Report on Fall 2019 Activities of the SMU Faculty Senate

Submitted by
Tim Rosendale, President

President of the Senate:  Tim Rosendale (Dedman I)
President-Elect of the Senate:  Aurelie Thiele (Lyle)
Administrative Assistant to the Senate:  Julie Maynard

Senate Executive Committee:  Susana Solera-Adoboe (Secretary), Tom Tan (Cox), Grant Hayden (Law), James Lee (Perkins), Brian Molanphy (Meadows), Michael Harris (Simmons), Luigi Manzetti (Dedman II), Pia Vogel (Dedman III)

This semester, the Senate continued to exercise its role as a strong and active partner in SMU’s shared governance system. We worked constantly and in many ways with members of the upper administration—President Turner, Interim Provost Peter Moore, VP for Finance Chris Regis, VP for Student Affairs K.C. Mmeje, AVP for Facilities Michael Molina, and Associate Provosts Sheri Kunovich and Doug Reinelt, among others—as well as members of the Board of Trustees. In all cases we endeavor to represent the priorities, values, and concerns of the faculty, and to work toward the general welfare and betterment of the University. Below I will summarize some of the activities of the Senate, its Executive Committee, and its President.

Faculty Senate

The Senate’s main business last fall was 1) to meet as a body with various administration guests for reports and conversation, and 2) to get its committees (the charges of which I described in our August meeting, and are available on the Senate website) up and running for the academic year. Since most of those committees will issue their reports in the Spring semester, I will recap their doings after the school year is over; below is a brief precis of what we did in our monthly meetings, the minutes of which you can freely consult in detail on the Senate website.

• At the September meeting, I updated the Senate on my summer activities on its behalf. Associate Provost Sheri Kunovich explained her very important and complex domain of Student Engagement and Success, and received many good questions and ideas from senators. And Dean of Libraries Holly Jeffcoat reported on (and took questions on) the reorganization, budgets, strategic plan, opportunities, and challenges of SMU’s library system.

• In October, we were joined by Dean of Students Mindy Sutton Noss, AD Evelyn Ashley, and Elsie Johnson, who gave an overview of initiatives and developments in Student Affairs, as well as an update on Texas law regarding mandatory reporting. AVP Sheri Starkey and Ashley Mason from HR described the faculty benefits package for 2020, and answered
questions. AVP Michael Molina updated the Senate on the many construction and renovation projects currently underway at SMU.

- Also, Associate Provost Doug Reinelt presented background and procedural information on changes and revisions to the Academic Affairs section of the University Policy Manual (including a generous new family leave policy and other improvements), and asked for Senate approval. But due to faculty concerns over two policies, a motion was made and approved to delay the discussion and vote until the UPM revisions could be more thoroughly deliberated on, which happened in a Special Session on October 23—at which it was further moved that those revisions should be further distributed to department chairs for review. The collaboratively-revised revisions were finally approved at the December meeting.

- VP for Finance Chris Regis gave a November overview of SMU’s operating budget and financial state, as well as areas of potential cost sensitivity. She answered questions about academic support and post-OE2C staff inflation, and stressed the importance of a larger endowment to SMU’s longterm fiscal wellbeing. Interim Provost Peter Moore then picked up on some of those themes in a wide-ranging Q&A that also included SMUGO, assessment, the Grid, the upcoming capital campaign, the need for more merit and need-based financial aid, and the ongoing provostial search.

- In December, AVP for Enrollment Wes Waggoner reported on Admissions and Financial Aid, both of which are constrained and require choices to be made. Emphasized yet again were the importance of growing the endowment aggressively, and pivoting more toward need-based aid. The Senate then began a discussion of a proposed resolution in support of free and civil speech.

Many senators also took part in the search for a new Provost by attending the faculty forums with each candidate, engaging in the Q&A, and contributing feedback for the search committee and President Turner. It is clear from the outcome that the voice of the faculty, among others, was heard.

Executive Committee

The ExCom participated in all of the above, and more. Its tireless members met 3-4 times a month to plan and prepare for upcoming Senate meetings, to have preliminary conversations with upcoming Senate guests, to advise the Senate President, and to aggregate and discuss emergent news, issues, and ideas that might require the attention of the full Senate and/or the administration. In addition to all this, and liaising with Senate committees, the ExCom…

- Had dedicated early-morning meetings with each provostial candidate.
- Monitored and reported potentially problematic situations in various schools, of which there were several.
- Compiled a list of the faculty’s top fundraising priorities (faculty research and activity support, library funding, need-based financial aid, East Campus development, and increased faculty quality and diversity) for President Turner and Provost Moore.
• Had a candid, collegial, and substantive December conversation with President Turner on a range of topics including capital campaign priorities, diversification (in admissions, faculty, Board of Trustees), and interdisciplinarity.

President

As President of the Faculty Senate, I participated in all of the above, plus I…

• Met at least once a month with President Turner to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing SMU at the moment, as well as what actions or policies might make the best of them. This frequently included forwarding faculty priorities and concerns.
• Did the same at least once a month with Provost Moore.
• Met less regularly, but productively, with Sheri Kunovich, Doug Reinelt, KC Mmeje, Harold Stanley, and various Deans and other administrators to discuss current plans, developments, opportunities, and concerns.
• Met multiple times with each provostial candidate.
• Convened two ad hoc committees: one on FSP conflicts of interest (including research findings, and proposed revisions that may or may not be made to the Senate’s constitution and/or bylaws), and one to develop a proposal for a faculty ombuds position.
• Convened, less formally, a committee to promote free and civil speech at SMU, composed of colleagues from across the university who were already interested and active in these matters. This brilliant group is beginning to work up large and small events designed to cultivate and strengthen a productive culture of free speech and respectful disagreement at SMU.
• Have continued, with some success, to press for serious review and remediation of classroom security issues. I recently met with Michael Molina, Warren Ricks, and two University Park code inspectors to assess the situation in Dallas Hall (as a test case) and figure out reasonable solutions.
• Represent the SMU faculty and its interests on the Board of Trustees.
  o And its Academic Affairs and Legal Affairs subcommittees.
  o And its Trusteeship committee, which will determine the membership of the Board for the next 4 years.
• Represent the SMU faculty on the Emergency Management Committee, the Academic Technology Council, the Libraries Executive Board, the Colonial Group Survey Analysis Committee, and more. That’s a lot of meetings.
• Met multiple times with Holly Jeffcoat and others to figure out how to maximize the libraries’ fundraising potential.
• Worked with Mark Rhodes to understand and alleviate the on-campus parking crisis.
• With the help of Julie Maynard and some folks with Sitecore expertise, am gradually updating and reorganizing the Senate website.
• With APC chair Matthew Wilson, members of the Student Senate and Honor Council, and Student Affairs, am working to revise the Honor Code, and soliciting new faculty participants for honor board hearings.

Conclusion

Shared governance works, and the Faculty Senate is working—hard, effectively, and collaboratively—to represent and advocate for faculty interests and priorities, and to make SMU an even better university.