

Faculty Senate Called Meeting

June 17, 2021 at 3:10 pm.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 pm via Zoom video conferencing.

https://youtu.be/1BDnyA4_xwE

Senators in Attendance: Charlene Simmons, Tammy Garland, Nominanda Barbosa, Jamie Harvey, David Giles, Julia Cummiskey, Natalie Owsley, Alexandra Zelin, Erika Schafer, Christopher Stuart, Joshua Hamblen, Cuilan (Lani) Gao, Phil Roundy, Stephanie Gillison, Ron Goulet, Joanie Jackson, Beth Crawford, Bernadette DePrez, Wes Smith, Anne Swedberg, Jodi Caskey, Donald Reising, Mengjun Xie, Chandra Ward, Ethan Mills, Marisa Colston, Susan Thul.

Senators not in attendance: Hill Craddock (**on sabbatical**), Priscilla Simmons-Robertson, Charlotte Ellington, Sarah Einstein, Spencer Usrey, Zibin Guo, Barry Kamrath, Irina Khmelko, Eleni Panagiotou, Ignatius Fomunung, Nicholas Boer, Liz Hathaway.

President Charlene thanked everyone for being present on this called meeting during summer especially for 9-month faculty. She added that the main topic of the meeting was to discuss the possibility of passing a COVID19 statement. However, a few other quick items of business were to be taken care during the meeting as well.

Approval of the minutes:

Approval of the minutes of April 15, 2021. There were no revisions nor objections, so the minutes were approved.

Administrative Reports:

Provost Jerold Hale had three very brief announcements:

- A. He wanted to alert the members of the faculty senate to watch for announcement on personnel changes and academic affairs. These announcements will be coming out next week. Some of them will concern the ongoing reorganization of the Academic Affairs and some other personnel issues.
- B. The Board of Trustees meeting for June is coming up on next Thursday and Friday (June 24 and 25). There are two items that relate specifically to UTC that are not on the consent agenda. One of those relates to the approval of a new academic program on applied science program in CHEPS. The other has to do with some work that the faculty senate took up in last year in which we will be considering the approval of changes to the

handbook. These changes include both changes that were initiated by the handbook committee as well as changes that needed to be made to make sure that our handbook content is consistent with the Board of Trustees policies for the system.

- C. The third item is related to Fall 21 course schedule. The distribution of courses by course modality has not changed since the schedule was built up for Fall. 72 % of classes will be face to face, 6 % of classes being in a hybrid modality, with 22 % of classes being online and mostly asynchronous online. Also, there are 10 CRN's listed as hyflex modality.

Committee reports:

No committee reports

New Business:

A. COVID-19 Absence Statement (revised draft; also posted on the senate website):

“COVID Absence Statement – Fall 2021 COVID Absences (3rd person) Students must complete the COVID-19 Notification form if they are positive for COVID-19; symptomatic for COVID-19; exposed (close contact) to a known case of COVID-19 / someone positive for COVID-19; or potentially exposed to a known case of COVID-19 / someone positive for COVID-19. Documentation will be provided to the instructor by the Office of Student Outreach & Support. If COVID-19 related illness or quarantine results in any missed classes or course work, students must contact the instructor within 48 hours of completing the COVID-19 Notification form to plan make-up classes and course work. **Where possible, faculty will work with students to identify ways to complete course requirements but are not required to change no offer additional modalities.** Makeup work must be completed according to the plan devised by the instructor in coordination with the student. It remains the student’s responsibility to complete any missed work such as assignments, tests, quizzes, labs, or projects outside of scheduled class time. Please realize that class will continue, and students may find themselves in the situation where they are unable to complete work in a timely manner. In such a case, students may consider requesting an Exception to the Withdrawal Deadline or an incomplete grade. Please contact the Office of the University Registrar (423-425-4416) to learn more about the late withdrawal process. **Some departments may have department bylaws or student handbook requirements that specify a limit to the number of classes or amount of work that can be missed. In these cases, the department requirements take precedence.** If students have COVID-19 disability-related risk factors that may indicate a need for additional academic accommodations, students are strongly encouraged to register with and/or contact the Disability Resource Center (423-425-4006) in order to receive necessary accommodations. If students believe the instructor has not made reasonable and appropriate accommodations for absences, or makeup assignments, projects, labs, or exams due to COVID-19, students have the right to

appeal according to **UTC's General Student Grievance (Complaint) Procedure** by filling out the Student Complaint Form and submitting to the Office of the Dean of Students.”

President Charlene: after the April meeting there were some faculty asking questions whether we would do an absence statement for Fall 21. So, we did a faculty survey to find out if that was something faculty wanted for this coming Fall semester. From the results of the survey, about 61 % of faculty that took the survey supported some kind of statement for the Fall but with few changes as compared to the previous one. Dr Simmons added that she then made a first attempt at updating an absence statement based on the feedback, she also reached out to several individuals on campus to get additional feedback and make few more edits. The finalized draft was posted online but it is not officially coming from a committee. We did not call together the entire executive committee. So, it is not a motion officially coming from a committee. It is simply being presented as a possible option. Then she opened the floor for discussions and to any other senators to make a motion (s) regarding a possibility of having a COVID-19 absence statement:

Associate Dean of Students Brett Fuchs said that from the student's perspective and student's affairs perspective he had certain concerns for students and reporting for students. He said that while he hopes that there are students vaccinated and that they are coming back and be healthy there was a number of cases where even the previous policy did not provide the appropriate level of support and leniency to students. While there may not be anybody on this call, there are a number of faculty that this did concern. There was a broader issue with student's absences similar to the issues that 9-months faculty have. We had some faculty not providing any level of leniency when a student has a death in the family or any sort of illness. He wanted to voice these concerns for the senate to consider.

Dawn Ford wanted to make a point to this: there are students who are in isolation and quarantine on campus. She reported that there were two cases this week and that neither one was vaccinated and one exposed four other students that are now on quarantine. So, while in general the trend is going down, we believe we will continue to see some cases in which we have to isolate or quarantine students and they won't be able to class.

A senate member suggested that because every semester is a little different and that summer is a bit longer and things could change a meeting be called early August right before Fall semester beginning to figure out the best language for the statement.

Another member supported the suggestion brought above. She thinks that while we all know that having an absence statement has been beneficial for us, she worries that given that we are seeing changes adopting an absence statement at this early time may come back to kind of decrease our credibility. She thinks that if there is a need for some kind of absence statement that is looked at from the perspective that any absence needs to be coordinated with faculty. However, she worries that in adopting an absence statement at this time may not be giving the most accurate information for the Fall semester.

A senate member had a question and a comment. First, she wanted to know whether the university has any estimates of what proportion of students will be vaccinated in the Fall. Then, she wanted to add a comment to Brett Fuchs's concerns expressed above: while she does appreciate and share the concerns expressed by the dean of students, she also thinks there is a very limited scope to the Covid absence policy. If this policy is designed to respond to a very particular set of issues, she would not be averse to having a larger conversation about absence policies. However, when it comes to the Covid absence policy to her mind it's always been a question of balancing the very real cost of labor to faculty of accommodating students who can or can't come to class for coming different modalities and she does not think anyone would disagree that the cost has been absolutely enormous this year. She added that against the risk that a student will be incentivized to come to class when they are infectious and pose a very real risk to other people. She then finalized but pointing that she would be much more comfortable knowing how many people are vaccinated in a class room but she does not know if the information will be available and for that this could be an issue.

To the concerns just expressed above about knowing the number of people vaccinated in the class, Brett Fuchs responded that we are not allowed to ask students directly or require that they turn in any information about vaccination. When we get access to the State vaccination, we may be able to pull some data but we are still working on that to access who on campus have had vaccinations. He agrees that maybe a general absence policy is the route we need to go overall and that this was brought forward by him last year and some recommendations and changes we made. He added that this has been brought forward again for next year consideration. He fears that if we put a COVID-19 absence policy that ultimately says that there is no leniency for students there will be another reason for students not to report. In addition, not supporting students will decrease our low reporting that we had at the end of year to begin with. He finalized by saying that while he appreciated the work that Charlene and Tammy did on the statement, and this is a part balance to not wanting to give too much leniency but still give faculty or department the level of leniency they need to make the class work general absence policy. He thinks that general policy gives us some guidance while still giving the faculty or department the level of leniency they need for their particular program.

Tammy Garland, the next faculty senate president said that she doesn't mind to come back to this subject till next month. There will be a meeting in July and this can give us some conversation today about where we want to go with this. However, she thinks that at some point we need to have some type of statement because what we are seeing at the university is somewhat a disjointed message. We are saying that we are returning to normal but then we are not returning to normal so we need to be clear on how we are going to approach COVID especially if we are going back into the classroom, not masking and not socially distancing. We might have a bigger problem than a day absence policy.

A senate member suggested a very quick change on the original statement (document). The president answered that she was aware of it but forgot to make the update. Then, the senate member wanted to put forward a motion to adopt the statement. She thinks we will need a Covid absence statement for Fall and we can still meet in July to amend it if needed. Her motion was to accept or approve the proposed draft statement. The motion was seconded by Erika Schafer and

the floor was then opened for discussion. Also, there can be motions to alter parts of the statement:

A senate member expressed his frustrations on the fact that there is a vaccine out there freely available and students just simply aren't getting it. He believes we should be encouraging them to get the vaccine and not giving them leniency on like missing like you get two weeks pass out of a class because of failing to get vaccinated.

Another senate member supports the frustration expressed above and she agreed that she feels much more comfortable after being fully vaccinated but there are still some risks of infection for vaccinated people plus there are some more vulnerable people (immunosuppressed) out there at higher risk. Also, even though students might have made a bad choice of not become vaccinated she does not want people to get seriously sick of Covid which can carry on many long-term effects. For our protection we must give all a consideration.

Another senate member also agreed with the other members concerns but brought a concern about the changed language in some part of the statement draft. She was concerned with the fact that they removed the sentence that said, "students will be penalized" and put the agreement of what will be the penalty or what is the make up to the faculty member like what faculty would treat any other absence. She strived that the importance of there being the word COVID statement is to make sure students know they must, or it is their responsibility to fill in the notification form just for everybody's protection. She thinks the changed language puts the responsibility of what that make up looks like back to the faculty member and not saying you may not have to make up at all. She feels that it was the same as the last Fall statement in which students would take it as since they would not be penalized there was no need to do anything.

Vice Provost, Matt Mathews expressed being uncomfortable with the part on the draft that says that "the faculty member chooses the penalty for the student". President Simmons clarified that in fact it does not say that in this draft. The statement versions for past Fall and Spring would say that there could be absolutely no penalty. That sentence was removed and on the actual draft it only says faculty will work with students to identify ways to complete course requirements. President Simmons confirmed that in the previous statement posted on the faculty web site there could be that kind of language that the Vice provost is concerned with. However, the actual statement being considered in the call does not bring that language.

There were few more interventions where faculty supported or commented on previous concerns.

Another senate member brought about a new concern where she asks that on working the absence statement, we should also take in consideration demands of each specific program which can vary.

Tammy Garland the next senate president called the attention that one thing about this policy is that is not intended to be punitive towards students. It is intended to say that faculty will work with students within reason. The problem with the language of some past statements is that some students were not expecting to do any make up assignment for missed work. This actual statement clearly does not say that. It also does not say that faculty is going to ignore students or

say you cannot make up anything if you were sick because is not allowed by the University. If a student has documentation, there is some responsibility to allow student to make up work within reason. What is does not say is that a student will go the entire semester without doing anything and then say oh I had COVID and for that I could not do any work. That said, this could happen, but she said she would hope that the vast majority of faculty would work with students if they were in the hospital or had long term effects of Covid which were in fact verified by the deans of students. She finalized by saying that she thinks that the actual language will give protection to both students and faculty.

Another member backed up the concerns brought about before by another member suggested that maybe some guidelines be provided to certain departments to allow them to decide based on their program. He agrees that the statement lines up perfectly with the general, but considerations should be given to each particular program accreditation issues that might arise.

President Simmons responded by saying that that is an idea but right now the motion is to accept this as a university wide one. In that case, we would have to vote the current motion down and then consider a separate one.

A senate member agrees that specific guidelines could be provided to specific department but in this case having a consistent policy is more important. She feels like the idea of having multiple policies could be a night mare especially because we know that students usually tend to not read the syllabus. She acknowledged that this is largely coming down to a question of risk of infection versus the burden on faculty to accommodate students. Then she proceeded to ask if there are ways that the university can help alleviate some of the burden to faculty. She then gave examples such as students withdrawing later without fees or get their money back. She thinks this would avoid putting faculty in the position of having to individually make up for a failure that is very much outside of faculty control and sometimes student control.

Joe Wells, University Registrar, explained the process brought about above: students have access to process where they combine several different appeals. Often with withdrawals, there are appeals for financial aid issues. Students have up to one year to request and exception to the withdrawal deadline. Many of these requests come in after the conclusion of the semester and we do expect them to have documentation of what circumstances changed and prevented them to accessing the normal withdrawing deadline and there is a review on a case by case basis. Often if a student is denied their acceptance, they do have the opportunity to appeal and the appeal is reviewed by a committee which includes representation from the dean of students, financial aid office, advising etc.

A senate member wanted to know and based on this statement whether we can say that we are handling Covid cases fairly and equally from semester to semester. Are there any concerns from dean of student's office end? To that dean of student answered: he believes it will be drastically different. He also acknowledged faculty concerns that students take advantage, there were a number of cases where students did not report or falsely reported and were held accountable for that. His concern is if we put something out that leaves the discretion completely to faculty members, many faculty will do the right thing but there will be a small number that do not. That small number may cause great heartache for a sizable number of our students. This extends to general absence policies too and that why he thinks that a general absence policy would be

effective including for Covid because it would still give some guidance to faculty on what is and isn't acceptable to turn in documentation while also leaving it up to the department or the faculty member to determine if it is acceptable that the student moves forward in the program because they can't meet course learning objectives.

Caroline Padalino suggested to perhaps include in the current statement a language that would say that "specific departmental handbook may have limitations established that set maximum numbers of classes that can be missed by students". She also suggested that maybe there should be a language to protect faculty and make it very clear to students that faculty is not expected to present their class beyond the typical normal presentation whether it is face to face, online asynchronous or synchronous or hyflex.

A motion was put forward by Caroline Padalino first to add the sentence to the current draft "**specific departments may have policies that specify a limit to the number of classes that can be missed**" to convey her first suggestion. The motion was seconded by Elicia Cruz and the floor was opened for its discussion.

After several suggestions, clarifications and editing, a motion to insert of the finalized sentence "**some departments may have department bylaws or student handbook requirements that specify a limit to the number of classes or amount of work that can be missed. In these cases, the department requirements take precedence**" to the original statement draft was put forward for roll call vote:

The motion to insert the sentence to the original draft passed with 24 "yes" zero "no" and zero "abstentions".

Brett Fuchs pointed out that what was before called "**Policies and Procedures for Student Complaints**" is now called "**General Student Grievance (Complaint) Procedure**". This change was made to the draft.

The second issue brought up by Caroline Padalino (see above) and related to the modality of accommodations extended to students was put for discussions followed with a motion to edit/insert the following sentence to the draft "**Where possible, faculty will work with students to identify ways to complete course requirements but are not required to change no offer additional modalities**". The motion was put forward by Julia Cummiskey and seconded by Ron Goulet. A roll call vote took place. The motion to insert this sentence to the original draft passed with 24 "yes" zero "no" and zero "abstentions".

After editing/inserting the two sentences to convey the two issues brought above, the senate returned to the statement draft. These same changes will be made to both third and first-person versions on the statement.

A motion to approve the revised COVID-19 absence statement was put forward. A roll call took place and the motion passed with 24 "yes" zero "no" and zero "abstentions".

President Simmons then presented two more business items as informational items only:

- B. Faculty Senate Year-End Report:** at the beginning of this past semester a document was shared that included some of the priorities for the senate. This document/report reflects on what was accomplished by the senate, what still on going and what still left to be tackled. This document will be handed to Tammy Garland so that we can have a nice transition. The report can also be found posted on the faculty senate web site.
- C. UT Faculty Workloads in the Age of Covid.** This information was distributed to the faculty senate and full faculty a few weeks ago. It's part of the process that we go through to get something to the Board of Trustees. Back in December many faculty participated in the TUFs (Tennessee University Faculty Senates) workload survey. Statewide results were shared with the senate and full faculty in February. We also had an executive summary that TUFs put together. In April TUFs presented us with our individual campus report which has been posted on the web site and shared with everyone before the April faculty meeting. This document summarizes three main points to the survey data to send to the Board of Trustees: during Covid faculty workload has increased and faculty are doing more on the teaching front and less on research. Also, regardless of pandemic, 9-month faculty do a lot of non-compensated work in the summer.

President Simmons announced that UFC will be meeting with the Board of Trustee. She announced that she will be attending the Board of Trustees meeting and that she requested to speak on the topic of paid family medical leave for 9-month faculty as her last act as senate president.

Unfinished Business

No unfinished business.

Faculty Concerns:

No faculty concerns.

Announcements:

No Announcements.

Adjournment:

At approximately 4:42 pm Tammy Garland put a motion forward for adjournment. The call was seconded by Ron Goulet.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully,

Nominanda Barbosa, Senate Secretary 20/21