatives, sometimes sending conflicting messages, hindering effective communication with faculty, and delaying execution of key priorities. Faculty involvement in local decision making and shared governance has been reduced at UTA, in favor of less effective top-down decision making.

**Budgetary issues:** The Faculty appreciate the increase in shared governance and transparency in the recent budget advisory process at the college level. However, lack of transparency at the university level is a concern. The Faculty Senate is concerned about general accounting practices, lack of proper fiscal year budgetary planning, and ad hoc allocation of university funds. The majority of colleges begin the year with a budget deficit instead of a well-defined annual budget, which seems counterproductive. The Senate is concerned over the requirement to increase enrollment without sufficient budget and infrastructure to support such growth. Customer service expectations cannot be met when coupled with rising enrollment and insufficient staffing. It is challenging to properly plan and manage academic year expenses. The erosion of confidence by faculty in the fiscal management of UTA is of great concern.

**Bureaucratic burden:** The Faculty Senate has noted an ongoing increase in unnecessary bureaucratic burden on department chairs and faculty. Central administration announces the implementation of campus-wide initiatives without having solicited stakeholder involvement in design (most recently, a year-long student registration initiative), which leads to wide-spread confusion and a huge bureaucratic burden on lower level administrators and faculty. Some administrative tasks require paper forms and signatures for even the smallest actions, often duplicating checks and authorizations up to half a dozen times for the same underlying process. This has resulted in a huge loss of faculty productivity and efficiency - affecting core faculty responsibilities like teaching, research, and service. Departments and colleges have been forced to set up paper forms to protect against errors in digital systems. Many units report large increases in staff just to fill and file forms. Faculty have reported loss of productivity in research management due to increased bureaucracy, which is inconsistent with UTA strategic goals.

**Inclusion and diversity:** While we appreciate diversity programs in place and the administrations' vocal focus on improving diversity of faculty hires, the Faculty Senate recognizes a pattern of complaints and concerns from faculty and administrators on inclusion and diversity issues. While the President and Provost have spoken of the importance of having a diverse faculty, there are few university initiatives to support this goal; and when initiatives are started on campus, there is little follow-through. The President disbanded the long-standing Committee for Diversity and Inclusion (which pre-dated him) and replaced it with term-limited Task Forces. In April of 2015, President Karbhari formed a Task Force to investigate the climate for women on campus. The Task Force completed a climate survey of campus and submitted a report to the President with recommendations in August 2016. The President did not release the report to the Faculty Senate until March 3, 2020, after years of requests. This not only demonstrates a seeming lack of commitment to campus inclusion and diversity, but displays a disregard for the faculty/staff time and effort of the Task Force, comprised completely (save one) of women. The findings of the report point to serious on-going issues for women on campus that need to be addressed. A second Task Force was formed and tasked with completing a campus survey focused on faculty/staff of color. This Task Force designed the survey (which took many faculty hours) and it was ready to be implemented. The survey was never released for completion to the campus community. Prior to being disbanded, the Committee for Diversity and Inclusion had recommended the establishment of an office on campus for Diversity and Inclusion, which has not been acted on. Many universities have established successful programs to target minority hiring, retention, and campus issues but we have decided not to pursue these types of programs at UTA.

**External affairs:** Concerns are noted about poor external rankings (U.S. News and World Report) and perceived image of UT Arlington. The Faculty Senate is concerned about the decrease in alumni support of the university, the closing of the alumni office, and the minimal growth in the university endowment. The Faculty Senate is also concerned about recent negative articles in local media about gender discrimination and bullying that have led to lawsuits against the university and the lack of university response. In addition, the high-rate of turnover in upper management creates a pool of people with possibly less than positive experiences who may speak negatively about the university after they leave. The advancement office's direct work with programs and colleges should be improved.

**Information technology issues:** The Faculty Senate has observed a sharp rise in IT problems on campus. Numerous examples were quoted by faculty - from poor maintenance of existing systems, poorly planned and executed upgrades and changes, to buggy software systems. An R1 university needs R1 digital infrastructure for basic functioning of the university, as well as to support research and teaching. Impacts to both internal efficiency as well as external facing services of the university were noted. The poor IT systems and infrastructure issues have resulted in large financial losses to the university, and in lost faculty productivity, thereby impacting faculty, students, and staff. There is insufficient faculty input for key technology systems used by faculty, such as the learning management system and Digital Measures.

## **Conclusion**

We look forward to a continuing dialogue where we can work towards solutions that enhance the university's functioning, morale, and image in the best spirit of shared governance as designated by UT System (McRaven UTS Shared Governance Document).