

Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes – October 4th, 2022

Senators Present: Francisco Aguiniga, Polly Allred, Travis Braidwood, Lucy Camacho, Mauro Castro, Steven Chumbley, Steven Corbett, Manuel Flores, Michelle Garcia, Elizabeth Goode, Anders Greenspan, Norma Guzman, Brent Hedquist, David Hicks, Michael Houf, Dongwook Kim, Sangsoo Lee, Anne-Marie Lelkes, Sarah Lucas, Lifford McLauchlan, Brian Menaker, Richard Miller, Kathleen Rees, Hans Schumann, Amber Shipherd, Velda Soydas, Teresa Young, Thomas Zinninger

Senators Absent: Bart Ballard, Michael Cherry, Jesus De La Rosa, Zhaoqi Fan, James Glusing, Mai Najim, Alex Sanchez-Behar, Benjamin Turner, Daniella Varela, Maria Velez-Hernandez, Subbarao Yelisetti

This meeting of the Faculty Senate was held through by hybrid in room the banquet hall room 200 in the Javelina Dining Hall and on Zoom to adopt a new meeting format. This meeting was recorded for records purposes but will be deleted upon completion.

I. Call to Order and Quorum Call.

At 3:32 p.m. President Machado asked the secretary, Elizabeth Goode, if enough members were present for a quorum. Senator Goode replied in the positive as there were twenty-eight members present; sixteen online and twelve in person. President Machado said we appreciate everyone that is coming in person.

II. Presentation-

President Robert Vela – Dr. Vela thanked the Senate for meeting in person so he could come, attend and see everyone not on a screen. He said enrollment is doing well with a 19% increase in enrollment. Enrollment, retention and recruitment is the formula. The retention side is where we are struggling and losing a lot of our students. Our head count is down 4%. About 2% when you look at contact hours. We had forecasted a 4% increase. 2% down for budget purchases. It's going to be a tight year but we aren't in any kind of financial situation and he is not overly worried about sustainability. You look there is demonstrated some growth there. Applications have doubled. Double the folks admitted into the institution. That's a really good sign and we need to continue that momentum.

Dr. Vela feels he has shared with us his approach to getting our fair share of the students that are available to us in the Valley. We've been losing students down there. And they are begging us to come back. They want to come back here. He has sent John Carrillo who used to be his chief of staff [now Executive Director of Student Completion and Community College Relations] and has now been redirected to work with our partners down there. We will be more intentional. Recruitment tables alone do not work anymore. We need to be engaging the faculty, deans, chairs at South Texas College and Texas Southmost College. We need to be working in the high schools. We are not in competition with UT-RGV. There are plenty of students down there for us to get and we can be doing meaningful work in the valley.

We also have tremendous growth from Corpus Christi. We want to double down on that because those students are not going to A&M Christi they are coming here. We can even tell down to what neighborhoods students are coming from and we need to better understand these neighborhoods. We need to double down on those neighborhoods. Right now the biggest recruitment is Corpus Christi area. Dr. Silva has done a tremendous job rebuilding and cultivating our partnership with the local independent

school districts. We have had three VP events and attached them to our football game. We had on average 60 people from various ISDs just to say thank you for being our partners and connecting with us. Tuloso-Midway ISD wants to do dual credit with us. That's a big deal. We've never been affiliated with Tuloso-Midway in any formal way. They have some top-notch students.

Great things are happening by us just being out there and cultivating those community relationships. Kingsville's leadership and ISD representatives will be coming on Friday. Mayra Flores may also be coming. We are waiting to talk to her staff. We welcome her as our congresswoman and we will work with her and her staff to be sure that we get all the federal funding for this institution.

Good things happening all around. Retention needs to be at the forefront. We need to have a more intentional strategy. President Vela talked to Brad Walker with the foundation about funneling some of that money back for retention efforts. We have got to create a significant plan to get our retention rates up. Retention is our number one priority. Students also want to be on campus. Graduate students on the other hand want to be online. We have got to find a better balance. We can't do everything for everyone but we need to find that sweet spot.

Those are the things that are front and center. We have the most work to do around Retention. We've also got to fix our advising program. We need to professionalize it. It is to optional. It's needs to be a safety net. There are too many off ramps to this institution. So, one of the things we have to do is make advising a high impact priority on advising. Maybe we even consider embedded advisors in the departments. Maybe make a hybrid model. In this we also are looking for something that is more intentional. Maybe even a little intrusive. That's the word they are using in the literature. I'm going to be here for you. I'm not going to let you fail. Dartmouth doesn't allow their students to fail or drop out. There are safety mechanisms embedded in all they do. This is an important leadership body that I want to work closely with to make sure we are communicating this very well; we need to turn it on its head. Our students are leaving at the rate of a thousand a year. We have 71 students with over 100 hours that we still have not been able to graduate. I'll be coming back to you so we can co-create on this journey. We cannot wait a year. We have to start working now to effect fall enrollment next year. A lot of things are going to come fast because we have got to stop the bleeding. We need to take a more local approach as our students are going through a lot. Maybe we even start embedding tutors right into courses. Why are we making tutoring optional? We know what classes need tutors in them. Where the tutor is working with the faculty member to provide supplemental instruction for those students.

We just need to figure this out for ourselves. We don't need to do it all at once but we need to start. Whatever we do will impact Retention and ultimately, we want our students to graduate. That's the goal. Obviously, that doesn't always happen but we want it to be. Things are starting to progress but there is a sense of urgency around enrollment and again the positive thing here is that because of the declining population we should be doing worse in enrollment.

Senator Castro asked a question. He told a story about being a parent and the student took five advisors to get her course in three years. President Vela spoke about the research behind advising and how important the first few years are. He thinks faculty could engage more with mentoring. Because there are particular nuances with some disciplines that make them better at assisting advisors in a collaborative environment. They discussed the sequence of Organic Chemistry classes.

Senator Young has a question. Senator Young wanted to comment about what President Vela said about embedding advisors in the department. She spoke about how in the department of Clinical Health Sciences they are already doing this and it works out very well. Their advisor is in their building readily available to faculty and students. The advisor also attends departmental meetings. President Vela responded back about how Senator Young articulated what he means by professionalizing advising.

Senator Garcia spoke about how the College of Ag put a table with advisors out in a main passage way to take care of any advisement problems students may be having. She spoke about how the advisors were a little overwhelmed at first but then everyone was using it and the problems got taken care of right away. President Vela spoke in agreement about how those are the tempos of advising. He said it is working and we should model it. Triaging at it's best. You don't need to sit down for thirty minutes that will come later when you have to have a more in depth conversation about say Organic Chemistry sequencing. He says he does not want to pick on advising but we have to have a safety net and that is part of it. There are to many off ramps.

Senator Lee made a comment about how every college is different and needs to be treated differently. President Vela agreed that there didn't need to be a cookie cutter approach. President Vela said we are not in competition with the other A&M schools. They also spoke about students learning marketable skills. He says even if students have to drop out they have some value.

Dr. Lou Reinsch – Dr. Reinisch said he wanted to first thank the faculty for meeting in person as we are transitioning out of COVID and that he planned to be there in person but he had COVID. He told a story that was on the front of the page of the New York Times (["The NYU Chemistry Student Shouldn't Have Needed That Petition"](#)) about a professor who is a pioneer in teaching organic chemistry. He changed the way it was being taught from being memorization to problem solving. He has written a very popular textbook order, getting chemistry. It's in it's fifth edition. He retired from Princeton in 2007 and since then has been teaching at NYU. After COVID 82 of his students petitioned complaining about his teaching and that he was not supportive of their studies. Most know that organic chemistry is the course that weeds people out of medical school so it is an extremely important course. They felt he wasn't teaching it appropriately. His student evaluations were not good. And so NYU let him go. Renowned person teaching organic chemistry, and the department chairman stated that Dr. Jones has no changed his style or methods in many years but the students have changed, and that's something I don't think most of us realize how much our students are changing. But if you consider the iPhone each year the students have had an iPhone one more year of their life and that is making a huge change on what students expect, how fast they expect to get answers, and how they expect to get response, and I think we have to be aware of that. It's not our job to make students appropriately educated for the twentieth century. We have to make them educated for the twenty-first century.

I share this with you just to point out how much our students are changing. We used to measure generational changes and now we are measuring yearly changes in our students. We have to be flexible and we have to be able to adapt. As we continue to transition out of COVID the one thing that we need to keep in mind is that what people are looking for is that human contact that COVID took away from us. And that has to be important. I think it's very clear that retention is one of our biggest problems on campus and retention is not just academics. Retention is academics. It's the library. It's student services. It's advisors. It's everything we have at the university. But what's going to work best for us is to increase the human interactions. When students don't show up from class that somebody reaches out to them

and ask them if there's a problem. When students don't turn in an assignment that somebody messages them and says "Why wasn't this turned in"? Those human touches that we have missed so much, have to come back, and that's going to really help us to make the transition forward and improve the retention rates. Our Fall to Spring retention rates across the University are 86%. We should be at 90%. And he has challenged the Deans that they each have to bring their colleges up by two percentage points, so that the average goes up from eighty, six to eighty eight percent. And the only way that's going to happen is with change. It's not going to happen by doing things the same way that we've been doing them. It's going to happen by us, changing, recognizing that our students are different and the very easy first step is making those human touch points. Maintain your standards. Do not lower them but make sure that your students have the support that they need to be successful in your class. Make sure they know what support is available to them. Dr. Reinsch said we all did a great job getting through COVID but transitioning out and we've got to get back to ourselves. We have get back to human interactions and making sure our students are successful.

Dr. Reinsch and President Machado then discussed the room, the acoustics, and people online not being able to hear what is being said. And then Dr. Reinsch suggested a room on the 2nd floor of the library.

President Machado than asked if there were any questions and Senator Castro spoke up on behalf of the Professor in the New York Times article and said he did not go out quietly. The Professor could tell through the technology that the students were not watching the videos and they were not doing the work. Senator Castro said he is a twentieth century guy. Are we going to be awarding degrees for enrolling or awarding degrees of knowledge because this Professor had documented and could prove that they weren't doing the work. He has personally also used the technology we have to check to see if his students aren't doing the work or spending enough time on things. Senator Castro did read the article and understand NYU is 60k a semester so 82 students wanting to drop out is a big deal, and one did change universities, and this experienced Professor wrote the book that like Dr. Reinsch said is in several editions, 82 students say he isn't doing it the way we want. Ok we don't need him anymore. Dr. Reinsch than answered that he would not try and defend the decision made or the instructor but that students don't want to work, nobody wants to work, and this is a problem educators have faced since the beginning of time. You can't expect students to pick things up on their own and study eight hours a day. It's up to the Professors to make sure the students now what is expected of them. That they make the students understand what is necessary, what other people in the classroom do to be successful and he knows this isn't an easy job for Professors.

President Machado than thanked Dr. Reinsch for coming and talking to us and invited Dr. Jarett Lujan, the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Dr. Jarett Lujan – Dr. Lujan thanked the faculty for their time said how excited he was to be in this inaugural position. He said Faculty Senate was an important part of the university to visit. He said his job is not just student affairs it is every part of the university. He gave us an update on where he was at since starting in May. He spoke about us being an HSI and how that alone does not make us diverse, equitable, or inclusive. He said there is a lot of work to be done and they are already starting. He is only one person with no staff so it's a lot of work and he is pulled in many ways. He is helping student activities, people working on grants, several departments and addressing questions about classroom treatment. He is happy to do this type of work so if you have any issues within your department or within your classroom he is happy to help.

One of the biggest issues we have is with data. The data is not disaggregated in a way that allows him to target certain populations and working it around those that need it. For example, we have a log of intersecting identities on campus. So being Afro-Latina or being LGBTQIA and Black. What does that mean for that student on this

campus and how that affects their sense of belonging in a Chemistry course as opposed to an English course, or in the library as opposed to the gym. So right now, they are working in partnership with Senator Miller and his direction is bringing in an external researcher to do that kind of data collection. And we are going to need your help because it's not just focused on the students tho they are the priority. It is going to include Faculty and Staff as well. They will send out three different surveys and that will give us the climate landscape analysis of all those different facets. He needs us to help get those surveys out not only to our colleagues but also staff and students. Those will roll out in November or December and will be open for about two months and then in the spring they will start doing focus groups. Focusing on creating those positive outcomes with retention rates, graduation rates, job placement rates and of course giving our students culturally enhancing experiences. What we are doing with the classroom to help prepare, educate and allow our faculty members to engage with our diverse student population is to make them feel like they belong in that classroom. Maybe something as simple as addressing a very well-known Chemist that is Latino in talking about the history of Chemistry or something along that line and that allows the students to see themselves in that person when they have not known of that person previously. We may be missing an portion of identity development when students come from a rural area to a more metropolitan one or even just to college.

So we are looking at all those things to make a better sense of belonging on campus and he does that by meeting with people and seeing what voice is missing from the room. He says we are definitely missing the Black voice on this campus and so what are we doing for that? Not only for our students but also our faculty and staff members to make them feel a sense of belonging. He told a story about working on research with a colleague at Texas Tech on Black university presidents who were looking at retention rates of Faculty and many were leaving because there was not a local barber for them and they were having to drive two hours away to the city just to get hair care or products they needed. So that's what we are going to do. We'll start looking at those things and doing them to help diversify the voice and bring that voice in.

We will also be pursuing the Seal of Excelencia ([See here](#)). It's part of being an HSI and is a designation from a non-profit that we will be pursuing. We just went to DC to meet with the Excelencia in Education group and talk about what that framework looks like and what we're doing on campus to put us on the pathway to being a really good HSI but also for accountability. What are we doing to serve this community as opposed to just enrolling them. He does have trainings and lunch and learns happening. The next one is October the 16th. It basically is just addressing access to higher education. He gives us the tools and we have a conversation about it. Please attend the trainings will really give you an insight into dealing with these things.

We are also going to look at Stoling ceremonies. Many universities do them. We will do this so that there is a visual example of success by going to a set up Stoling ceremony were our graduates are able to be honored by their families. We will also look at having those at some regional sites, maybe go close to the border so their families can attend in person or virtually.

We are looking closely at working with the Hispanic population and the Black population as well as the LGBTQIA and API groups as well. Because again if you show up to these things and that the students know you care. Cause the students that are graduating aren't the only ones coming their siblings and their friends and family will come too.

Also be looking at food insecurity. That's one of the things we have a really bad problem with security on our campus and he has a Masters of Social Work intern helping to work on collecting the data on that as well.

And the last thing to about is the Social Injustice forum. He highly encourages people to still submit proposals. The more proposals that we have the better this is going to grow and the more diverse topics we are going to have. They are also really pushing for attendance as last year was lacking. Tell your students to submit.

Senator Shipherd than made a comment on having more time slots for trainings. Dr. Lujan said in the future he hoped to. Senator Goode spoke with him about Unity.

III. Approval of Minutes from May 2022 Faculty Senate Meetings.

President-elect Houf motioned to approve. Senator Rees seconded and the minutes were approved with twelve members in person and 10 online.

IV. Report of Officers

a) President's report - President Tanner Machado

President Machado gave a brief report as most of what was covered in their meeting with the President had been covered before. We did get an update on enrollment. Down a little bit. It is up 19% for first time college students. Our retention has been a problem since prior to COVID so we need to focus on more than that. Dr. Silva did a focus group with the students, some things that were identified as concerns was mental health, housing insecurity and food insecurity. They also commented about their not being enough "sticky spaces" on campus. The sub doesn't cut it.

One of the things they are looking at about retention is possibly pursuing some eight-week courses for core classes. They really haven't pursued anything of it yet but it should be on our radar.

The other thing we talked about was that last meeting we had a discussion about policy AOP2 ([See here](#)). We have two different policies listed on websites and we need to make sure we are following A&M System policy. What's our protocol for updating all these websites?

The last thing they talked about was the President's inauguration. It is still November 29th but they moved the time to 3 o'clock and the reception to 4 o'clock so classes will not be canceled. It will also correspond with the lighting of the tree for Christmas.

V. Standing Committee Reports

- a) **Committee on Committees** – Senator Goode spoke about the trouble with finding people to serve for a couple of the committees and what colleges people were still needed for. She also spoke about the need for there to still be a chair.
- b) **Resolutions and By-Laws Committee** – Have not met. Still need a chair. Senator Garcia offered to chair and call the committee for it's first meeting. We will be talking about discrepancies between our documents. Like the Committee on Committees handbook and the Constitution.
- c) **Election Committee** – Senator Hedquist spoke for the election committee and said we were able to complete our election and the new senator for Mechanical and Industrial Engineering was there. The next meeting would be to cover apportionment.

VI. Reports from Committees Reporting to the Senate

- a) **Administrator Evaluation Committee** – No report
- b) **Annual Faculty Lecture Committee** – No report
- c) **Faculty Benefits Committee** – No report
- d) **Faculty Evaluation Committee** – No report
- e) **Faculty Handbook Committee** - No report
- f) **Piper Award Committee** - No report
- g) **Policy Revision Committee** – No report

VII. Old Business – None**VIII. New Business –**

We started talking about the ad hoc committee on salary equity at the May meeting. Looking for volunteers for the committee. Senator Allred volunteered. Senator Miller volunteered. Senator Lelkes also volunteered. Senator Allred had a question about whether or not the version sent out was the final version or not because non-tenured faculty was basically a reprint. President Machado said he thought it was the final version.

Then we spoke about the possibility of a faculty pub on campus. And we really question why and what they mean by Faculty morale. Senator Menaker brought up how other campuses do annual surveys about faculty morale. He has agreed to chair a committee to develop a survey to do that. Senator Rees and Senator Garcia offered to be on that committee. Senator Flores said he would also serve. He also made a comment about how the art gallery can already serve alcohol and why don't we use that resource more. Have functions for the faculty to come see new art being done on campus. We can pitch a lot of ideas to the Provost.

The last thing on the agenda is moving toward a more electric form of voting. We will move to using Microsoft Forms. This will be done on your smart phones and we will be moving forward and getting you information about that.

We ended the meeting awarding the Distinguished service award to our former fellow Senator Christine Radcliff.

IX. Adjournment –

Senator Castro motioned to adjourn. Senator Goode seconded. Meeting ended at 5:02 pm.