In Case You Missed It: An Unofficial Recap of a Robust and Informative Faculty Senate Meeting

These “ICYMI - meeting update” notes do not replace the formal Journal of the Faculty Senate that will be distributed later, and that will be approved at the next monthly meeting. Rather, these are highlights interpreted and presented by FS Secretary Kalenda Eaton, based on general meeting notes from Stacey Bedgood (Administrative Coordinator).

Here we go. Once upon a time not long ago many people logged on to be “in the know.”

October 11, 2021
The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Chair Kornelson. Chair Kornelson read the Land Acknowledgement. The Faculty Senate Journal for the regular meeting of September 13, 2021, was approved without revisions.

Announcements (via Chair Kornelson):
- The Faculty Senate sent out the call for proposals for the Ed Cline Faculty Development Awards on October 6, 2021. Up to $2,500 may be awarded per proposal. Proposals are due to the Faculty Senate by Monday, December 13, 2021. The submission link is https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_br9PZau0UqsaAhn and further information is available at http://facultysenate.ou.edu/facdev.html.
- The four policy updates presented by the OU Policy Office and discussed at the October meeting have been deferred to the November Faculty Senate meeting.
- The Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) requests that all Senators, particularly those whose units have more than one Senate representative this year, volunteer to be a Senate liaison for a unit without direct representation.
- The Faculty Senate is sad to report the deaths of faculty member Jerzy Bodurka (Biomedical Engineering) on August 12, 2021, and retired faculty members Henry Tobias (History) on March 28, 2021, Kathy Latrobe (Library & Information Studies) on May 1, 2021, William “Charlie” Clay (Sociology) on August 29, 2021, and Curtis McKnight (Mathematics) on September 11, 2021.

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Chair Kornelson asked if there were questions or comments about any of the items in the Chair’s report. There were none.

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Chair Kornelson introduced Associate Vice President for Budget and Finance, Stewart Berkinshaw, to talk about funding the Strategic Plan. Points of note from the presentation include:

- As part of the Strategic Plan, the university plans to add one-hundred-fifty new faculty positions over the next six years. Additionally, staff positions will be added in critical student-facing and faculty support positions to sustain this growth. To fund the endeavor the university will consider:
  o Potentially revising the current Defined Contribution Plan structure for new employees.
  o Changing the third-party administrator of OU’s self-funded medical insurance (Blue Cross/Blue Shield to CIGNA).
  o Potentially limiting Defined Contribution Plan payments from the university to base pay only. This will impact supplemental, overload, and summer pay actions.
Changes to some retiree benefits to better align with the market including:
  o A shift from traditional Medicare Supplement to Medicare Advantage Plan (implemented in 2021).
  o Examining benefits compared to the number of employees for potential re-balancing.
  o Working with OTRS to modify a provision that inhibits the university’s ability to hire back retirees. Currently, OU must pay 15.55% of a retiree’s salary, even though the retiree does not obtain additional benefits.

The strategic plan identifies need-based aid as the university’s top fundraising priority. The university will seek to leverage the university’s large donor and alumni base to support that priority and other strategic initiatives.

With a budget of about ~$350 million, Academic Affairs represents the largest area on campus and serves as the financial engine, as well as the heart of the university. The current Strategic Plan funding strategy seeks to grow revenue in Academic Affairs while minimizing costs not directly supporting students and faculty. While there were a few items to consider under this point, the one that garnered the most discussion in the written online “chat” box and verbally was:
  o “All non-grant funded areas on campus, including Academics, will be assessed a 1% charge equivalent to their actual payroll expense beginning in FY22. This charge increases to 2% in FY23 and 3% in FY24. This permanent reallocation redirects funding to priorities within the Strategic Plan and allows colleges and departments a phase-in period to respond. This percentage may need to increase if other actions to fund the Strategic Plan are not successful.”

After several questions from Senators asking how departments will pay for the tax when most departmental budgets have little M&O funds in their budgets and that an across-the-board tax will mean that those with the fewest resources will be taxed at the same rate as others, VP Berkinshaw stated that after carefully reviewing College budgets and cash reserves, there appears to be resources in each College to fund this tax. VP Berkinshaw advised that if departments have trouble finding the funds to pay the tax those units should consult with the Dean of their College. VP Berkinshaw reiterated that implementing the tax across the board allows the auxiliary areas (Athletics, Housing, Food Services, etc.) the ability to share in funding the academic mission and simplifies the method of accessing the tax.

VP Berkinshaw concluded by noting:

- The university is planning for growth in the undergraduate class of 2% moving forward. In fall 2021, there was a 3.5% increase. To that end, VP Berkinshaw stated the growth in tuition and fee rates should be consistent with inflation to cover fixed costs, including raising programs and deferred maintenance.

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Next, Chair Kornelson introduced the Chief Human Resources Officer Dorothy Anderson. Also present from Human Resources were Lee Camargo-Quinn, Benefits Assistant Director, and Colin Fonda, Associate Director of Human Resources. Ms. Camargo-Quinn presented on the Benefits changes for the upcoming year. Camargo-Quinn stated that open enrollment will be October 25 – November 5, 2021, for the 2022 plan year (Note: it has since been extended to November 16, 2021). Notable changes for 2022 include a medical carrier change to Cigna (effective January 1, 2022). The university will continue
with Blue Cross/Blue Shield for dental services. For those on the dental Basic Plan, preventative care is now covered at 100% (for an in-network dentist).

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At the September meeting, Chair Kornelson asked Senators to send the FSEC input on suggested priorities for the 2021-22 academic year. During the October meeting, the question was asked again. Senators identified a need for more resources for recruiting and on-boarding post-doctoral fellows; a desire for conversations about ethics and integrity among faculty and administrators; addressing the perceived lack of a faculty voice on campus in some areas; concern about job postings requiring physical requirements that are not qualifications for those jobs; and an ongoing concern about the computer standardization policy (this included a request to invite OU IT to a future Senate meeting).

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Chair Kornelson called for new business. There was none.

A motion was made, and seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 5:29 p.m.

The official Faculty Senate Journal will be made available in draft form prior to the next regularly scheduled Faculty Senate meeting (November 8, 2021) for approval during that meeting.

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And this is the way I have to end this story. Just another case about OU’s path.

Good night.

Kalenda Eaton
Faculty Senate Secretary