Faculty Senate Meeting
October 1, 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), Tom Eskridge (EECS), Nakin Suksawang(MCE), Hamidreza Najafi(MCE), Chiradeep Sen (MCE), Joo Young Park(MSE), William Arrasmith (MSE), Shibo Liu(MSE), 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: Madhur Tiwari (APSS), Melissa Borgen (BES), Steven Rivet (Business), Georgio Anagnostopoulos (EECS), Sidhartha Bhattacharyya (EECS), Robert Weaver (OEMS), Wanfa Zhang (SAC)

Proxies: Deniz Velioglu Sogut (Proxy for Gary Zarillo)

Other attendees: John Nicklow, John Kiss, John G. Harris, Ted Richardson, John Deaton, Heidi Hatfield Edwards, Lisa Steelman, Scott Ferguson, Jared Campbell, Jen Campbell, Christian Sonnenberg, Penny Vassar, Tristan Fiedler, Nancy Garmer, Yasha Berchenko-Kogan, Suzanne Kozaitis, Kaylee Erdos, Jason Martin, Nick Daher, Nasri Nesnas

__Call to Order__
Meeting starts at 3:32pm

__Discussion and Q&A with University Leadership__
The President, Provost, and/or Deans will join the first portion (3:30 PM to 4:00 PM) of the meeting to discuss current University initiatives and answer any questions, fostering open dialogue to better understand faculty concerns. Faculty members who wish to ask questions anonymously can send them to their representatives or directly to Sen. Suksawang, who will ensure the confidentiality of their inquiries.

 Key details from Provost John Kiss' remarks

Provost Kiss introduced himself to the Faculty Senate, noting that it was his first Senate meeting since joining Florida Tech in May.

Goal to Meet Faculty in Small Groups
Provost Kiss emphasized his commitment to meeting faculty members in small groups or departmental meetings directly to understand their concerns and research interests.

Building Relationships with Departments
He described attending departmental meetings and social events to connect with faculty and listen to their perspectives.

Strategic Focus on Research

- **Supporting Faculty Research and Grant Applications:**
  Provost Kiss highlighted the need to strengthen proposal development and increase faculty success in securing grants.
- **Collaboration with External Experts:**
  He mentioned bringing in an external consultant to review the university's research infrastructure and offer recommendation, she has a proven track record of increasing research funding at her institution, from $12 million to $70 million, and I believe her insights will be invaluable.

Shared Governance

- **Commitment to Shared Governance:**
  As a former faculty senator, Provost Kiss expressed his understanding of shared governance and its importance in fostering collaboration.
  - "I served as a faculty senator before going into administration, so I deeply value the work you do and the importance of shared governance."
- **Active Listening to Faculty Concerns:**
  He emphasized the importance of two-way communication and expressed openness to hearing faculty concerns.

Key details from President Nicklow's Remarks

Enrollment and IPEDS Reporting

- **Enrollment Status:** "Overall, we are up 2% in enrollment... a 2 to 3% growth rate is sustainable and attainable to graduation." "Retention rates have improved to 79.8%. Last year we were at 77%."
- **IPEDS Reporting:** The university currently reports enrollment figures to two IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) systems: one for the main campus and one for online programs like Bisk.
  - "We actually have two IPEDS reports[…] we're trying to convert to one IPEDS report. There's some risk involved in terms of reporting failures, the risks involved with dual IPEDS reporting, including the potential for a $65,000 fine if data is misreported. Consolidation into one IPEDS report is a priority to streamline processes and improve accuracy".

Rankings and Metrics

- **Improvement in U.S. News Rankings:** Florida Tech improved by 38 positions in the U.S. News rankings, moving from 269 to 231 out of 494 nationally ranked universities.
  - "This year, we jumped 38 points in the U.S. News and World Report rankings... that's a significant improvement."
- **Challenges with Rankings:** Despite the improvements, President Nicklow cautioned against focusing solely on rankings, as methodology changes often impact outcomes.
  - "Half of the ranking is still a beauty contest, still perception... and the methodology changes every year."

Budget and Surplus

President Nicklow addressed confusion over financial surplus figures and emphasized the focus on maintaining a $1 million operational surplus rather than accumulating large savings:

  - "We did have a surplus of more than $1 million—closer to $10 million last year. But the goal is not just saving money; it's about consistently hitting our target of $1 million in the black."

Additional Clarification by President Nicklow

  - The $10 million surplus was recorded as part of unrestricted net assets, which also plays a role in maintaining the university's accreditation.

- President Nicklow also highlighted concerns about overly conservative forecasting approaches taken by previous CFOs, which impacted financial planning and operations.

Operational Challenges: Rising costs, such as labor and unexpected expenses (e.g., $6.5 million for chiller repairs), present challenges for maintaining the budget balance.

  - "Two chillers went down… we were quoted $6.5 million for replacements. These unexpected costs have a significant impact."

Campus Improvements

- **Master Planning and Housing Projects:** Efforts are ongoing to incorporate faculty feedback into a comprehensive master plan and address housing needs.
  - "The master planning sessions have been very valuable. Over the next few months, we'll integrate that feedback into a cohesive plan."

Clarification on Teleworking policy

- **Teleworking Agreement Not Required for Faculty:**
  President Nicklow clarified that faculty do not need teleworking agreements for their roles, except in specific situations.

- o "You do not need a telework agreement, and I've confirmed that with HR. I don't know where that information is coming from."
    - o "If your role is 100% online and you're never on campus, then we might define your role as remote, but you still don't need a telework agreement."
- **International Travel Considerations:**
  Faculty traveling overseas for work-related projects or sabbaticals must follow the university's international travel and risk management policy.
    - o "If you're overseas for the summer, or working on a project in another country, you still need to comply with our international travel and risk management policy."
- **Separation from Telework Policy:**
  International travel requirements are independent of telework agreements.
    - o "I don't want to conflate the international travel policy with telework. They are separate issues."
- **Further Clarifications in Progress:**
  He mentioned that additional clarifications will be provided through HR.
    - o "We are working with HR to ensure this information is clear and consistent across departments."

Faculty Raises for 2024

President Nicklow acknowledged that the university is implementing a salary raise for faculty and staff in 2024, marking the first significant raise in recent years:

- o "This is the first time in over five years we've been able to offer salary raises across the board. It's a small step, but it's an important one."

- **Raise Details:**
  Raises are designed to align with the budget surplus and address inflationary pressures, recognizing the hard work of faculty and staff.
- **Acknowledgment of Past Challenges:**
  President Nicklow highlighted that financial constraints in previous years made raises impossible, but the improved financial position of the university allows for this step.
    - o "I understand this doesn't address all the issues related to pay equity or cost of living, but it's a starting point."
- **Future Goals:**
  President Nicklow emphasized a long-term commitment to salary competitiveness and equity as part of the university's financial strategy.

Follow-up key Questions and Discussions:

1. **Questions about reporting to Two IPEDS Systems**

   Sen. Jones: Can you explain why the university maintains two IPEDS reports for enrollment, and what challenges or risks are involved with consolidating them?

President John Nicklow's Response:
"We currently report enrollment data to two separate IPEDS systems: one for the main campus and another for online programs, including those managed through Bisk. This is a legacy structure that predates many of the changes in how we manage online learning and enrollment."
"Consolidating to one IPEDS report is a priority for us because it simplifies the process and ensures greater accuracy in how we count students. However, there is some risk involved. If we fail to report a single piece of data correctly, we could face fines as high as $65,000. That's why we're being cautious with this transition."

Additional Clarification
"Once we streamline to one IPEDS system, it will improve our understanding of enrollment metrics across modalities and allow us to focus on key areas of growth. It's a balancing act between operational efficiency and compliance risk."

IPEDS and SACSCOC Compliance
"The move to consolidate IPEDS reporting isn't just about streamlining data; it also ties into SACSCOC and federal compliance. Both SACSCOC and the Department of Education closely monitor how we report enrollment and retention data. Accurate reporting impacts funding, accreditation reviews, and even student aid eligibility."

On Risks and Compliance
"By maintaining two separate IPEDS reports, we're aligning with legacy systems, but it complicates compliance. A single consolidated report would simplify our relationship with SACSCOC and reduce the risk of errors in Department of Education reporting, which could result in financial penalties or audit findings. That's why we're approaching this carefully."

On How Rise Point Aligns with Accreditation and DOE Goals
"Rise Point supports retention and student success, which are critical metrics for SACSCOC and federal agencies. Improving retention from 77% to 79.8% is not just good for students—it's a signal to SACSCOC and the Department of Education that we're meeting key benchmarks for institutional effectiveness and student achievement."

2. **Question about Budget Transparency and Surplus**

   Sen. Hohlmann: seeking more details on the university's approach to maintaining a $1 million surplus while addressing concerns over recent financial decisions.

   President Nicklow's Response:

   o "We have an approved budget with the Board, and that target is typically $1 million in the black. If we come in at $2 million, we've failed. If we come in at zero, we've failed. That's my view."
   o "Last year, we ended with a surplus closer to $10 million, but that wasn't the goal. The budget is tight this year due to increased expenses like labor costs and maintaining faculty salaries."

3. **Question about Travel Budget Cuts**

Addressing pre-collected questions from faculty members: Some colleges reported their travel budgets were completely cut. What's the solution for faculty seeking travel funding?

Provost Kiss Response:

- o "I looked into that, and one college had a specific amount set aside for every faculty member's travel. That policy was unique to that college, and it lacked accountability."
- o "The solution is that any faculty member, with dean support, can submit a written request for travel funding to the Provost's office. You'll likely receive partial funding to support professional development."

4. **Questions about Salary Increase**
Sen. Turgut : "Regarding the 3% raise, was it a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or a general salary raise?"

President Nicklow's Response:

- o "The 3% last year was a salary increase, but it wasn't specifically defined as COLA. Part of it was to address cost of living, but we also needed to retain our people."
- o "At the time, it was a little higher than the CFO wanted, but I insisted we needed to make this work."

Follow-Up by Sen. Turgut:

- o "The reason why I'm asking this is because this body is an important body representing the faculty. We passed the resolution three years ago here for COLA raises. And I followed up on it during my presidency and afterward as well. That's why I wanted clarification on whether we achieved the COLA adjustment or not. So, it appears it's just the raise adjustment. Thank you for that."

Additional Context Provided by President Nicklow:

- o "Please, as we get into this spring, we'll go through budgeting again. I love being in a position financially where we can recognize our people. The biggest challenge I see when we talk about costs is that expenses are increasing faster than revenue. Things like insurance and utilities are skyrocketing."

5. **President Nicklow's comments on Behavior and Trust**

President Nicklow acknowledged prior leadership issues and emphasized building trust with faculty moving forward.

- o "There's been some bad behavior at the leadership level in the past, and I want to acknowledge that. I hope you'll give me and Dr. Kiss the opportunity to work and build trust."

Requests from faculty via TRI committee

During the meeting, Senator Jordan Poole, Chair of the Technology Resources and Infrastructure (TRI) Committee, presented feedback and concerns raised by faculty members. The following issues were highlighted:

1. **Inconsistent Help Desk Performance:**
   o Faculty reported variability in the response times for IT help desk tickets. While some issues were resolved promptly, others remained unresolved for extended periods.
   o Senator Poole emphasized the need for improved accountability and streamlined ticket management to ensure timely resolution of faculty concerns.
2. **Password Reset Policy:**
   o The current 180-day password reset policy was identified as disruptive, particularly during the semester. Faculty suggested revising this policy to require resets annually to reduce inconvenience while maintaining security.
3. **Lab Computer Issues:**
   o Concerns were raised about lab computers running out of storage space and not functioning properly. Faculty noted the need for a more permanent solution to address these recurring problems.

Key Points from Scott Ferguson's (CIO) Report:

Help Desk Improvements

   o **Response Times:** Scott reported that the IT department has **improved response times** for help desk tickets, enhancing the overall support experience for faculty and staff.
   o **New Escalation Procedures:** They have introduced new **escalation procedures** to address issues more efficiently and ensure that more complex problems are resolved promptly.

Password Policy Update

   o **Annual Password Resets:** The IT department is testing a **new annual password reset policy** as part of an effort to improve security. Faculty will need to reset their passwords once per year, which will be rolled out gradually.

Outage Notifications

   o **Improved Communication:** Scott emphasized the importance of better communication during **system outages**. The IT department now provides **earlier and more detailed notifications** to ensure that faculty are well-informed about any disruptions.

Classroom Technology Upgrades

- o **Hybrid/Online Teaching Tools:** There have been **upgrades** to classroom technology, especially with tools that support **hybrid and online teaching**. This includes new audiovisual equipment and improved integration of online platforms to facilitate remote learning.

Data Security Enhancements

- o **Increased Focus on Security:** There has been an increased focus on **data security** within the IT department, with more stringent measures being implemented to protect university data and faculty research materials.

Future IT Investments

- o **Ongoing Investments in Infrastructure:** Scott mentioned that there would be continued investments in IT infrastructure to **support teaching, research, and administrative needs**. These efforts will help ensure that the university remains technologically competitive and resilient

Q&A and Discussion after Scott Ferguson's IT Report

1. **Question on Help Desk Response (Sen. Hohlmann)**
   - o Sen. Hohlmann inquired about the **specific timelines** for help desk response improvements, particularly regarding high-priority tickets.
   - o **CIO Ferguson's Response: priority tickets** are being addressed within 24 hours, and less urgent issues are being resolved within 48 hours. He emphasized the ongoing improvements in help desk workflows to ensure efficiency.
2. **Comment on Classroom Technology Upgrades (Sen. Brown)**
   - o Sen. Brown expressed appreciation for the recent **classroom technology upgrades**, especially for hybrid/online teaching tools.
   - o **CIO Ferguson's Response:** the IT team is actively working to make these tools more user-friendly and will offer additional **training** and support for faculty to ensure smooth transitions.
3. **Concerns about Password Policy(Sen. Jones)**
   - o Sen. Jones raised concerns about the **annual password reset policy**, wondering if it might cause confusion or difficulties for faculty who already struggle with maintaining passwords.
   - o **CIO Ferguson's Response:** He acknowledged the concern and assured that the IT department is working to **streamline the process**. They will provide clear communication and support to assist faculty with the changes, and there will be options for faculty to reset passwords easily through automated systems.
4. **Data Security and Research Materials (Sen. Poole)**
   - o Sen. Poole asked about the **measures** being taken to safeguard sensitive **faculty research data**, particularly given the increasing threats to cybersecurity.
   - o **CIO Ferguson's Response:** he outlined several initiatives, including **encryption** and **multi-factor authentication (MFA)**, to strengthen the security of sensitive

data. He also mentioned regular **security training sessions** for faculty to ensure they follow best practices for data protection.

5. **Concerns about Outage Communication (Sen. Pres. Suksawang)**
   - Sen. Pres. Suksawang inquired about how the IT department ensures **timely and transparent communication** during service outages.
   - **CIO Ferguson's Response:** Scott explained that the IT department is now providing **real-time updates** through email and the university's website during outages. Additionally, they are working on setting up **dedicated communication channels** for emergency IT issues to keep faculty informed.

6. **General Discussion on IT Support for Hybrid Teaching:**
   - **Sen. Kaya and Sen. Wildman** both raised points about how hybrid teaching requires not only strong technology infrastructure but also **adequate support** during the transition, especially for faculty who are less familiar with digital tools.
   - **CIO Ferguson's Response:** Scott assured that the IT department is committed to offering **ongoing training**, including workshops, office hours, and one-on-one support to help faculty with hybrid teaching setups. He encouraged faculty to reach out for personalized assistance.

7. **General Faculty Feedback on IT Support Services:**
   - Several senators provided **general feedback**, mentioning that IT support has been improving, but some **inconsistencies** remain in the level of service across different departments. They suggested better coordination between IT and departments to ensure all faculty have access to the resources they need.
   - **CIO Ferguson's Response:** Scott acknowledged these concerns and promised to work closely with department heads to identify any gaps in service and improve consistency across the board.

Approval of Minutes (September 3, 2024 meeting)

A motion was made to postpone the vote on the September minutes until revisions could be made.
Motion by Sen. Turgut

- "There are some inaccuracies, especially about some of the key discussions that went on last Senate meeting, especially from the sections that I spoke."
- "For the record... one quote from the university president was missing: "Even if it was up to me, I would not sign that agreement.' That should go in the minutes because it's important."

Motion to postpone the vote to approve the minutes for that reason, because there are inaccuracies.
Seconded by Sen. Poole.
No objections or explicit dissent were recorded, so the motion carried unanimously.

Old Business:

Faculty Handbook Updates

- **A request to change AFTC Charter under FH 1.4 (See the attached proposed bylaw)**
  AFTC met on August 15 and voted Dr. Robert van Woesik as new Chair.
  The AFTC also approved amendments to its charter under FH 1.4 Bylaws, aligning with President Nicklow's request to route AFTC recommendations to the Provost and President through the Faculty Senate President (see attached charter changes).
- **A resolution to retire the faculty library committee under FH 1.5.1 (see attached resolution)**
  The Faculty Library Committee has been inactive for over five years, prompting a resolution to dissolve the committee.

Key discussions

Governance and Faculty Handbook Issues

1. **Shared Governance Principles and Concerns About Process Adherence (commented by Sen. Turgut):**
   o Shared governance is defined as the joint responsibility of faculty, administration, and governing boards, with differentiated roles based on expertise. Sen. Turgut emphasizes that shared governance principles outlined in the Faculty Handbook (FH 2.10) are not being followed.
   o Faculty's primary responsibility areas include curriculum, instruction, research, tenure decisions, and student life as it relates to education.
   o Sen. Turgut expressed that he resigns from the Administrative Policies Committee (APC), with the lack of adherence to agreed-upon procedures during the Faculty Handbook update process. Practice should align with policy, not the other way around.
2. **Faculty Handbook Revision Process**
   o Stresses the importance of having a redline version for tracking changes to the Faculty Handbook. Argues that the current process is not transparent or consistent with shared governance principles.
   o Agrees that redline versions are necessary for clarity and accountability. Suggests the Faculty Senate revisit and validate changes made without proper faculty involvement.
   o Sen. Turgut emphasizes the importance of following proper Faculty Handbook revision procedures as outlined in **FH 1.6**, stressing that the current process has bypassed shared governance principles.
   o Sen. Pres. Suksawang clarifies that the Senate did not vote on or approve the new Faculty Handbook changes, except for one update presented by Sen. Kaya's committee (APC) in May.
   o Sen. Turgut urges the **Administrative Policies Committee(APC)** to take responsibility for bringing handbook changes to the Senate for discussion and voting, emphasizing their critical role in governance.
3. **Questions raised by Sen. Hohlmann:**
   o Senate ought to vote on the changes of Faculty Handbook for approval
   o **Comments by Sen. Eskridge:** The Faculty Handbook modification procedure requires Senate validation of any changes. The Senate cannot bypass this step.

- o **Comments by Sen. Pres. Suksawang:** Suksawang suggests bundling related changes, such as those involving the Library Committee, to address them comprehensively during Senate discussions, and he suggests the Administrative Committee bring the changes to a vote during the next meeting.
4. **Question raised by Nasri Nesnas:** *There seems to be a discrepancy between the PDF and HTML versions of the Faculty Handbook. We need to decide which version is authoritative.*

    - o **Response by Sen. Pres. Suksawang:**

    "To secure the integrity of the Faculty Handbook, I proposed removing the HTML version to prevent inconsistencies or unauthorized edits."

Motion: To keep the voting on the Faculty Handbook changes in the next meeting's agenda, ensuring a focus on the accuracy of changes and reviewing the redlined version.

- o **Proposed by Sen. Brown, seconded by Sen. Jones.**
- o **Outcome:** the motion was approved unanimously.

Committee Reports

No formal committee reports were presented due to time constraints.

New Business
No new business was introduced.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Sen. Brown and Seconded by Sen. Jones. Meeting adjourned at 5:12pm.

Next MEETING Tuesday, November 5, 2024, 3:30-5:00 p.m. in Board Conference Room

Respectfully,
Senate Secretary, Jooyoung Park