Faculty Senate Meeting
September 3, 2024, 3:30 p.m.
In person in the BOARD OF TRUSTEES' Room with ZOOM link:
https://fit.zoom.us/j/98187817280

Senator Present:
Jordan Poole (Aeronautics), Tolga Turgut(Aeronautics), Shawn Scott (Aeronautics), Abram Walton(Business), Charles Bryant(Business), Angel Otero (Business Online), Donald Platt(APSS), Csaba Palotai(APSS), Marcus Hohlmann (APSS), Mehmet Kaya (BES), Vipuil Kishore(CCE), Alan Brown(CCE), Sidhartha Bhattacharyya(EECS), Tom Eskridge (EECS), Nakin Suksawang(MCE), Hamidreza Najafi(MCE), Chiradeep Sen (MCE), Joo Young Park(MSE), William Arrasmith (MSE), Shibo Liu(MSE), Robert Weaver (OEMS), Pallav Ray(OEMS), Gary Zarillo (OEMS), Joe Montelione (SAC), Anna Muenchrath (SAC), Robert Deacon (SAC), David Wilder(BA), Jessica Wildman(PSY), Marshall Jones(PSY), Patrick Converse(PSY),William Bowman(Library),

Senator Absent: Georgio Anagnostopoulos (EECS), Steven Rivet (Business), Melissa Borgen (BES), Wanfa Zhang (SAC), Madhur Tiwari (APSS), Angela Tenga (SAC)

Proxies: None
Other attendees: John Nicklow, Munevver Mine Subasi, John G. Harris, John Deaton, Kaylee Erdos, Penny Vassar, Tristan Fiedler, Ted Richardson, Raymond Bonhomme, Mary Bonhomme, Nancy Garmer, Heidi Hatfield Edwards, Brian Lail, Rian Mehta

Call to Order
Sen. Pres. Suksawang welcomed the attendees and encouraged introductions due to several new members present.

Approval of Minutes:
Sen. Brown made a motion, which was seconded by Sen. Jones. With a majority in favor, the Senate approved the minutes from the April meeting.

Discussion and Q&A with University Leadership

President Nicklow provided updates, including challenges related to campus housing shortages, the progress of a new housing project, and upcoming improvements to campus facilities. Additionally, the administration hinted at positive news about the university's rankings, which would be announced soon. The master planning process, focusing on long-term campus development, was highlighted. There will be opportunities for faculty and students to provide input on the plan during open forums on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of the month.

Key points from President Nicklow's speech regarding the university updates and ongoing initiatives are the followings:

1. **SACSCOC**
   - An initial report will be available in late November or early December, identifying any shortcomings.
   - There will be time to address these issues before or during the comprehensive visit in April.
2. **Policy Finalization & Revisions**:
   - Ongoing finalization of policies, including the addition of a workload policy to document existing practices.
   - Commitment to revising policies as needed post-implementation.
3. **Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Policy and Compliance**:
   - An ad hoc committee chaired by John Deaton is reviewing contracts, conflict of interest, and other issues.
   - The committee comprises 10 members, mostly faculty, and will bring proposals for changes to leadership. The goal is for this committee, which represents all constituents, to bring back insights to the Senate and leadership team so we can deliberate and implement changes if necessary.
4. **Conflict of Interest Policy**:
   - The annual conflict of interest form requirement was temporarily removed due to challenges in demonstrating compliance.
   - Efforts are ongoing to reintegrate this requirement through collaboration with the Faculty Senate and Staff Council.
5. **Faculty Salary Analysis**:
   - A salary analysis for faculty and staff is complete and will be presented, likely at the State of the University address in October.
   - HR's Jessica Vinson will deliver this report.
6. **Financial Health & Review**:
   - While finances are lean, the institution is fiscally healthy with no red flags. o There is an ongoing initiative to build the endowment, which currently sits at $105 million.
7. **Endowment Growth**:
   - A feasibility study aims to determine a realistic fundraising goal, with discussions around a $75 million campaign.
   - Some stakeholders have expressed concerns that $75 million may be too ambitious.
8. **Alumni Engagement & Fundraising**:
   - Efforts to engage alumni are ramping up, with events planned and focus on improving alumni database management.

- Organizational changes, including partnerships with external vendors, are underway to enhance alumni outreach and fundraising efforts.

Key Points are discussed:

Sen. Turgut raised a question regarding the scope and membership of ad hoc committee.

Pres. Nicklow responds,

This ad hoc advisory group is chaired by John Deaton. The members include Marshall Jones, John Kiss, Jessica Wildman, Jessica Vinson (the HR director), and Brooke Wheeler. Grace Gamage serves as an ex-officio member. She's the university attorney, but she does not vote.

The scope of this committee is somewhat open. We met a couple of weeks ago to discuss a few initial issues, but we're open to adding more topics as we proceed. The charge begins with faculty contracts, which was a significant issue last year. I think most senators are aware of that, and we won't revisit the past discussions on it. We need to determine the best way to handle this and what we really need. I've shared my thoughts with a few of you over the summer, and honestly, I'm not sure I would have signed that document either.

We need to clarify our objectives. I've made it clear to my team that I expect a collaborative approach to governance. We won't make changes and then just present them to the faculty. I want to work with you all; that's how we can effectively move forward.

The expectation is that this group, representing different constituents, will come together to develop ideas that can then be brought to the Senate for discussion. At that stage, it won't become policy; it will just be a proposal for feedback.

I'm seeking input from the executive leadership and deans, but we need something to provide feedback on. If we don't have this smaller group developing proposals, we risk stagnating.

The initial focus is on contracts, but we will also address intellectual property and conflict of interest.

Sen. Turgut comments,

Thank you for that elaboration. This is the first time we've officially learned about the details of this committee. It's great to hear from as many voices as possible. I just want to remind everyone that last year, we have a standing committee under the Faculty Senate called the Administrative Policies Committee, which has worked very hard last

year on updating the Faculty Handbook. I don't see its chair or members represented here, despite their significant investment of time in this area.

In the spirit of shared governance, I believe that the chair of the Administrative Policies Committee should be included, given its similar scope. This committee addresses policies relating to faculty employment conditions and makes recommendations on matters like promotion qualifications, contract renewals, teaching loads, sabbatical leaves, and more. There's a wealth of current knowledge regarding the faculty handbook within that committee. I would kindly recommend that at least the chair of the Administrative Policies Committee be involved.

On a side note, as a former Senate president and an executive committee member if I were asked while serving in those roles, I would prefer not to be part of this advisory committee due to potential conflicts of interest. The advisory committee members include the Senate president and president-elect, who are officers of the Senate. They will present cases that originate from this committee, which was formed by the president.

This creates a challenge for others to dissent. To maintain impartiality, I suggest removing executive committee members from this group so they can retain their objectivity.

Additionally, I propose reinstating the chair of the Administrative Policies Committee as a coordinator, allowing them to oversee discussions and bring relevant points back to the Senate.

Pres. Nicklow comments,

I appreciate that suggestion. However, if that creates a conflict of interest, we risk repeating the same issue. I consulted with the attorney during the meeting, and it was determined that there was no conflict. Everyone has a vote in this process.

I don't wish to diminish the committee's work or the Senate's role. Whatever proposals emerge from this ad hoc group will go to the Senate, and you can run them through the Senate committee structure if you choose. You all have a voice in this process.

The committee includes representatives from HR, which ensures broader collaboration beyond just faculty perspectives. Our goal is to involve as many constituents as possible to avoid developing proposals in isolation, ensuring they are viable and well-considered.

My intent is to foster transparency and collaboration. If anyone disagrees with that approach, I'm sorry, but these are my principles, and I believe in shared governance. John Deaton, as the chair of this group, you're welcome to invite additional resource

people as needed. This is an ad hoc committee, not a formal body. If you want to invite someone, feel free to do so. For instance, if you're discussing a topic related to aviation management, you could invite Sen. Turgut for his expertise.

The Associate Provost Munevver Subasi discusses the need for an overload policy for faculty to address compliance with SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) requirements. Key points include:

1. **SACS Compliance**: Policies are being updated to ensure compliance with core requirements, including maintaining a sufficient number of faculty and defining full-time faculty roles.
2. **Policy Updates**: New sections have been added to the faculty handbook to define fulltime faculty, faculty load, and how overload assignments are managed. The overload policy discourages excessive workload but allows flexibility if overload is necessary.
3. **Overload Assignments**: Overloads, such as additional teaching or administrative duties, are generally discouraged. When they occur, the policy ensures that faculty are compensated and not penalized in evaluations for reduced scholarly activity due to overload.
4. **Implementation**: Policies are set to be implemented and published soon, with ongoing revisions possible based on faculty input and compliance needs.
5. **Service Overload**: Beyond teaching, overloads in service or administrative roles are also recognized and compensated if they exceed typical faculty duties.
6. **Publication**: The policy will be posted under academic policies, not HR, and eventually added to the faculty handbook after final discussions.

Key Points from the Q&A Session following the Overload Policy Presentation by Associate Provost Munevver Subasi:

- **Research Overload Definition:** A question was raised by Sen. Ray about how research overload is defined. It was discussed that faculty work is not typically a standard 8-5 schedule, and defining overload is subjective. Faculty who are actively engaged in scholarly work or who secure funding may negotiate reduced teaching loads depending on their level of research activity. Negotiations often involve the department head.
- **Faculty Handbook Changes:** A query was made regarding changes to the faculty handbook following the provost's email on August 16th, specifically concerning overload and compensation. It was clarified that the recent changes were primarily related to overload policies and compensation. Sen. Turgut sought confirmation that the updated policies did not omit any items that were previously confirmed in May.
- **Handbook Revisions:** The two major revisions, sections 2.51 and 2.52, were identified as the most significant updates since April, with some minor typographical corrections made. Concerns were raised by Sen. Turgut: We liked to compare what we confirmed last May with the current changes to ensure nothing is missing. is it correct that a

demonstration of the policy changes is required? Typically, there's a one-year demonstration period. However, since we're implementing changes so quickly, that's why we're receiving many questions.

Associate provost Subasi responds, as long as we align our policy with current practices, we should be fine. For example, regarding the Overload policy, we're set to publish it today or tomorrow. The examples we provide will match this policy, ensuring consistency. We have gathered 3 or 4 Overload examples from 2 or 3 different colleges, as provided by the deans. Yes, faculty were compensated by 10% in cases of true overload, which were unavoidable due to circumstances like a faculty member passing away or withdrawing right before the semester started. This is why Dr. Archambault is writing the policy to reflect our existing processes and practices. Going forward, this policy will be regularly reviewed, updated, and included in the handbook. Regarding changes to the faculty handbook, the provost's email included additions to section 2.5. I don't believe the Senate had an opportunity to review these changes before the academic year ended. These are the two main sections that were updated. Additionally, if we identified any typographical errors or discrepancies regarding the chief academic officer, those were more minor adjustments and not at the policy level. The primary changes to the faculty handbook occurred after April.

Reports:

Senate president report– Sen. Suksawang. Key details from Senate President report:

- **New Trustees**: Two new trustees are joining the board.
- **Fiscal Year 2024 Budget**: The budget ended with a surplus, which is positive news.
- **Endowment**: The university's endowment is at $105 million, and they aim to increase monthly donations, which are currently around $60,000. There are ongoing discussions about capital campaigns to raise the endowment further.
- **New Dorm Vision**: A new dorm is part of a vision that involves partnerships with industrial leaders, with a focus on Kemet and collaboration with Starcom and the Space Training Center.
- **Enrollment**: Undergraduate enrollment is strong, but graduate enrollment has significantly decreased, partly due to international students leaving after obtaining visas.
- **Online Programs**: These are performing well, with program realignments underway to simplify and consolidate offerings.
- **New Leadership**: There is a new library dean and CFO. The CFO will focus on improved budget planning to avoid concerns about deficits later in the year.
- **Salary Increase**: A 3% raise has been implemented, and employees should see this reflected in their paychecks.
- **Club Sports**: Club sports have been moved under the athletics department, providing better medical and safety support for participants.

Key points from following discussion:

1. **Budget Discussion:**
   - Thanks to conservative estimates by the interim CFO, a $6 million surplus, primarily from housing, was reported. ○ Concerns were raised about the financial forecasting method, which impacts merit raises due to worst-case scenario budgeting.
   - A suggestion was made to invite the CFO to discuss the financial approach and the impact on faculty hiring and salary adjustments.
2. **Endowment and Funds Management:**
   - Discussion on the rollover of unspent funds and endowment disbursements.

   - Endowment funds typically have a 5-6% annual disbursement that fluctuates depending on performance.
   - Some questions remained over how unspent funds are handled, prompting the need for further clarification from the CFO and philanthropy office.
3. **Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA):**
   - A 3% COLA adjustment was applied for fiscal year 2025.
   - Previous COLA increases were minimal, raising questions about the terminology and accounting used for these adjustments.
   - A request was made to clarify the differences in how COLA is applied at private institutions.

Committee Reports:

   - **Academic Policy Committee**– Sen. Kishore : Two members from the same college; they are seeking more faculty members from other colleges to join.
   - **Administrative Policy Committee**– Sen. Kaya : Focus on updates to the faculty handbook. Clarification is needed regarding the roles of different committees and the ad hoc nature of some.
   - **Excellence Award Committee**-Sen. Wildman: No immediate report. ○ **Scholarship Committee**: The position is open, with the committee primarily active in the spring.
   - **Technology and Resource Infrastructure Committee**-Sen. Poole: Ongoing IT problems were reported across departments, with a request to gather specific issues to address in upcoming meetings.

Action Items were suggested:

- Invite the CFO and philanthropy office to clarify financial planning and endowment fund management.
- Recruit additional faculty for the Academic Policy Committee.

- Address ongoing IT support challenges, with a focus on resolving staffing or resource shortages.

Discussion on IT Challenges and Classroom Technology

- **Zoom and Classroom Technology Issues:**

    o Faculty members discussed ongoing challenges with classroom technology, specifically the use of Zoom and smartboards. o Some expressed frustration that recent updates caused issues during the semester start. Faculty stated that the use of remote technology, such as Zoom, should be maintained and improved rather than reverting to face-to-face-only interactions.
    o There was consensus that IT infrastructure and support were lacking, particularly during crucial times at the start of the semester.

- **IT Staffing and Resource Allocation:** o It was noted that IT staffing appears to be insufficient to meet the needs of faculty and students. Faculty members shared personal experiences of inadequate technical support and system failures, leading to disruptions in teaching. o Faculty emphasized the need for increased investment in IT resources by the administration to align with the university's reputation as a technology institute.
    Several instances of underperforming equipment and software were highlighted.
- **Management and Planning Concerns:**
    o Concerns were raised about IT management and the planning of updates. Issues with application upgrades, particularly for specialized software (e.g., CAD tools), were mentioned as causing disruptions. Faculty noted that proper testing should occur during low-activity periods like summer, to avoid such issues during the semester.
    o It was suggested that while IT has adequate funding, the problem may lie in poor management and lack of proper oversight.
- · **University-wide Response:** o A new Director of Classroom Technology, Jared Campbell, has been appointed. Faculty members expressed hope for positive changes with new leadership but remained concerned about systemic issues. o The idea of creating a small committee or reactivating an IT advisory committee to communicate ongoing issues with the administration was proposed. This would allow faculty to address these concerns more formally.

Faculty Handbook Updates During the summer, the Provost's Office implemented essential updates to ensure compliance with SACSCOC standards. These changes, consisting of FH 2.5.1 and FH 2.5.2, were made in consultation with Sen. Suksawang and approved by President Nicklow. Due to time constraints, the updates did not go through the standard amendment process. Thus, we need to review, revise, and approve these changes.

Discussion on Faculty Policies and Handbook Revisions

o The faculty reviewed recent updates to the Faculty Handbook. Some members expressed concerns that the updates were not appropriately communicated or vetted through the Faculty Senate as required by procedure (FH 1.6). o Clarification on Terminology in the Handbook (Section 2.5.2): o Discussion around the term "established faculty" was raised, with confusion over the definitions provided in the Faculty Handbook. o It was noted that the term had been defined in older versions of the handbook, but newer policies had left the definition vague. The faculty member emphasized the need for clarity, especially in differentiating between "new" and "senior" faculty members.

· **Issues with Handbook Updates:** o Several errors, such as grammar and spelling mistakes, were identified in the current version of the Faculty Handbook. o Faculty noted that while some policies were carried over from previous versions, new updates had also introduced problems that need to be addressed.

o It was noted that the Library Committee has not met in four years, which could potentially lead to issues with compliance during the SACS accreditation review. The suggestion was made to address the status of this committee at the next meeting to avoid non-compliance concerns. o There was general agreement that the handbook requires a comprehensive review and cleanup to resolve inconsistencies. A request was made to provide a redlined version of the handbook that shows the differences between the current and previous versions, as this would make it easier to review the changes.

New Business: Meeting Format
The IT staff is currently unable to assist the Faculty Senate with moderating Zoom meetings. Although Conference Services has personnel available, their familiarity with advanced Zoom features is limited. Given that the Zoom option was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, it might be time to reevaluate our meeting format and consider reverting to in-person meetings. We could still record meetings via Zoom, but may face challenges in creating polls or restricting access to senators and their proxies. To maintain our current format effectively, it's essential to explore additional technical support options.

Key points from following discussion:

- **Challenges with Meeting Format and Overload of Responsibilities:** The dual role of facilitating the meeting while also managing technical aspects—such as overseeing Zoom, monitoring the chat, and recording minutes—has proven to be overwhelming.
- Faculty members discussed potential solutions, such as assigning volunteers to help monitor the chat or handle other administrative tasks during meetings.

- Preference for Hybrid Meetings: While the convenience of Zoom for remote attendance was acknowledged, some members expressed a preference for in-person meetings to facilitate face-to-face interaction.
- It was agreed to continue using a hybrid format; however, additional staff or faculty volunteers may be needed to assist with technical management. Senator Poole, as chair of the IRT committee, has volunteered to provide technical support for the meetings.

The original agenda included the Old Business item: Motion to take off the table Sen. Jones' motion to decouple faculty legal representation from Faculty Senate; however due to the time constraint, the old business item was tabled.

Adjournment
Motion to adjourn by Sen. Jones and Seconded by Sen. Turgut. Meeting adjourned at 5:08pm

Next MEETING Tuesday, October 1, 2024, 3:30-5:00 p.m. in TBD

Respectfully submitted,

Senate Secretary, Joo young Park