

Faculty Senate President's Report

November 20, 2024

The following report is a demonstrative summary of some of the activities undertaken by the Faculty Senate President as well as various members of the Executive Committee from October 16th, to the middle of November, 2024.

If there are questions on any point, please feel free to reach out any time. Thank you.

Introduction:

Key Initiatives/Accomplishments/Events:

1. Strategic Planning Faculty Priorities –
 - a. Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee (IPAC) next meeting – Feb. 5th (Faculty Senate members – Donna Streeter, Sean Walker, Christina Wassenaar)
 - b. The result of the meeting in October was that a subcommittee was formed to draft an initial version of faculty focused strategic priorities for consideration. The format would be a main bullet/statement, which would entail some overarching USA focus on Faculty and the role that we occupy at USA and then four/five sub points which more specific topical notes. As an example, do we want a specific sub point that holds up retention as a strategic priority?

2. Ad-Hoc Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness Committee (AHETEC) Report – In October we reintroduced the most current version of the AHETEC report that was developed by a small committee over the last two years. The most current version is from July, 2024 and the faculty have been asked to provide comments. In order to do so with a wider than typical net, the chairs of Evaluation, TL&T and Mentoring committees solicited comments from each of their committees but have also hosted two listening sessions where additional interested faculty could weigh in on their concerns and thoughts. Those various sessions and feedback have now been integrated into one document, along with the other members of the executive Faculty Senate team, and will be sent back to the committee and Council of Deans (CAD) for further review. Of key importance was the continuing lack of definitional clarity on basic concepts such as “effectiveness” and “evaluation”. We have asked for those and other concepts to be far more clearly developed, as well as some sample rubrics, and more specificity around workload and addressing bias in peer evaluation (as some examples).

3. Inversion/Compression/Equity – In the previous report, I noted that cost modeling for three scenarios would take place over the month of October that would be released to the Salary and Benefits committee and ExComm. At the November President’s Council meeting it was shared that this modeling is almost complete and the results will be shared soon. We will follow up on this in a separate meeting and share that with the Salaries & Benefits Committee for dissemination to the Senate.
4. Professional Development (PD) Nominations for Chair development – Seven people were either self-nominated or thrown into the ring by colleagues for this committee. These names have all been shared with AA and have been informed of their nomination (if they were not aware). The next step is the development of a draft charge for this committee to help guide the work. Additionally, as many of you know, the Council of Chairs Committee has been reconstituted with Ellen Harrington (English/A&S) as chair. The first meeting for that group will take place on Nov. 20th at 2:30.
5. The proposal was made in the October plenary related to the addition to the bylaws to include Zoom augmented plenary meetings in December, June and July of each year. These meetings would only occur as needed for timely votes but would not be considered standing meetings. The vote for this change will take place on Nov. 20th. Administration has been notified of this pending change and the agenda item needed for the change to the “Exchange document” created in 2019 that encourages timely exchanges between Faculty Senate and CAD (but currently has no dates) has been added to the agenda for CAD in Dec. as a tentative agenda item, pending the result of the FS vote.
6. A few months ago, we received a request to make a few of the Huddles opportunities for faculty to do some semi-organized research networking. The first Huddle where this occurred was on Nov. 7th, and around 50 faculty joined for a few hours of table discussions on topics where they had interest. At least two discussion groups have formed from that time together, but even more than that, the general feedback was that it was nice to have an opportunity to come together in a shorter setting for research discussions. We will continue to develop these themed Huddles for the Spring as well.
7. We continue to encourage Caucus Leaders to focus on developing themselves and their caucuses as repositories of faculty focused information and communication channels.

Faculty Concerns:

These items are often ongoing, and so if there are updates we will make them to the sections in the accomplishment section.

1. Of primary concern to faculty has been the discussion on R1. A goal date of 2028 has been established for the university to meet the general metrics that are part of this status (<https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/carnegie-classification/carnegie-2025-basic-classifications-faqs/>). This process will entail increasing our overall PhD student production to 70 PhDs per year (we are currently ~52/year) and maintaining our R&D spend at more than \$50M/year. In order to determine who meets this threshold, they will use the higher of either a three-year rolling average or the most recent year data. At our current rate of growth, we will 'naturally' achieve both of these metrics by 2028. Clearly, the conversation must and will continue about teaching loads both for research active and teaching faculty, compensation, research assistant classification and salaries, as just some examples.
2. Of concern to faculty has been that there have been key academic searches that occur during the months not covered by a typical faculty nine-month contract. We have asked the administration to consider this in scheduling interviews for these key positions, as well as if they do progress to interviews during that non-contract time that they at minimum record presentations and offer zoom as an option to the interviewing group. They agreed and this went forward in that way this summer, allowing some of our traveling faculty to participate in a productive way.
3. A new item which is being developed is that of the role of adjuncts as colleagues. Currently there are no representative bodies for these colleagues, and while many have been involved with the university for a reasonable length of time, they are not actively or financially acknowledged in many ways. We currently do not represent adjuncts through our Bylaws, which means this discussion is also out of the purview of the Senate (by tradition), but this has been brought to our attention, so I'll add it here for the moment for committee discussion.
4. (Moved from accomplishments) Salary increase/supplement – Recently, the question of part-time and adjunct salaries has been raised, both to ExComm and directly to the President and Provost. The administration has acknowledged that the base compensation for part-time faculty needs some additional evaluation and has begun that process. This discussion is ongoing and will be updated as information becomes available.
5. (Moved from accomplishments above) In August, the Executive Committee brought forward the general concern about inconsistencies in Department Chair Professional Development/Training from one College/Division to another. This concern included a recommendation for a new PD program that would be

developed 'in-house' that would effectively support the chairs in their roles, which in turn, would allow for the faculty who are in each department to benefit from a consistent application of Handbook and University policies. This was accepted, and the process has begun for developing curriculum topics. The ILC will be the main developer of the materials, but we have asked to have 3/4 faculty members as part of the development committee which has also been accepted.

Administrative Updates:

1. A VPRED candidate was interviewed on Nov. 11, 2024. A summary letter with comments and feedback was sent to the administration from the ExComm on Nov. 14th.
2. The University Sustainability committee will be collecting operations and academic data for submission to AASHE, for accreditation through that organization. This has been presented to CAD, with the announcement that there will be a call for information of various forms to support this process. More information to come in January, as this information must first be presented to CAD. <https://www.aashe.org>.

Faculty Achievements: We want to start building up a repository of key accomplishments for our colleagues around campus, mainly focused on teaching excellence, innovative research or other essential academic pursuits. As several examples:

1. David Meola was featured in a joint project for the ILC and FS for his excellence in teaching. Further information on this can be found here: https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/ilc/facultyspotlight_meola.html
2. We need more faculty achievements. Please tell us the interesting things you are doing... you can send them directly to me, Bret Webb or Vicki Tate.

Future Actions:

1. The Senate Planning and Development Committee (Sean Walker) is planning a Friendsgiving event at POST on the Hill on Nov. 26th. They will be ready for us anytime after 4:30pm, and we will provide some snacks and charcuterie. This time it's a cash bar. We are also encouraging any faculty, not just those on the Senate, to join. All are welcome.
2. The next Huddle is tomorrow at 4 at the Faculty Club. This one is not a themed Huddle, so just come for the chat and hang out.