

SENATE CHAIR'S REPORT, by Prof. Keri Kornelson
October 5, 2021

On September 10, I spoke on the phone with VP Burrage regarding what could be a changing legal situation in Oklahoma regarding mask mandates. He let me know about the conversations happening in the COVID committees and in the administration regarding the decision not to mandate masks. I expressed a concern from faculty members that, even though case counts are dropping, we are still not out of danger.

On September 10, I spoke on the phone with Provost Wright about the masking policies in place and asked how classes are coping. We discussed a plan to collect data regarding mask usage in classrooms to see if support may be needed for certain populations of instructors or certain types of classes. He will work with his team to send out a survey. He also agreed to offer additional funds to the incentives in the OU Employee Vaccine Drive.

On September 13, the Faculty Senate met.

On September 14, the FS Officers met. We discussed action items from the previous week and made plans for the next FS Executive Committee meeting.

On September 16, I had a short phone call with VP Burrage, as he had an update on the Ombudsperson search. The ad has been posted and the search committee will be convening soon.

On September 20, I attended the meeting of the Board of Regents on the OU Health Sciences Center campus. There were reports from Regents' committees that address various aspects of OU health and operations, but sadly, the committee meetings were not open to the public this year. Regent Shirley reported from the Committee on Property, Staffing, and Maintenance. They have been giving a critical eye to the property owned by OU and giving a lot of attention to the extensive deferred maintenance needs of the campus. Regent Holloway reported from the Audit, Risk, and Finance Committee. OU hired a new CFO, Matt Rockwell, who will begin in December. She reports that the cash position of OU remains strong, our enrollments look good, and that an external audit should be completed in October. Regent Stephenson reported on OU Operations. One area of concentration has been cybersecurity, so they have been meeting with CIO David Horton. Centralized policies and procedures for IT were discussed. He also reported on the athletics budgetary consequences of COVID (in short, not as bad as it could have been). Also, strangely, the Presidents of Cameron University and Rogers State University had not had contracts, but now they do. At the end of the scheduled public meeting, OU Norman Campus faculty member Julie Ward asked to address the Board. She spoke eloquently about her concerns regarding the COVID mitigation policies on the Norman campus, and then read an open letter that many members of the OU community - students, faculty, and staff - have signed since August. A few other members of the audience also made brief remarks. A parent of an OU student expressed her concern about online instruction.

On September 21, I met with the FSEC officers. We discussed plans for the upcoming FSEC meeting in 2 weeks and visitors for the October and November meetings.

On September 23, I met with the Chair of the Faculty Senate at the OU Health Sciences Center, Dr. Fernando Esteban-Florez. We discussed ideas for promoting research collaborations across our campuses, compared notes about the biggest issues that faculty are interested in right now, and outlined some of our common challenges. The OU Health merger has been a source of a great deal of turmoil for their faculty members. We also floated the idea of having a joint meeting of our executive committees, possibly with visitors like our Provosts and/or VPRPs. We will continue talking and will meet again later in the semester.

On September 27, the Faculty Senate Large Executive Committee met held our fall meeting. This committee is made up of the FSEC together with chairs the university-wide councils. Each committee/council chair presented their plans and priorities for the year. Heather Shotton from the Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (FDEIC) reminded us of the passing of the Land Acknowledgement resolution for Faculty Senate events and outlined priorities including recruitment and retention of faculty for the coming year. Anthony Natale reported from the Faculty Compensation and Benefits Committee (FCBC) that their goals include finding ways to learn what is happening with regards to salary inequity at the college and unit level to better guide their actions. This was agreed to be an innovative idea that we all supported. Andy Fagg reported that IT Council was happy to see a better policy in place for faculty to receive permission to purchase second computers with external funding or with demonstrated need using startup or other internal funds. He also let us know about changes to the password requirements, so everyone will be prompted in the next few months to change their password. The ITC is eager to be more involved in some policy decisions. Paul Spicer from the Budget Council discussed the joint plan with the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC) to create workshops that educate faculty about university budgets in general, and the OU budget in particular. There was a discussion that came up where we found several councils did not yet have their student representatives assigned. Stacey Bedgood agreed to check into this for us.

Vincent Deberry from the Continuing Education Council gave us some interesting insight into non-degree certificate programs. David McLeod from the Athletics Council gave some updates on the financial implications of COVID on athletics, the motives for the SEC move, and the turmoil around recent court rulings that will profoundly alter how the NCAA operates. He let us know that Athletic Director Joe Castiglione is eager to come give a presentation to the Faculty Senate, so we will get that booked very soon. Karen Hayes-Thumann from the Academic Programs Council said that they are just inundated with programs that do not follow the pre-finals week rules, and also mentioned that these rules are a bit unclear and sometimes contradictory. We agreed that APC and FWC would collaborate to start from scratch and write a fresh version of the pre-finals week policies for consideration of Faculty Senate and other stakeholders. Cindy Rogers from Research Council reported that there were far fewer applicants last year for the RC awards, particularly FIPs. They are still looking into ways to solve the perpetual issue that faculty in the arts and humanities tend not to apply for RC funding. One recent change is allowing RC funds to be used for salary or course buyouts. There was some discussion about

whether the Research Council should be more involved in the larger research dollar awards given out by the VPRP office. This is something we will continue talking about and consulting with both the RC and the newly-formed VPRP Advisory Committee. Sarah Robbins from the FWC updated us on the Task Force for "non-regular" faculty members. This group was formed near the end of last semester and is discussing the ways that this group of colleagues would like to gain representation in OU governance. She also gave a quick update on the Teaching Evaluation Working Group (TEWG) and other ongoing projects.

On September 28, the FS Officers met. We finalized the agenda for our FSEC meeting with Provost Wright. We discussed ways that faculty representatives might be able to have a voice in the COVID policy and response plans for the spring semester and moving forward into the future.

On September 29, I met with Provost Wright. We discussed the idea of faculty involvement in COVID planning for spring. He agreed to find a venue for this, possibly with an FSEC (ex-officio) seat on the COVID response committees. We discussed the hiring that will be happening from the strategic plan, and how this will be designed to grow faculty diversity. He let me know that the SFRA scoring rubric did include the strength of the hiring plan toward proactively seeking out diverse applicants. Provost Wright shared his plans to set aside funds for spousal accommodations. I showed the Provost last spring's *Recognition and Rewarding of Faculty Service* Resolution from the Senate, explaining the background and motivation for the resolution and that the administration's response was to work with the new Provost. This will be an ongoing conversation. I asked Provost Wright for any updates on the salary equity program, but he did not know the status of this yet. We briefly discussed how decisions will be made for the next round of faculty raises, planned for January 2023.

On October 1, I attended the Faculty Appeals Board (FAB) Rights Assurance Committee meeting. This committee consists of the FAB Chair, the Faculty Senate Chair, the OU Legal Counsel, the Provost, and a representative from the Institutional Equity Office. Every year, this committee is supposed to hold a Policy Maintenance Meeting where the caseload from the past year is discussed from the perspective of assessing the existing FAB policies. This meeting, while mandated by the *Faculty Handbook*, and not been held for many years. Outgoing FAB Chair Anthony Natale and Senate Administrative Coordinator Stacey Bedgood arranged for this long-overdue meeting. Last year was an unusually busy year on the FAB, and the stress exposed some weaknesses in existing policies and procedures that were discussed in the meeting. It is likely that some proposed changes to the FAB policies will be coming to the Senate this year.

On October 4, the FSEC met. Dr. Alisa Fryar from Political Science met with the committee as a consultant on aspects of the university budget. She provided some information about different budget models used in higher education. Associate Vice President for Budget and Finance Stewart Berkinshaw met with the committee to present the current plans and projections to fund the strategic plan. This plan includes benefits changes, fundraising through the OU Foundation, budget reductions via a tax, sale of some property, tuition increases and growth in the size of incoming classes, as well as income from OU Online. We asked questions about the likely regressive impact to departmental budgets from the

tax, given that some units have large payroll but small discretionary budgets. We asked to see the data used to develop this system. We also asked for clarification about the proposed change to the Defined Contribution Plan payments on supplemental pay. AVP Berkinshaw explained that payments into OTRS are mandated to be paid on all compensation, so this would not change OTRS benefits at retirement. But he said that there is not a consistent policy about which supplemental pay is counted for the DCP contributions from OU, and which is not counted. He suggests a consistent policy.

The committee welcomed Provost Wright to the meeting. He discussed the survey sent by his office to track vaccination rates among faculty and staff and rates of masking in classrooms. He announced that there were 8 SFRA's (strategic hires) approved for searches this year. He discussed his plans for building a fund for spousal accommodation requests coming from both the strategic and regular hiring plans, which we applauded. He also discussed retention funds. We mentioned that we were interested in the development of other retention efforts beyond salary increases to match outside job offers. We asked some questions about the projected impact of the new tax on academic units, and whether the Deans had been given guidance or boundaries on how they make cuts. Provost Wright will have more discussions with Deans and will report back to us as these plans are made. He also indicated that he intends to modify some budgetary policies so that Colleges have ways to increase revenue. We showed Provost Wright the Faculty Senate *Recognition and Rewarding of Faculty Service* Resolution from May 2021. Action was deferred on this resolution until he took office, but we asked that his office now develop a plan to respond.

The FSEC also welcomed HR representatives VP Dorothy Anderson, Lee Camargo-Quinn, and Colin Fonda. Ms. Camargo-Quinn presented the information about the new healthcare plans for 2022 with Cigna as the provider. She reminded us that very soon, Cigna will have a representative available to us in person to answer questions or help with the transition. She encouraged everyone to check the network status of our current providers and to let HR know if you have a provider who is not in the network. Cigna will reach out and ask these providers to join the network.

The Executive Committee then discussed an issue of how legal names vs. preferred names are displayed in various systems across campus. We began by agreeing to offer support to Kevin Buck and the Canvas team in an initiative to get "preferred" names and pronouns always displayed in Canvas. The committee then discussed a broader desire that would impact all university systems. We will work on a plan on how to best advocate for this. We briefly discussed the agenda for our monthly meeting with President Harroz.

On October 5, I met with Secretary Kalenda Eaton. We finalized the agenda for our monthly meeting with President Harroz and identified visitors to the Senate for November and December. We also discussed some priorities for the Executive Committee for the rest of the semester.