

The University of Texas at Tyler

Office of the Faculty Senate

Thursday September 17, 2021

12:30-1:42 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Recording with captions is available at:

<https://uttyler.zoom.us/rec/share/CT8Cm0eAmeZE9t7HrZQ9GpQ-7vTa-LyvdYhf1rpn7F6nBw0p2h7u-iAjUBzjEA4h.ICU-hrLdHHQGNNSO>

AGENDA

12:30

Welcome and Call to Order

Dr. Sarah Sass

- If you have issues with Canvas, please reach out to Scott Dillingham's team.
- Positive rates of Covid are on the rise, so please encourage everyone to get vaccinated.

12:31

Approval of July Meeting Minutes

Dr. Amentahru Wahlrab

- Approved at 12: 32

12:32

President's Update

Dr. Kirk Calhoun

- Enrollment is flat as compared to last year, but this is a positive development as other institutions across the state have seen significant year-over-year declines.
 - There is a decline in transfer students and graduate student enrollments
 - The decline in transfer students is likely related to steep pandemic-related enrollment declines at junior colleges (although TJC fared anomalously well). This disrupted the transfer-student pipeline.
 - The declines were offset by significant increases in freshman enrollment
 - The university continues to become more diverse with increased African American and Hispanic enrollment as a proportion of the total share
- The administration is focused on COVID
 - On the north campus, hospitals and staff are stressed.
 - On the south campus, the university is "opened up" academically for in-person learning. The deans and chairs are afforded leeway to hybridize courses based on the conditions in their classes.
 - The Student Government Association strongly desires in-person learning experiences.
 - Since the pandemic began, the university has administered 20,000 tests with ~900 positive and about that same number under quarantines at some point.
 - 8,000 staff are on campus and about 69 of them came up positive at one point or another.

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- On-campus positivity rate is lately trending down, and the community positive rate is also coming down. The numbers in hospital is coming down. Hopefully a good sign. Pandemic has ups and downs, hard to predict.
- COVID cases peaked when campus was closed, but this year they peaked when the campus was open, so shutting down campus didn't make a material difference. No evidence of significant campus spread above background community levels. There's a committee watching it, there are benchmarks for shutting down activities and going totally online, but we're far off from those marks right now.
- Everyone encouraged to be vaccinated. People who became seriously ill are the unvaccinated. Vaccinated persons with positive tests often have no symptoms or minimal symptoms but he has not known anyone needing a vaccination or serious infection who was vaccinated.
- Boosters. 6-8 months after previous shot. FDA says persons with chronic conditions should get a booster. More controversial for those who are healthy. Calhoun will get a booster when it is allowed.
- Dr. Calhoun wants all faculty to be vaccinated.
- ~60% of students are vaccinated.
- UT campuses are mostly back in person, not just ours. Except for UT-D.
- Legislature going into 3rd special session. Doesn't expect much debate over higher education. \$16 billion in CARES funding from feds, and the legislature will be deciding how to spend it. Hopefully some money will go to higher education. Tuition revenue bond funding for example would be great to fund some projects. Money for faculty would be good. UT system has proposed funding for cybersecurity. Funding for student mental health also proposed by UT system. Campuses will also make individual requests. Leaders in Tyler met with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, and Dr. Calhoun asked for funding and Patrick noted it down. Patrick said he has \$50 billion in requests for \$16 billion in funding. Take that to mean don't be disappointed. For example, the state's unemployment fund drained 4-5 billion dollars, so they may need to top that off
- Governor has asked legislature to chime in on masking and vaccinations, asking for laws codifying the executive orders he has issued under his emergency authority.
- More travel of faculty and employees is now allowed. This is because COVID is running rampant locally, so we're not at risk of importing a COVID surge from other regions. Travel permissions could change if the data changes.

12:51

Provost's update

Dr. Amir Mirmiran

- Search for Dean of the Soules College of Business is under way, led by Dean Gray. Initial review of candidates is completed, and five candidates will be invited to campus. Hopefully the search will conclude before holidays and the Dean will start in January. There are ongoing searches for Vice Presidents of Advancement and Marketing as well.
- The end-of-course evaluations are being streamlined. Currently there is one in use for the north campus and one on the south campus that is based on the template from the UT System. Dr. Berman is leading this charge with Dr. Sass and department chairs and SGA. They will offer their recommendations so we'll be able to finalize that for next fall. Issues to be addressed are (a) What types of questions should be included? (b) What sorts of flexibility

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are needed to accommodate different programs? (c) How will we make it comparable to the past evaluations?

- Merit raises will be at the start of the academic/fiscal year from now on, so faculty evaluations are postponed until late spring. Everyone seems to be okay with an April/May/June time frame. This would make us consistent with the evaluation schedule traditionally used on the north campus. HR will try the same schedule with staff evaluations so that everything is unified.
- SACSCOC (the accreditation board): This is “the year of SACSCOC.” Compliance certification reports have been sent to them. The merger report has been sent as well. We are waiting for an off-site review. We will then hear their recommendations in early- to mid-December to see if they have finalized the approval of our merger. Then we'll have a site visit in March. The site visit will cover compliance certification and our re-accreditation.
- We are going to finalize our quality enhancement plan with Katie Stone (Director of QEP). She talked to deans about it to make sure there's enough representation from every college. The focus is on undergraduates and incorporating real-world problems into the curriculum. There will be an incentive program for departments that are really good at this. There will be input from faculty on this. There are two programs in biology and chemistry that are implementing this as a pilot but will expand out to whole campus.
- A question was asked about faculty being evaluated during the pandemic. Dr. Mirmiran emphasized that is an agenda item for his upcoming meetings with deans and chairs. He recognizes that things are difficult. He emphasized that it is great that instructors and students have shown grace towards each other under the difficult circumstances, with students being understanding of the difficulties instructors faced switching modalities, and instructors being understanding about the difficulties students faced with technology and with their home situations. He also pointed out that the tenure and 3rd year review clocks were extended, so that should help compensate for any troubles over the preceding 18 months.

1:06

COVID Response Team update

VP Ona Tolliver, Dr. Kim Laird, Dir. Andy Krouse

- Ona Tolliver, Senior Vice President for Student Success, Dr. Kim Laird, Associate Vice President and Chief Budget Officer, and Andy Krouse, Director of Facilities Management.
- The university also has an Incident Response Team (IRT) that has been hard at work and is focused on all aspects of safety, not just as it pertains to COVID.
- COVID peaked a week ago after the three-day weekend. Similar to last fall. Now the numbers are starting to decline. Hopefully the trend will continue. Students are still struggling. Fall is also different from what they expected.
- There is an incentive plan for vaccines that has two phases. Together there were \$1 million in funds. The phases were as follows:
 - Phase 1 offered a COVID education course in late summer. Students may be misinformed, so that's why this was so important. Over 8,000 students participated and were awarded \$100 each. VP Tolliver got great feedback. Students were appreciative to learn where to find tests, vaccines, and general COVID-related support services.
 - Phase 2 consists of a vaccine incentive program. It directly incentivizes the vaccine with money, along with promoting the vaccine with a marketing campaign.

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Information went out this past weekend over social media. Students enroll voluntarily. They upload vaccination information to a secure portal. Faculty and staff will have a link to a form, which they fill out. Truthfulness of the vaccine cards will be vetted. This phase will last six weeks, with drawings on Wednesdays at 10am. Winners will be taken out of the pool, but everyone will be eligible for the grant prize at the end. There will be cash prizes in the hundreds to low thousands of dollars as well as several scholarships, and parking perks.

- An on-site vaccination clinic is under consideration, pending discussions with healthcare partners.
- A question was asked about students not following protocols. VP Tolliver replied that there are updated fall and spring COVID response plans coming, but if you have any ideas about how to improve the classroom environment, you should reach out to CRT member Andy Krouse, Director of Facilities Management. The marketing/communications division is also getting out fresh messages all the time. But VP Tolliver stressed that we are part of a society and a community, so if people behave a certain way it may be out of our control to a certain extent. Plus, she reminded us of the governor's orders regarding masks and vaccinations.
- There will soon be a better university COVID website that will be easier to navigate with more information. It will remain current. The main UT-Tyler home page will also provide more COVID information and direct persons to the proper places.
- A question was asked about randomized testing, and the fact that athletes in particular skew the results. The person suggested a more granular dashboard that shows who is being tested and when. The CRT representatives felt that randomized testing of the campus community would be feasible if it were deemed warranted and deemed a good idea.
- Director Krouse thanked everyone for giving him feedback to make the dashboard clearer. They will work on it and there will be a FAQ page to minimize confusion.

1:25

Office of Research and Scholarship update

Drs. Steven Idell and Kouider Mohktari

- ORS is committed to fostering research. In this vein, they commit to resourcing research groups with seed funding to get their research going or to get it back on track.
- Field work is now permitted. But Dr. Idell emphasized that, as a pulmonologist, he advocates distancing and masking.
- If you get covid, there's an infusion center on the north campus for people with underlying condition (age, etc).
- ORS has a new initiative to enrich research and thesis experiences for students. This means enhancing recruiting of grad students as part of the initiative. The Council for Graduate School is going to be reviewing the entire operation of grad programs on our campus: recruitment, administration, funding, and engagement. They will also review and advise the proposal to develop a "health science degree" (presumably referring to the Biomedical Sciences PhD program). The visit will be virtual later this month.
- Dr. Idell believes that research and scholarship is very solid on the south campus, and that there are ample partnership opportunities between the two campuses. And he reminded everyone that the vivarium is for everyone who uses animals.
- Responsible conduct of research training on the south campus will be intensified. This is because of unfortunate events on north and south campuses involving academic misconduct.

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- ORS will invest in hiring new faculty.
- Responsible conduct for research will be through CITI training. More details to follow in October.
 - If you are doing research with human subjects, there's some modules. If you are doing research with animals, there's some modules. But if you're doing ANY research, there are modules (data management, academic misconduct, peer review) for you.
 - CITI training is intensive. It will be customized to the researcher so you'll only have modules relevant to you. It's good for three years and it's a recognized standard across the country. It will be expected to be completed by all researchers in next few months.
- Since integration of the two campuses, ORS personnel for both campuses now includes Dr. Ana Kordowska, Assoc. VP of Research Compliance. There is also a Director Panda Powell. She is going to be overseeing a lot of operations.
- ORS is investing in labs, and especially in upgrading the labs that are in BEP and HPR where animal research is going on. On the north campus all research labs are being renovated in the biomedical tower, and investigators on animals on south campus are being offered space on the north campus as well. They're almost done with renovations. The focus for now has been on renovations, not new buildings.

1:40

Faculty Senate President update

Dr. Sarah Sass

- The Faculty Senate has been in discussions with the administration about strengthening communication across north and south campuses, and communication in general relating to COVID and any time-sensitive matters. There are regular monthly and more frequent meetings among the Faculty Senate council and administration.
- The Faculty Senate has been involved in discussions about improving inclusion on campus. Sarah has met with HR Assoc. VP Gracie Buentello and others to address accessibility issues on campus, but there's still a lot to accomplish. Sarah recognizes that there are Title 9 questions to address campus-wide, and that there is a desire among faculty to recruit/retain diverse faculty. HR has a new manager of culture and diversity, and the university has an administrator in charge of diversity and success. There's an academic climate survey coming. Please participate in this survey.
- Next senate meeting 10/21 12:30PM. Please note that the Faculty Senate email address is not in use. Contact Sarah directly at her email address.

1:43 Adjournment