

Minutes from the 2017 MTSU Faculty Senate Retreat

23 August, 2017

Miller Education Center Training Room

Attendance

Present

Mark Abolins, Murat Arik, Tyler Babb, Martha Balachandran, Bishwas Bedekar, Alan Boehm, Andrew Brower, Larry Burriss, William Canak, Rick Cottle, Mamit Deme, Tricia Farwell, Rebecca Fischer, Justin Gardner, Joey Gray, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Tim Greer, Shannon Harmon, Pippa Holloway, Robert Kalwinsky, Yang Kim, Paul Kline, Vanessa Lefler, Alfred Lutz, Mary Martin, Pamela Morris, Susan Myers-Shirk, David Otts, John Pennington, Joshua Phillips, Ariana Postlethwait, Terry Quinn, Michael Rice, Patrick Richey, Stephen Salter, Kristi Shamburger, Mary Ellen Sloane, Nat Smith, Donald Snead, Sherri Stevens, Michelle Stevens, Deborah Wagnon

Excused

Katherine Blankenship, Laura Cochrane, Angela DeBoer, Preston MacDougall, Deana Raffo

Absent

Joshua Harms, Shallum Harris

Visitors

Dr. Tony Johnston, Professor, Department of Agribusiness and Agriscience, Middle Tennessee State University; Middle Tennessee State University Board of Trustees Faculty Representative

Dr. Mark Byrnes, Interim Provost, Middle Tennessee State University

Dr. Sidney McPhee, President, Middle Tennessee State University

Agenda

President Joey Gray called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM.

1. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the Special Called Faculty Senate meeting on 24 April, 2017, and from the 01 May, 2017, regular Faculty Senate meeting were distributed for review and consideration on 22 August, 2017 by Wendi Watts.

William Canak moved to approve the minutes from both the April and May meetings. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved as corrected by voice vote.

2. Officer and Committee Reports

A. Treasurer's Report

The Faculty Senate budget for 2017-2018 is

- Operating: \$3,300
- Travel: \$1,600

As of 08 September, 2017, the Faculty Senate has the following funds on hand:

- Operating: \$799.06
- Travel: \$1,600.

B. Board of Trustees Faculty Representative, Dr. Tony Johnston

The Faculty Representative on the MTSU Board of Trustees, Tony Johnston, summarized his first few months as a member of the Board. Before taking questions from the Faculty Senate, Johnston characterized the experience as “interesting, surprising, adventurous, and unusual” and gave attention to three topics: the nature of the transition, the efficiency of communication channels, and the voices represented on the Board.

First, Johnston described the nature of the transition from the state-wide Board of Regents to the installation and first months of the local Board of Trustees as an enormous learning curve. All members of the Board, according to Johnston, began with high expectations, which required substantial modification as the Board had to acclimate to a number of obstacles. These obstacles included lingering policy revisions, incongruences between academic and business timetables and procedures, and incomplete information and communication of relevant information, such as budgeting figures. Johnston summarized his role in this area as one of educator and interrogatory who asks “obvious” questions in order to break through mismatched norms and expectations between academic governance and business management.

Johnston continued his presentation by identifying the Office of the University President as a critical gatekeeper in the flow of information and communication between the Board and the University and its administration. Johnston added that insufficient training for Board members about how to ask the right questions of University Administration contributes to communications challenges that result from this gatekeeping, but expressed his belief that better training of the Board and better preparation by University Administration to respond to Board inquiries can resolve the inefficiencies.

Last, Johnston summarized the roles that different Board members have adopted, particularly noting three voices: the student body, as represented by the non-voting Student Representative, academic institutions and faculty interests, and individual member interests. As

he explained in his earlier comments, Johnston describes his role as one which represents the norms of academic institutions in general as well as a faculty perspective. Speaking to the appointed members of the Board, Johnston observed a shared interest in elevating MTSU to the “best in Tennessee,” but different visions among members about how to fulfill that vision.

In his last minutes before the Faculty Senate, Johnston took questions from senators on the Board’s external activities such as fundraising and program development and on their agenda for internal policies and procedures concerning the budget, faculty development, and athletics.

C. University Interim Provost, Dr. Mark Byrnes

Interim Provost Mark Byrnes delivered a few brief, general remarks before taking questions from the Faculty Senate. In his comments, Byrnes again pointed to the central role that the installation and transition processes of the new Board of Trustees will play in the direction the University goes this academic year. The Division of Academic Affairs is working with the rest of University Administration and the Office of the President to facilitate these processes; Byrnes echoed earlier sentiments that incorporating the new governance structure is a “learning process” for all involved.

To this end, Byrnes commended past Faculty Senate president, Mary Martin, for her “diligent and time-consuming” work to help revise and recommend new policies and procedures for university administration that will now apply under the new governance structure.

Looking forward, Byrnes shared his observation that a preponderance of the Board of Trustees work and information transmission comes from the subcommittees, rather than in full meetings of the Board. He encouraged senators to include subcommittee meetings on their agenda and plan to attend them whenever possible to gain fuller information on the Board’s activities.

The remainder of the Interim Provost’s time with the Faculty Senate was devoted to questions, which fell under two general categories: those seeking more information on the Board of Trustees’ activities and those pertaining to issues currently on the agenda of the Division of Academic Affairs.

Senators were interested in perspectives from the Office of the Provost on three general areas of the Board of Trustees’ activities. Byrnes first fielded several questions about the channels of communication between the Board and the university. He recognized that scheduling of meetings, especially for subcommittees, has yet to be regularized, but shared that earlier and more public announcement of meeting times is a new priority and should be expected to be carried out soon.

Meanwhile, the most direct way for senators and other members of the university to communicate their interests to the Board is through the Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees, Byrnes said in response to a question about the relationship between faculty and the Board. He continued that it remains unclear how else to directly communicate with the Board; however, Board and subcommittee meetings are open to the public.

When sharing concerns and interests with the Board of Trustees through the Faculty Representative, Byrnes also advised senators to include the Office of the President in the exchanges. He reminded the Senate that policy directs communication between the Board and the University through the Office of President, but expressed the possibility that the Faculty Senate could seek to be included in the information sharing processes.

A next set of questions pertaining to Board of Trustees activities focused more on the interactions between the Board and the Division of Academic Affairs. Senators were specifically interested in the direction these interactions were heading on questions pertaining to faculty and staff compensation, faculty workloads, and tuition rates. Byrnes perceived a difference of opinion between the Board of Trustees and University Administration on the question of faculty and staff compensation. In response to the recently publicized faculty compensation report, the position of the University Administration is to work to achieve salaries commensurate with market rates. The Board is currently considering the adoption of a merit-based system of faculty compensation, which the Administration believes should be a secondary goal to achieving market parity.

Senators shared their hope that Academic Affairs continues to research the comparative status of workload and teaching expectations at MTSU with its peer institutions. Teaching workload expectations that are higher than peer institutions, along with salary, were noted as significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of faculty. Byrnes took these concerns under advisement.

Byrnes also responded to a question asking whether the Board had yet considered altering tuition structures, such as discounts to out-of-state students, as a way to attract more students. Byrnes responded that such adjustments were in the Board's powers and the discussions similar to this appeared to be underway. These discussions are waiting on more data on the comparative costs and benefits of different student cost structures, but the Board appears to be following the direction that other universities are taking on incorporating tuition adjustments in recruitment strategies.

As to remaining issues between the Board and Academic Affairs, Byrnes noted that in each of these cases and others the Board and Academic Affairs are working to identify the Board's expectations and conceive of metrics that will be appropriate to assess whether University administration and the Trustees are reaching targets. The Offices of the Provost and President view securing appropriate metrics as an important responsibility.

The Interim Provost also fielded questions that posed concerns expressly for the Office of the Provost and the Division of Academic Affairs. Byrnes conveyed optimism that the University would distribute approvals for new hires earlier in the Fall semester so that academic units could take better advantage of job market timing in the recruitment of new faculty. Meanwhile, the Provost's office is attempting to create as many new lines as financially possible, especially

as personnel forecasts predict a substantial number of retirements of tenured faculty in upcoming years.

On a separate Academic Affairs matter, the Provost also announced that further consideration is being given to the addition of an A-minus grade option for undergraduate courses. The question was originally received from the Student Government Association and has also received feedback from the Faculty Senate in support of the option. As of his meeting with the Senate, Byrnes reported that the question remains unresolved but that it has been advanced to additional input from the Student Government Association.

D. University President, Dr. Sidney McPhee

President McPhee delivered remarks on enrollment, the university's budget, and the new governance structure before taking questions from the Faculty Senate.

On enrollment, McPhee delivered news that, on the whole, enrollment for the upcoming academic year is down six to seven percent from the previous year. Noting that this decline comparable to nationwide trends, McPhee expects that enrollment will continue to decrease for the next few years.

Upon investigating the sources of declining enrollment, McPhee reported that decreases are concentrated in student retention. In contrast, enrollment among first-time freshmen, new transfer students, and graduate students are up this year; MTSU is welcoming the second largest freshman class among higher education institutions in Tennessee. McPhee credited the "True Blue Tour" initiative and "Quest for Student Success" for bringing about these areas of growth.

Meanwhile, research is underway to uncover why student retention efforts are less successful and to find ways to remedy those circumstances. Initial results from a survey of individuals who did not enlist in classes after committing to the university and former students who left after completing some work, McPhee shared, show that financial exigence primarily explains student attrition.

After describing the general information on enrollment, the president segued to discussion on the budget for the upcoming academic year. McPhee noted that budget decisions are not possible to make firm until enrollment numbers are settled as the university relies on tuition from enrolled students and state appropriations as the sole two sources of revenue. McPhee criticized state appropriations as an "undependable" revenue stream because the legislature, consistent with national trends, allocates insufficient resources to higher education and, this year, did not fulfill the amount it pledged. Thus, tuition is the most important source of revenue to the university.

Declining enrollments combined with insufficient state appropriations and the consequences of the Outcomes Based Funding Formula instituted by the Complete College Tennessee Act mean that MTSU faces, in McPhee's characterization, "significant" budget challenges.

McPhee concluded his remarks on enrollment and the budget with a positive note that the incoming freshmen class, along with being the largest in recent years, is also the most academically accomplished that the university has recruited, based on GPA and standardized test scores (ACT, SAT).

Last, the president reported on his observations of the transition process to install the new Board of Trustees. McPhee shared in the sentiments expressed by Faculty Representative Johnston and Interim Provost Byrnes that university administration and members of the Board are learning together how to govern the university, with the Office of the President taking upon itself a task of educating Board members about the norms and structures of academic institutions and university governance.

After his comments to the Faculty Senate, President McPhee took questions on a variety of topics, many of which focused on the relationship between the Board of Trustees and the university community.

Briefly, McPhee first addressed a question on the effects of the Tennessee Promise tuition waiver and its expansion to adult learners for MTSU. He expects that the expansion could impact enrollment at MTSU, but informed senators that the program is a “last scholarship program” and that the waiver is the last financial aid source applied after other programs (e.g., Pell, federal student loans).

A number of subsequent questions followed on the president’s remarks on the relationship between the university and the Board of Trustees, especially as that relationship impacts the university’s budget. In sum, senators were concerned about Board members’ training in academic and shared governance, discussions about the budget, and evaluation of alternative or supplementary initiatives to budget cuts.

On Board training, McPhee reported that members of all the Tennessee higher education Boards of Trustees met for shared governance training earlier in the year. The agenda for this meeting, however, was changed and, instead, focused on state-formulated higher education initiatives (Tennessee Promise, the Complete College Act, and the Outcomes Based Funding Formula). McPhee characterized the message of this presentation as encouraging boards to focus on institutional and operational efficiency.

Having noted earlier that the University anticipates a budget shortfall due to unfulfilled state appropriations and decreased enrollment, McPhee also shared that the Board of Trustees is likely to seek significant cuts to the size of the budget, in the range of 5 to 10 million dollars. With this announcement, McPhee and other senators pointed out that the greatest impact of budget cuts would be against faculty salaries. In response, senators expressed a series of concerns to which McPhee responded.

First among these concerns asked what assessments the Board has made regarding the effect of salaries on faculty recruitment and retention. The president shared that formal discussion has

not yet taken place on this matter between the University Administration and the Board but that salary cuts would likely be a component of the general conversation on budget cuts. The Administration hopes to cool some of the motivation to cut faculty salaries by linking the negative effects of salary cuts on important Board objectives like Student Success. Moreover, budget allocations to salary increases, the Administration hopes, will be targeted to achieve market parity. But this hope will likely be another source of contention between the Office of the President and the Board, which is looking to the recent decision in the Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees to implement merit-based salary increases.

Next, McPhee spoke to questions about alternatives to budget cuts, especially those that might affect faculty salaries. The president expressed the belief that the Board is motivated to execute significant budget cuts in order to cover other operational costs of the University and to also avoid tuition increases. There also appear to be market-based motivations within the Board to assess the comparative value of different academic programs. In response, University Administrators are taking efforts to educate members of the Board about the division between mandatory spending lines in the university's budget that are devoted to long-term contracts and grants and discretionary spending streams to demonstrate the limited flexibility to enact significant cuts. Additionally, the University is working with academic units to discuss the comparative advantages and returns on investment of different academic programs, including nursing, which McPhee noted has already provided a report to the Board.

McPhee also spoke to activities besides Board education that may possibly address the dilemma of budget cuts that will affect salaries. In response to a direct question about the role of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) in deciding salaries, McPhee noted that THEC is no longer involved in the appropriations process. Now, all the university presidents campaign directly to the governor and the legislature decides allocations to each institution, including recommendations for faculty salaries. The Board of Trustees controls how the budget, which includes appropriations from the state, is spent. In sum, this means that collective bargaining by THEC to affect appropriations and faculty salaries is no longer part of the process. It also points to the greater competition that will take hold between universities in the state to receive revenue from the state.

Another question raised regarding the subject of Board activities to generate revenue for the university spoke to the Board's on-going attempts to lobby the legislature and to engage Middle Tennessee partners in the private sector. McPhee did not speak to any direct efforts by the Board to lobby the state government, but noted that most of the members of the Board have invested several million dollars of their own money in MTSU. The Board also seems willing to leverage area business connections in order to attract more revenue to the institution.

As a complement to the previous question, McPhee also spoke to a question about efforts the university is taking to stay aloft in the increasing competition among institutions. The president shared that the university hired new University Counsel with professional lobbying experience to replace Heidi Zimmerman, who recently transitioned to a role as Board Secretary to assist the

Board and the Office of the President. The University also plans to continue its successful efforts at showcasing the institution through events like “MTSU Day” at the state capital.

In the last of his comments to the Faculty Senate, President McPhee commended the “amiable” job that the Student Representative to the Board of Trustees is performing in response to additional questions about how intently the Board is incorporating students’ perspectives in decision making. He also announced that Dr. Mark Byrnes would be recommended to assume the role of Provost, transitioning from his current role as Interim Provost.

3. Unfinished Business

A. Election of Recording Secretary

One senator, Vanessa Lefler, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, was nominated by to serve as the Faculty Senate Recording Secretary for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Rick Cottle moved to accept the slate of nominees for the Faculty Senate Recording Secretary and to vote on the candidates; the motion received multiple seconds. There was no discussion on the motion and voting proceeded immediately. By the assent of a voice vote, Vanessa Lefler was elected by the Senate to serve as Recording Secretary for the present academic year.

B. Election of Faculty Senate Steering Committee

Senate President Gray submitted the slate of candidates for the 2017-2018 Faculty Senate Steering Committee. Noting several openings, Gray called for additional nominees to the Steering Committee.

The final slate of nominees included:

Senator	College	Department
Joshua Phillips	Basic & Applied Sciences	Computer Science
Rick Cottle	Behavioral & Health Sciences	Human Sciences
Sherri Stevens	Behavioral & Health Sciences	Nursing
Murat Arik	Business	Management
Stephen Salter	Business	Accounting
Shannon Harmon	Education	Elementary & Special Education
Donald Snead	Education	Womack Educational Leadership
Susan Myers-Shirk	Liberal Arts	History
Larry Burriss	Media & Entertainment	Journalism
Alan Boehm	Walker Library	Special Collections
David Otts	University College	University Studies

The slate of nominees to the Faculty Senate Steering Committee was moved to the floor for approval in whole. Voting to elect the Steering Committee Members proceeded immediately. By the assent of a voice vote, the 2017-2018 Faculty Senate Steering Committee was approved. All nominees were elected to serve.

Following the election of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, one seat designated for a senator from the College of Liberal Arts remained vacant.

4. New Business

President Gray outlined two objectives for the Faculty Senate for the 2017-2018 academic year: to improve and increase lines of communication and transparency between the Faculty Senate and its constituents; and to establish a working structure through the creation of four new Faculty Senate committees that will allow the Senate to be more proactive and responsive to the activities of the new Board of Trustees.

A. Communication and Transparency

Gray impressed upon all senators the importance of sharing information and announcements from Faculty Senate meetings with their departments and other relevant constituencies.

To facilitate information-sharing and to increase transparency of the Senate's activities, Gray announced a new Senate practice. Immediately following each meeting, the Recording Secretary will submit a brief summary of important points and announcements that can be quickly and concisely shared. These briefs will be in addition to more extended minutes from the meeting, which will be distributed at a later time.

B. New Faculty Senate Strategic Committees

Noting the reports received from the visiting speakers to the Faculty Senate and to observations from Faculty Senate Executive Committee members from earlier meetings of the Board of Trustees, Gray announced that the Faculty Senate would create four new committees to mirror the subcommittee structure of the Board of Trustees. These committees include Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics; Finance and Personnel; Audit and Compliance; and Executive and Governance.

Each senator shall either serve on one of these strategic committees, the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, or the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. These committees share the general responsibilities to be attentive to the agendas of the Board of Trustees and their respective subcommittees, devise their own action items and submit them for consideration on future Board and subcommittee meetings, and be a visible bridge between the interests and competencies of the Board of Trustees and the faculty and staff at MTSU. These responsibilities may include committee meetings outside normal Faculty Senate meetings and attending Board subcommittee meetings. Strategic committees should also be attentive to deadlines for commenting periods on policies still under revision and agenda requests.

Each strategic committee was also designated specific goals and responsibilities. Primary among these were, respectively:

- Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics: Academic Misconduct policy transition, Promotion and Tenure, Athletic Programs
- Finance and Personnel: Salary increases and merit pay

- Audit and Compliance: Institutional peer review, Workloads, Background checks in hiring
- Executive and Governance: On-line Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)

Strategic committees met during a work session coinciding with the Retreat and began developing plans to carry out their objectives.

5. Announcements

President Gray shared the following announcements with the Faculty Senate:

1. The Information Technology Division (ITD) informs faculty and staff that significant changes will be introduced to Pipeline this semester. While these changes will largely not affect the functionality of Pipeline, they will alter its appearance. Teresa Thomas, Director of Enrollment Technical Services, has agreed to visit the Faculty Senate and any other faculty to provide an instructional walk-through of the changes.
2. The Office of the Registrar reminds faculty that final grade reports are due at 9:00 AM on Monday, 18 December, 2017. This semester, the University emphasizes timely grade submissions because this semester's deadline for final grades encroaches upon university holidays and financial aid and other mandatory reporting deadlines. Therefore, the University prepares to issue "naming and shaming" reports to those faculty who do not submit their grades by the deadline.
3. Faculty who advise students should note that Pell Grants are now available for summer terms. Government-funded classes must be in the student's degree track, though, and federal funding will not be applied to elective courses. Students are, instead, personally responsible for expenses resulting from courses that fall outside their academic tracks.
4. Gray reported that her meeting with the Chairs Council was largely positive. The Chairs Council conveyed an interest in constructive collaboration with the Faculty Senate, including providing feedback and resources from their own research on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs).
5. Gray reminded senators that the Promotion and Tenure reception honoring faculty who received tenure and/or promotions for the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year was scheduled for Thursday, 24 August at 4:30 PM in the Todd Art Gallery (TODD 224A). Gray noted that this year's event was scheduled for a later time than past Promotion and Tenure receptions so that the venue could also serve alcohol and light refreshments to celebrate the achievements of the honored faculty. All faculty were encouraged to attend.

William Canak moved to adjourn the meeting and the motion received seconds from multiple senators. With the assent of a voice vote, President Gray adjourned the meeting at 1:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Vanessa A. Lefler
2017-2018 Faculty Senate Recording Secretary