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Meeting Minutes

Faculty Senate

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December 7, 2021

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Faculty Senate Minutes – December 7, 2021

Zoom – @ 6:00 pm (details at end of Agenda)

Senators Present: Kenya Wolff, KoFan Lee, Shari Holt, Kerry Bowers, Alex Watson, Joseph Carlisle, Joe Sweeney, Melissa Bass, Lance Yarbrough, Robert Barnard, Angela Green, Dan Durkin, Carrie McCormick, Matteo D’Alessio, Lauren Cardenas, Sasan Nouranian, James Cizdziel, Mike Cinelli, Donna Buckley, John Berns, John Lobur, Cole Stevens, R.J. Morgan, Carolyn Higdon, Whitney Sarver, Christy Nielson, Hans Sinha, Andre Liebenberg, Joel Mobley, Brian Boutwell, Carrie Smith, Brian Reithel, Heather Allen, Gabriel Garrido, Brad Jones, Sujith Ramachandran, Yunhee Chang, Jennie Lightweis-Goff, Scott Mackenzie, Randy Dale, Michael Repka, SueAnn Skipworth

Senators Absent (Alternate): Simone Delerme (for Willa Johnson), Macey Edmonson (for George McClellan)

- **Call Meeting to Order –Phillis George presented on Books and Bears. Look for drop-off locations around campus asking for new books, bears, or toys to be completed by end of business on December 14. Email questions to plgeorge@olemiss.edu (see attached)**

Carrie Smith Violence Against Women donation for prevention services for month of December.

- **Approve minutes from the November 9, 2021, meeting**
 - Motion -
 - Second -
 - Vote – APPROVED
- **Update from Provost Noel Wilkin on Covid**
 - No students are currently in isolation or quarantine, nor in ICU at Baptist Hospital. We close on December 21 and will be posting updates until then. Proud of vaccination group that has been providing vaccines for our community, not just for Covid but also all vaccinations to ready you for travel, including 8135 vaccines, under 13% of all vaccines administered in Lafayette County.
 - It’s very early but Omicron appears to produce milder symptoms and is largely affected the unvaccinated, who are affected more dramatically. So far vaccines seem pretty effective but illness it doesn’t seem to be protected. 6 days a week at Depot. Low numbers but will continue through December 18. We close on the 21st. We plan

- to have testing in spring but will depend on circumstances and we are getting IHL approval for that.
- Executive Order for federal contractors led IHL to issue a directive to follow that order. We've had a good response to that vaccine mandates. As of yesterday morning, 81.5 % of faculty have provided evidence of vaccination or been granted an exemption. The percentage is 79.5 for staff and for students-workers is 41.7%. We've modeled our exemption process on other instances of exemptions in the workplace. A number of students will be affected by the mandate as student-workers. Executive order says masking is related to CDC local transmission rate: positivity and cases/100,000 and current health guidance is that we keep masks in place when our rating is substantial or high, and relax when the rate is low to moderate. That's a running 7-day average for those parameters. Currently we are rated substantial. We'll also continue to get guidance from the Mississippi Department of Health.
 - Our GC discussed the injunction against the executive order ruled by a court in Georgia and it does apply to us. The IHL declaration will also be dependent upon that ruling and getting clarity, we hope by tomorrow morning.
 - We will continue to follow public health guidance and I want to thank you for your patience and your engagement with this issue and all the people serving on all the various task forces.
 - Some people may ask why a nationwide injunction issued in Georgia should apply to us in Mississippi and the IHL. The state of Mississippi is part of a case in Louisiana that has just been issued an injunction too.
 - I've just received confirmation that the HL did stay their directive as a result of the Georgia decision and we will get that announcement out there, though I expect there will be an appeal and will update you all accordingly.

Q. Some funded grad students in my department thought they had already provided proof of vaccination and they need some clarity on what they need to provide. Also, if we go maskless then go back on, I'm worried we will be bad re-compliance. Evidence says retrofit and improve ventilation systems in teaching spaces. What steps is the university taking?

Provost Wilkin: We are suspending the mask mandate but if the court reverses it, we will go back to where we left off and will leave the portal open for people to submit their information. We intended to send out notices to every supervisor on who has complied and not, but we are suspending that for the time being.

As for masking, this ongoing discussion requires us to follow federal guidance. If this falls away, we would then follow MDOH guidance instead of the federal government. It takes a week or two to get updated information. My preference is stay with current situation through this semester and take another look in the spring. I believe masks should be required in spaces like classrooms where they are required to be but perhaps not in other spaces that are voluntary.

Ventilation has been assessed through Facilities Management and they worked early in the pandemic to update all ventilation to the utmost that the systems would allow them to. We are seeking external funding to infrastructure to supplement our efforts but are awaiting word on funding. We've done everything possible at this time and we have plans for if and when we can add more capability to our system.

Q: We were told to get our documents together to seek accommodations for teaching if the mask mandate goes away.

Provost: We have a high percentage of people in full compliance with vaccines. A letter was going to be issued and report to supervisors are on hold for now.

Chair Durkin: We expressed a preference for staying the course, but you can come back early in the spring to revisit the question.

Provost Wilkin: I will be happy to come back.

- **Presentation by Nishanth Rodrigues, Chief Information Officer, Bob Cummings, Director of Academic Innovations Group, and Brian Hopkins , who oversees IT for the university on migrating Blackboard application to the classroom.**

Explained a new application coming to Blackboard and emphasized three main points:

1) Why make this change now? Many organizations are moving to cloud solutions, whereas Blackboard is hosted on our campus.

2) What will we get? Monthly security updates, which is great because vulnerability has become more exploitable. There will be no outages and they will offer enhanced redundancy solutions, making it more reliable.

Blackboard Ultra evolves the current experience for faculty and student, especially on mobile. Quite a heavy lift because Blackboard has been on this campus for more than a decade so there is a lot of data to migrate. We will have to take system down temporarily after grade submission and run through migration process to the cloud, hopefully restored between Christmas and New Year's. The faculty and student experience will not change too much and we will provide training and announcements.

New cloud solution will give you two options: web IDs or another box. The rest of the interface remains unchanged as of right now.

2 new Blackboard modules: Blackboard Ally will help us with compliance for accessibility. Will offer the ability to convert course into alternate formats. When we talk about accessibility there will be a rating that Ally will make apparent and offer options to remediate it. The goal we would like to hit is to be readily accessible for students. Solution will provide a comprehensive view of the rating system, assessing every piece of the course material for the faculty to view it.

Once a faculty member creates a course, students may select your format or an alternate format the system will create for the student based on their needs.

Ratings are also only visible to the faculty member and not the student but may encounter an issue with accessibility as a result of

Additional training will be made for accessibility, in general and for Blackboard.

The second new Blackboard module is Easy Soft, built-in online help solution for testing. Easy Soft recognizes the context the student is in and provides pre-prepared responses based on the context, all based around testing. There is also an option to email or call if they cannot get the help they need using Easy Soft. The benefit to you is the help is context-aware, so our folks know most of the information about you.

Another small piece you may be aware of is that when you log out of Blackboard still caching your credentials, so your logout is just from Blackboard and not from UM login, which is how you log in to Blackboard. Your single-sign-on is still in session, so you need to log out. Some of our students are quite aware of how to use our credentials so be careful to take these extra steps to log out fully.

Q: By default I have an enormous amount of material stored on Blackboard. Will this upgrade affect any of that at all?

Nishanth: Yes, everything on it right now is being moved on to the new system that we are testing right now. Once we pause after grades are submitted, we will transition all the information to the cloud. You will not have to do anything differently.

Brian Hopkins: 5 years is outside the course removal policy, so you cannot access material beyond that point.

Q: Blackboard outages today are related to the migration issue?

Nishanth: No, it's a nationwide outage affecting places like Netflix, Disney, and others, and not just us.

○ **Presentation by Pam Johnson, Assistant Director of Benefits, Human Resources, with a benefits update**

- Open Enrollment changes have already been communicated in email but to remind you, the state health plan did implement a 6% rate increase, which we don't always have. Two plans: Select and Base and the Select changed the deductible from \$1300 to \$1500 for individuals and \$3000 for families.
- Davis Vision had an increase in premium, which varies based on tier of coverage. But we did also make some enhancements to the plan as well. \$120 benefit for glasses or contacts has been increased to \$150. Slight rate increase will not be significant. Retinal imaging is also now included, which can be a major benefit if you need it, as it can help determine various illnesses. These are now common in the market and well worth the slight increase in cost.
- Long-term disability we had a true open-enrollment this year. Usually you can only do this when you're hired but our vendor wanted to increase participation, so you can

- actually enroll in a 90 or 180 day plan that does not require underwriting. Closed in October but if you make changes you will see your changes in January.
- IRS increased annual limits on flexible spending account from \$2750 to \$2850. A special window will be opened for next year through December 15 and will send a reminder Friday. Double check to make sure we have received it by the deadline.
 - The other change is to 403b: the general limit raised from \$19,500 to \$20,500; it's open to anyone including retirees and student-workers.
 - In April 2021 we made a change to the 403b plan to use Plan With Ease from Voya to assist with employee contribution elections, distribution elections, etc. Letter sent in March had a temporary password. If you need that, you can contact Plan With Ease and get a new letter and password. Hover over benefits tab and look under retirement plans to do so. They will need to know your date of hire as well as much other information, so know that beforehand.
 - Those changes will not be made immediately in our system but we will receive updates more than a week later. Do this soon if you want it made by the December 21 payroll.
 - Deferred compensation change to \$2500 and \$6500 for age 65. Make changes one month in advance.
 - EIS Higher Ed has only one counselor available through EAP. We recognize increased need for mental health services and have contracted with a supplemental health plan through ESI, which will offer tele- mental health or by telephone. Use 5 free visits and can be referred on to providers within our network. Additionally, there is an extensive library of personal and professional opportunities such as financial counseling and for professional development. Can be used at the department level or personally. We have funding through May but are seeking additional funding to extend that benefit. Looking for something more permanent.
 - **Presentation by David Whitcomb, General Counsel**
 - Started in August from the University of Tennessee where I was deputy general counsel of a differently structured university, where I've gotten to see how several campuses were run, each by a different chancellor. Three years there and before that in Big Law in Ohio, where I was a litigator and employment lawyer. Fortune 500 or 50 companies to mom and pops and a little bit of higher ed work, advising on employment matters. Four years in Detroit as a trial lawyer for Equal Opportunity and Employment commission. Clerked for a couple of justices before that so I've had the chance to see the law from many different perspectives. Why move from UT to UM? I enjoy being campus focused and interact with students and faculty and look forward to working with y'all.

Q: Who do you root for: University of Michigan or Ohio State?

Whitcomb: Ohio State but I attended both schools and was a season ticket holder at both.

Q: What should we “run by general counsel”? What’s the best way to get in contact with your office?

Whitcomb: By email is easiest though you can call as well. Customer service is a priority.

Whitcomb@olemiss.edu We have great lawyers in our office who can get back to you.

- **Presentation by Kimberly DeVries, director of Equal Opportunity and Regulatory Compliance**
 - Joined UM in August. My focus at the moment is getting to know the campus and seeing how my office can assist. I also moved from Michigan, a community college for about 6 years as GC, and more than happy to be warm in December. UGA law school, worked in Florida, at MSU, and am glad to be back here.
 - ADA, Title IX and employment are all areas I’ve worked in consistently and I work with Honey Ussery in Title IX leaving me freer to focus on equal opportunity for employees.
 - ADA: Making sure employees know their options when it comes to accommodations and you should contact our office to help with that. Accommodations process has gone back a long time since well before Covid and I’m working to clarify the process.
 - Accessibility Compliance: My office is working to ensure campus-wide ADA compliance, for not only physical but also digital facilities. Working to clarify this policy as well as all relevant processes.
 - Equal Opportunity is another major piece of my job: educating about discrimination policies, what we ask of search committees, and just in general any concern about possible discrimination. Contact our office to have conversations about making EORC more of a resource and helping us fill any gaps that exist and best serve the community.
 - Title IX: Honey Ussery is updating these policies and procedures, and my office also oversees this piece.
 - Happy to talk online or off.

Chair Durkin provided an update on the Metro Narcotics Unit and concern expressed as to whether we should continue working with them. ASB, GSC, and Staff Council have all been notified we would support them should they choose to take any action.

Chancellor Boyce issued a statement supporting increased commitment to the Ombuds office. This was the faculty senate continuing to work on that.

Q: That statement was extremely reassuring to my department, but it might be a good idea to revisit the initial recommendations for the office through faculty senate, especially the granting or either tenure or a multi-year contract, to further strengthen the office. Someone suggested perhaps a secure server could be used for contacting the ombuds.

Chair Durkin: I have not seen the initial recommendations but will look into it.

Reithel: Ombuds established in 2013.

Durkin: We will revisit the mask mandate in spring.

Q: Are faculty allowed to impose masks in classroom even if mandate goes away?

GC: It will depend on how the guidance flows down and if it even gets lifted. The MDOH may also hold off on lifting the mask mandate.

Provost Wilkin: We will provide guidance from public health agencies so that faculty will not have to make those kinds of decisions.

Chair Durkin: Working group for faculty teaching awards will be configured with me and Josh Eyler. Please let me know if you or anyone you know is interested in being part of this work group that will start in the spring.

Upcoming legislative session starts soon and a tweet indicates they may be considering Critical Race Theory in the upcoming session and the Executive Council met to discuss this and decided to wait and see what the proposed legislation actually says before responding to it. We also have in place with our colleagues in faculty senates across the state to write a joint resolution on the matter that would likely carry more weight than a single resolution from a single school.

Watson: A subgroup of Academic Affairs has drafted a resolution decrying charges of CRT. Anyone interested in working on this, we are happy to share with you. Email discussions indicate that they agree with the handling of this matter so far. We can afford to be more deliberate about this.

Chair Durkin: Our approach will be like any academic freedom issue regardless of the legislation that emerges.

Q: Are we planning anything around proposed changes to tenure review, as done in Georgia?

Chair Durkin: The legislative liaison will be coming to talk to us in January, we hope, so we will be able to discuss next moves and the implications for tenure and other matters.

- **Committee Updates**

- Academic Instructional Affairs (chair: Alex Watson) – Nothing to report
- Academic Conduct (chair: Kenya Wolff) – Nothing to report
- Finance & Benefits (chair: Joseph Carlisle) – Nothing to report

- Development & Planning (chair: Jon-Michael Wimberly) – Nothing to report (Chair Durkin noted that Jon-Wimberly will be joining the Strategic Planning Council)
- Governance (chair: Carrie Smith) –Members met with the Provost and General Counsel to revise the grievance policy last Thursday and had a very productive meeting with changes that will provide much greater clarity on the timeline for filing grievances, the process, the committee structure—essentially altering every part of the existing policy and we hope to have something for this body to review in the spring.
- Research & Creative Achievement (chair: Donna Buckley) – Nothing to report
- University Services (chair: Heather Allen) – Nothing to report
- **Old Business**
- **New Business**
- **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 PM.

- Motion
 - Second
 - Vote

NEXT MEETING: January 18, 2022 @ 6:00 via ZOOM

Zoom details:

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