

Faculty Senate Meeting of March 6, 2009 Minutes

Attendance. The following Senators were present (proxies in parenthesis): Anderson, Annulis (Scurfield), Bass, Beckett, Blackwell, Brannock, Bristol (Lundford), Burnett (Keltoum Rowland), Campbell (Kim LeDuff), Daves, Davis, Evans, Fisher (Daves), Goggin, Gould, Green, Greene, Hannon (Pandey), Harbaugh, Hauer, Judd (Young), Klinedinst, Kyriakoudes, Lunsford, McCormick, Meyer, Oshrin, Pandey, Piazza, Rachal, Rakocinski, Redalje, Rehner, Rushing, Scurfield, Smithka, Spencer (Brannock), Tingstrom, Young.

Senator McGuire was absent.

President Oshrin gaveled the Senate to order at 2:02 p.m. on the afternoon of Friday, March 6, 2009. The agenda was approved with one addition. After Senator Beckett requested modifications and Senator Piazza requested a second posting of the corrected minutes to the listserv, the minutes were moved and approved.

Senate President Oshrin then introduced the University President.

Remarks of President Saunders. The President reviewed a number of recent university issues:

“Nothing has changed about the budget since our last meeting, ” President Saunders cautioned. There is talk of financial incentives from the federal government, but plans remain uncertain. The Governor is still debating how do distribute such funds, if they are forthcoming.

The Annual Fund has exceeded all expectations, with as much money raised in less than half a year than in all of 2008. The Centennial Campaign will soon be underway, with the official announcement next month. Centennial banners should go up across campus at the same time.

The Athletic Director assures the President that athletes involved in the recent “housing issues . . . have been taken care of.” A county sheriff and a full-time football assistant coach have moved into the housing complex. Football recruiting was good; women’s basketball finished second in their league; baseball is off to a good, nationally-ranked start, with ticket sales at a record. The Spring Football game is set for April 18.

The Century Park (i.e., the new residence halls) will break ground March 27. Founders’ Day is March 30; a faculty-staff picnic will take place following the installation of new student government officers. It should begin at 4:30 on the Kennard-Washington lawn.

Southern Miss now has *ten* National Merit Finalists committed to enroll. This is the most we have ever had.

President Saunders is involved in the selection of the new state superintendent for IHL. A search firm will be used.

At this point the President stood for questions. Among these was a query about whether the federal omnibus bill would alleviate the university debt. The President says not. Disturbed by the recent disreputable behavior of athletes, another Senator wondered who determines the appropriate punishment for such cases. The President responded that Student Affairs handles this matter, with the subject of “team discipline” in the purview of the Director of Athletics. Recalling a recent event of “shooting up the neighborhood,” the President cautioned that the incident took place off campus, thus removing the university police from jurisdiction in the case. The President emphasized that student athletes are not given special or preferential treatment.

Then followed the **Report of the University Provost**. In his remarks, the Provost chose to focus on the budget process of the university. Much of his material was reiterated from the Senate meeting of January 30. The Provost emphasized that the current financial difficulty is dual in nature: (1) the immediate cuts for the current budget year and (2) the possibility of further cuts in the approaching budget year. The former has been effected, largely (insists the Provost) by the good offices of the collegiate deans. As of yesterday, the present-year cuts are complete. No designated accounts (e.g., from grants) were touched. (Cheers from Senator McCormick.)

The Provost discussed how he had taken the services of an existing strategic team and reallocated their talents to address the approaching crisis for next year. (For the composition of said committee and further details, readers are referred to the minutes of the [January 30](#) meeting.) The “biggest thing” we have done is a hiring freeze; over 40 faculty positions and 120 staff positions will not be filled; this action will save \$5 million. He acknowledges that some of the faculty vacancies must be covered in some manner, either with visiting or adjunct appointments, and thus reducing the financial advantages of the freeze.

A retirement incentive plan will be offered: after 45 days, retired faculty may return to teach as much as half-time. We shall request from the IHL the granting of multi-term or multi-year post-retirement appointments. These decisions will vary, of course, depending on the staffing of department and the flexibility of its budget. All in all, the early retirement program may gain the university as much as one million dollars.

The Provost offered a grocery list of other financial reductions to be considered:

- eliminating the cap on tuition, charging strictly by the course hours taken
- reviewing out-of-state waivers, particularly of part-time graduate students
- changes in the academic calendar
- voluntary or involuntary “furloughs” (Readers should note that such furloughs are *not* being considered by the cabinet at this time.)
- raising minimum enrollment figures for classes
- energy savings
- departmental mergers, consolidations, or closings (a last resort), of both academic and non-academic units

Virtually none of these items realizes any immediate financial gains. “The times will not be getting better quickly,” the Provost summed up glumly.

The Provost then accepted questions. The first inquired the minimum class sizes for summer: 16 for undergraduates, 10 for graduates. Another question concerned the required 45 day waiting period for rehiring retirees; the Provost agreed that the abolition of this stricture would be wise and should be taken up by PERS. Queried about what the nature of program closures, the Provost frankly stated that elimination of a program would mean faculty dismissals; he stressed, however, that consolidations and other streamlining procedures would work differently. He cautioned that there *are* programs on campus that lack sufficient enrollments and graduation rates to continue their present operations. (No examples were given, and the Senate made no requests for them.) “It is naive to consider that every program we offer is worth continuing, regardless of what we consider our mission to be.” The Provost and his cabinet are starting now to look at these very areas.

Returning to the early retirement incentive, Senator Beckett argued forcibly that a three-year post-retirement employment period is “the gold standard.” In response the Provost reminded the Senate that there must be a balance between the incentive and the cost. The Provost concluded by stating that programs and services signatory to the university’s character and image will be protected. “This will not be a godless machine. . . . We have to consider quality.”

Turning to other matters, Senator Beckett raised the issue of tenure for university deans (viz., how it is awarded by the faculty after the first year of the dean’s employment). “The situation is that the IHL changed this,” Senator Beckett charged, “so that the President can grant tenure to anyone coming in.” He further emphasized that the tenured deans *must* be able to earn tenure within their departments, if only to ensure the dean employment at the termination of administrative service. He urged that deans go through the same vetting process as regular faculty. The Provost admitted candidly that he was in exactly this situation himself: now in his first year, he is an untenured professor of psychology. The appropriate procedure should be that the department should assess the administrator’s quality for tenure. When pressed, the Provost admitted that this assessment did not happen in the case of the new Dean of Libraries.

Senator Young addressed a question to **Associate Provost Powell** about the university’s recent stress on student retention. Are we encouraging, she wondered, the retention of unsuccessful students as well? Are we trying to retain students whom we do not want, i.e., those who do not perform well academically? Provost Powell vehemently denied this assertion. He observed that a website is about to be launched wherein faculty can report students they perceive to be in trouble. Those remarks will be sent to trained personnel. The site will also contain an *omnium gatherum* of student-related and tutorial services, as well as links appropriate for parents. President Saunders rose and restated her remarks from last month’s Town Meeting, that only 12% of students leave for “academic reasons.” Associate Provost Powell added that UNV 101 or its equivalent might be a requirement for all entering freshmen, if only as a way of building community. He continued at some length answering queries from various Senators. A visitor asked if a required attendance policy might be debated.

President Oshrin then introduced the **Faculty Senate Forum** speaker, Dr. Virginia Crawford, director of the Health Services Center. Dr. Crawford expressed her pleasure that a major goal of the strategic plan is campus and student “wellness” [designated by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “rather a nonce-word”]. The clinic sees 25,000 patients a year. Dr. Crawford encourages faculty and staff to take advantage of the health services plan offered by the state. The financial advantages are good for preventative health care (link is [here](#)). The university experience is an opportunity to influence the student’s behavior for a lifetime, with faculty (ideally) serving as models. The clinic offers many free services for health maintenance.

Dr. Crawford inquired of the Senate whether faculty would be interested in special hours designated for faculty and staff. Likewise would the Senate be interested in drug delivery? What about specially appointed periods (such as fall break) for annual checkups and other wellness procedures? Senator Redalje asked how much health service was available on the Coast; Dr. Crawford’s frank answer was “very little.” She suggests a needs assessment be made there to find out what services would be most valuable. Senator Beckett inquired about a program for regular checkups of mainline illnesses such as breast or prostate cancer. Yes, was Dr. Crawford’s response, those procedures are in place as part of the statewide health system.

The Senate applauded Dr. Crawford warmly for her informative remarks.

A representative from iTech reported on a power outage planned for the data center renovation. This will take place during the first days of Spring Break, from Monday through Wednesday.

At this point the Senate broke for light refreshments. President Oshrin reconvened the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

The Report of the Senate President. President Oshrin spoke briefly but to the point. A few days ago he sent out copies of the revised [Course Fee Policy](#). Such fees are not to be used for routine departmental services. Also IHL has asked for a firm policy from each institution about course fees. After some fairly mundane questions, the Senate approved the policy unanimously.

Electronic voting for (say) Senate elections was much anticipated. Unfortunately, though the program is ready for use, it stipulates that the names of eligible faculty be associated with their colleges; thus the LDAP database must be modified to include such information. iTech promises the program will be running next year.

On March 28 representatives of the Faculty Senates across the state will convene in Jackson. Members are encouraged to attend if they can. President Oshrin will report on this meeting at our next meeting.

Report of the President-Elect. President-Elect Evans spoke of retirement and the early retirement incentive. For faculty vested in the state PERS system, upon retirement such employees receive a “thirteenth check” at the end of the year as a cost of living increase.

Retirement earnings are exempt from many taxes and fees. To calculate one's real earnings, the potential retiree should multiply the initial retirement salary by 1.25. For retirees who choose to continue teaching in phased retirement, a half time load is defined as two courses a semester. Upon retirement, all health benefits are lost, and retirees must pay for their own health insurance.

The Senate Secretary read a note of appreciation from Nancy Kaul, thanking the Senate for its financial contribution to the Arthur Kaul Symposium, named in honor of her late husband and former Senate President. The faithful Secretary-Elect had no report.

Committee reports.

Faculty Welfare. Senator Davis distributed the Faculty Welfare Committee's "State of the Faculty 2008" [report](#), comparing results of the Faculty Satisfaction Survey with personnel expenditures, tenure track salaries, external funding, and student contact hours. Of the 177 faculty responses, there was a continued level of overall satisfaction (55.5%) indicating a non maximal capacity for research and learning productivity. The report concludes with a resolution to establish a university standing advisory committee charged to continually review best practices and budgetary planning for the enterprise of research and learning, guided by the higher levels of satisfaction in the College of Health, productivity in the Colleges of Health, Science and Technology, and research in organizational learning. The resolution will be considered formally for a vote at the next meeting of the Senate.

Senator Davis distributed "The State of the Faculty 2008." 177 responses were received. The results virtually replicate the data of two years ago, with "nothing" changing in the faculty's attitudes toward the institution and employment here. The report includes a resolution to establish a Senate committee to study the improvement of faculty satisfaction. The resolution will be considered formally for a vote at the next meeting of the Senate.

Awards. Senator Beckett reported that three major awards will be decided soon:

- Grand Marshal: Distinguished Professor Award
- Excellence in University Service Award
- Excellence in University Teaching Award

Their selection committees are as follows:

Grand Marshall: Senators Beckett (chair), Brannock, Davis, Judd, and Rakocinski; plus faculty members Richard Conville, Donna Davis, Joseph Olmi, Mary Lux, Jiu Ding, Shirlene Stogner, and James P. Smith; staff representative Tina Griffin; and student representative Melissa Cirino.

Excellence in University Service and Teaching awards. These members are chosen solely from the Senate. In addition to the Senators mentioned above, the committee includes Senator Burgess and Fisher.

The original deadline for nominations was March 3. The committees have extended the date to March 9. (A kudos is extended to Senator Beckett for providing the Secretary written copies of his remarks in advance. *Vide ipsum.*)

Constitution and Bylaws. Senator Buchanan presented a proposal to modify the Senate meeting calendar:

“Article 1, Section 190. The Senate shall meet in nine regular sessions, once each month during the year except for the months of July and August. The Senate shall meet once during the months of January and February. Special sessions of the Senate may be called as required by the president of the Senate or at the request of a majority of its voting members.”

Administration and Faculty Evaluations. President Oshrin announced that the results should be back from the computing center by the end of the month.

Elections. Senator Goggin announced that elections are underway.

Faculty Handbook Committee. Senator Beckett is arranging a meeting of the committee on March 25. Topics to be discussed include (1) a protocol for selection of recipients of sabbaticals; (2) consideration of whether associate deans and provosts should participate in departmental third year reviews, tenure, and promotion votes; (3) clarification of the policy that College Advisory Committees *must* vote in their departmental referenda but must then recuse themselves from voting at higher levels, if the candidate under consideration is from their home departments.

Liaison reports.

Gulf Coast Faculty Council liaison. Senator Scurfield encouraged the Senate to change the meeting time until 1:30 in the afternoon. Some discussion ensued with no clear result.

Harkening back to the Forum Speaker, Senator Scurfield noted his very strong concern about the historic and current absence of University provided health services on the Gulf Coast in contrast to the wonderful array of health services in Hattiesburg. This concern was supported and echoed by several other Senators. Perhaps a resolution will be forthcoming at the next meeting. Associate Provost Powell cautioned that funding for such a purpose may well be in place but directed elsewhere.

Academic/Graduate Council liaisons. Various Senators remarked that the Academic Council approved a revision of the grade repeat policy to apply to all courses, not only those with D's or F's. The mathematics department asked (and were granted) the requirement of MAT 099 for all math ACT sub scores of below 20.

AAUP liaison. A forthcoming meeting will be in early April.

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Old Business.

Senator Young reported on an *ad hoc* committee to evaluate and compensate chairs and directors. Such administrators should be on a three-year rotation. Only a draft of such a policy is under consideration now. Responses are invited.

Senator Redalje reported from a committee he is serving on about the university purchase of computers. iTech's present policy is much under attack and should be reconsidered. Scientists lament that the low-end models now recommended are not suitable for their research. The committee is recommending a larger and more flexible selection of computers.

Senator Davis of the Sabbaticals Committee bewailed the low number of sabbaticals awarded (only four), believed to be a record low.

President Oshrin adjourned the Senate at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Stanley Hauer
Secretary to the Senate

Approved by
Stephen Oshrin
Senate President

March 10, 2009

(Posted 4-8-09)