In Case You Missed It: Unofficial Recap of a Protracted, yet Robust 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 notes and highlights from the perspective of FS Secretary Kalenda Eaton, with input from Stacey Bedgood (Administrative Coordinator), Chair-Elect Dave Hambright, and Chair Keri Kornelson.

September 13, 2021
The meeting was called to order at 3:32 p.m. by Chair Kornelson. Chair Kornelson read the Land Acknowledgement approved at the May 2021 Faculty Senate meeting. The Faculty Senate Journal for the regular meeting of May 10, 2021, was approved without revisions.

Announcements
Chair Kornelson:
- Introduced new Faculty Senate members.
- Gave notice of regular Faculty Senate meetings for 2021-2022 academic year (September 13, October 11, November 8, December 13, January 24 (tentative), February 14, March 21, April 11, and May 9).
- Announced Wayne Riggs (Philosophy) as Parliamentarian of the Faculty Senate and Regular Faculty.
- Noted the summary record of the disposition by the administration of Faculty Senate actions for September 2020 to August 2021 and the compilation of the 2020-21 annual reports of University councils.
- Listed committee recommendations made on behalf of the Faculty Senate (Tribal Liaison, Vice Provost, Honors College Dean, and Ombudsperson search committees). Recommendation was also made to the “Building a Sustainable Structure” committee which will work to support OU’s presentation to the Higher Learning Commission.
- Noted the 2021-22 list of faculty appointments to committees is available on the Faculty Senate website at http://facultysenate.ou.edu/commem21.html.
- Announced that the Athletics Department is offering the Faculty & Staff “One Pass” which for $100 provides general admission access for two people to all OU Volleyball, Baseball, Women’s Basketball, Men’s and Women’s Gymnastics, Soccer, and Wrestling home events. The “One Pass” also provides general admission access for two people to select OU Softball and OU Men’s Basketball non-conference home games. For further information, contact the Athletics Ticket Office at 325-2424 or outickets@ou.edu.
- Acknowledged the deaths of faculty member Jonathan Forman (Law) on August 16, 2021, retired faculty members Leon Zelby (Electrical Engineering) on November 9, 2020, Daniel Cottom (English) on June 27, 2021, Michael Buchwald (Drama) on August 4, 2021, and Richard Hilbert (Sociology) on August 22, 2021.

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

Chair Kornelson introduced our new Provost André-Denis Wright. Provost Wright gave remarks about his career and decision to apply to OU and spoke briefly about how he was impressed with the University Strategic Plan. Chair Kornelson opened the floor to questions. Senators posed several questions about the administration’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions covered what senators should tell colleagues questioning OU’s action regarding COVID; why there are no mask
mandates; why the university is not challenging SB 658; how President Biden’s recent announcement that federal workers and those that work on federal contracts are required to be vaccinated against COVID would affect OU employees that work on federal contracts and grants; and what information faculty is supposed to receive from the Healthy Together App. Provost Wright responded that he reads all the emails he receives from faculty members about COVID. He also spends a significant amount of time in meetings about COVID. He defers to the OU General Counsel about the interpretation of SB 658 and the Executive Order. In response to the question about federal contracts, Provost Wright said this is still being investigated and may be complicated because the vaccine mandate for federal workers is not standard across the board and there are areas OU does not satisfy. Regarding the mask mandate there was conversation about retention and Provost Wright stated the farthest the administration can go is to require masks in classes where there has been a positive COVID test. Provost Wright noted that the Healthy Together App does not allow students to easily share their COVID status with instructors. After further discussion, Provost Wright thanked everyone and remained in the meeting.

Chair Kornelson introduced Dorothy Anderson, the new Chief Human Resources Officer, and recognized Lee Camargo-Quinn, Benefits Assistant Director, and Colin Fonda, Associate Director of Human Resources. Ms. Camargo-Quinn discussed the benefits plan for the Norman Campus, noting a change from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to Cigna for 2022. Human Resources hopes to have rates to present at the next Board of Regents meeting. They will be able to provide more detail about the change at the October Faculty Senate meeting. The floor was opened to questions. Senators asked questions about the reason for the change; if the change to CIGNA will apply to Norman and HSC; how this affects negotiations with OU Physicians; how rates and Medicare-eligible retirees would be affected; payment tiers; and the OU dental clinic being out of network with the current OU dental insurance. Ms. Camargo-Quinn noted all questions and concerns. She responded that OU will not have the same policies that caused problems with CIGNA before in place this time. Pre-65 retirees will be under the same plan as current employees and Medicare-eligible retirees will have several options to choose from. Ms. Camargo-Quinn confirmed that OU Physicians has a long-term contract with CIGNA. Also, there are no plans to change the current three-tier structure. All other specifics of the plan were pending Regents’ approval. Ms. Camargo-Quinn will return to the Senate during the October meeting with rates and more details, including more information about the dental concerns.

Chair Kornelson introduced Jennifer Hembree, the OU Director of Policy. Dr. Hembree explained the new policy adoption and review process. Dr. Hembree explained that the Faculty Senate is not an approver of Board of Regents Policy, Institutional Policy, or Campus Specific Policy, although the Faculty Senate will be asked to review the policy when appropriate. Dr. Hembree presented four policies that are either updated or new (“Minors on Campus,” “Accessible Course Text,” “Data Governance,” and “Data Privacy” policies) for review and discussion. The policies will be voted on in the October meeting. There was discussion about the details of the process, systems that will be used, and the specifics of the policies.

Chair Kornelson wanted to discuss general faculty concern about the university response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Senators shared concerns they have been hearing from colleagues and constituents around the lack of social distancing in classrooms and/or staggered classes; the lack of a mask mandate and lax visible masking on campus (including by administrators); and student activities and other university activities being held in person. In the chat (feature on Zoom) Provost Wright responded to some of the comments with updated data on the vaccination status of students; a question about splitting classrooms and subsequent effects on the professor; and an announcement of a survey being sent out asking faculty and staff for feedback on vaccination status and observations on in-class
masking. Senators continued the discussion with several suggestions such as following the example of K-12 school districts and mandating masks; having administrators encourage masking; and administrators making videos linking masking to in-person classes, as opposed to moving classes completely online.

Finally, Chair Kornelson said that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) would like input from the members of the Faculty Senate on a list of priorities for the Faculty Senate for 2021-22. A request was made for Senators to email officers with suggestions.

Chair Kornelson called for new business. There was none. It was late.

A motion was made, and seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

The official Faculty Senate Journal will be made available in draft form prior to the next regularly scheduled Faculty Senate meeting (October 11, 2021) for approval during that meeting.

Kalenda Eaton
Faculty Senate Secretary