

Tennessee University Faculty Senate (TUFS) Report

There were members from various universities & representatives from government relations representatives present in the June meeting. A special welcome was given to our UT Southern (formerly Martin Methodist). Some of the topics: vaccine requirement, mask mandate, critical race theory, faculty raises, gun exemption and tenure on campuses. The question: what do the government relations folks see as issues for the universities' future? How can we as faculty help them lobby for what faculty want?

Our government representatives began conversation with the number of bills passed (6969) or amended with 493 being tracked that had opportunity to implement with higher ed. There were no punitive bills against higher education this cycle. Question was raised: could the (gun) clause be removed to exempt universities. This needs to be watched intentionally. Next year is an election year with a potential filing for guns of campus. Legislative processes get messy. The unintentional can be frightening. There must always be eyes and ears on prospective legislation.

Question was raised about required vaccinations with future FDA approval. What can we expect? Three exemptions: Health, Religion & Right of Conscience. There are currently other inoculations required: MMR & meningitis. Covid has not risen to the level of public health threat. UT Health Science Center is not requiring the vaccine; first & second year cannot be asked if they have had the vaccine; however, the third & fourth-year students are required due to clinical responsibilities with the public. This is the secure exemption for medical schools.

The question about faculty raises was asked; TN formula is set by THEC with the subset for raises 55% of the 4% raise is a portion from the university. The state supports a percentage and the university provides the remaining raise. Increasing tuition to the pool is how a university can support their portion. Distributed Lottery are provided from money pool for community colleges with a one-time legislation. A question was raised about limiting tuition increase to supplement faculty raises. THEC determines and adopts tuition ranges which was passed this month.

Critical race theory is not being supported by K-12 with implications for higher education. Is there any advice about faculty academic freedom? There appears to be a vacuum between the public & private environments. Each of us (faculty) need communications among faculty, campus leaders/administrators, senators & representatives for principles and fight for freedom. This is not only in TN, but also a national conversation opportunity. We need to do our best to encourage democratic & operational engagement more as individuals rather than the university.

A former legislator was asked about 'shared governance' at one time with the response voided with any faculty. Also, we need ways to support students to focus on academics. Mental health has its challenges on every level at our universities. We must recognize early alerts for our students. Faculty need to give individual office hours to personalize time beyond the classroom. When the robust faculty and mental health professionals develop a team-approach, students gain immense benefits.

The survey (see link below) provides research as faculty work in teaching, research primarily with service comparing 2019 and 2020. Communication is pertinent to be hands-on, share the responsibility and view the facts from the survey. Please visit the TUFSS website.

<https://tnfacultyssenates.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TUFSS-Workload-Feb2021.pdf>

On-line learning has transformed education where “the education go to the people rather than the people going (to campus) to education.” Yet in many classes, we cannot put all curriculum on-line. Why is there a need for physical brick and mortar buildings with so much on-line learning? There are variations for the 18-21 year old compared to 30 year olds and later-career students. We were reminded that there is more expense and time for on-line classes compared to face to face. There is a higher success with more human contact associated with face to face classes. Learning from the classroom can last for years. This human interaction connects with the mental health.

Campus updates outside APSU:

ETSU: a new provost was appointed. Tenure & promotion are being reviewed. Athletes and free-speech is a hot topic among faculty, staff & students. ETSU’s Strategic Plan 2025 is underway.

MTSU: Concerns & issues: salaries, raises, budget review, Covid policies & teaching with masks/a moving target. Fall looks to be ‘back to normal’. Other issues include organizational policy review & vaccines with health outcomes.

U of Memphis: Pre-covid with masks not mandated but highly recommended. Tenure procedures in Faculty Handbook. Fall Faculty Senate meetings will meet on-line. Representative will meet this summer with deans for shared governance.

UTC: Equity and Diversity leadership appointment made. Interim appointments have been controversial on campus. This needs more structure with possible set terms for administrators (chairs & department heads). There are more Non-Tenure-Track advances and representation in FS. Handbook re-written to address policy. Workload is unresolved across UTC campus. Summer budget is a mystery with some impact on scheduling. The final issue is the fight for paid family leave/medical leave for 9-month employees.

UTK: Change in Faculty Senate (FS) president-elect. Handbook for NTT (non tenure-track) and how promotions are handled. FS has a role to play with the post-covid roll-out.

MTSU: New software to capture credit hours which has been under discussion.

UTHSC: Getting past Covid as faculty recognize reducing faculty & student ratio. All dental students are required to be vaccinated. UTHSC is based on research & 12-month clinical; not a formula school. NTT committee is part of FS with over 70% of faculty as NTT. As a contrast, TT numbers are low with many slowly phasing-out to retirement. This is possibly approaching 100% NTT hence the need for a NTT committee. UTHSC is a different campus from the other UT schools with each college providing unique programs. For example, the dental school is in-house while the Medical students go out to clinical training. An internal search for interim academic officer is current with the retirement of the UTHSC chancellor (end of 2022).

UTM: Phase 3 software in Curriculog that provides automatic catalog changes and a more fluid workflow has begun. Handbook has not been approved by UT legal. Adhoc committee for NTT is scheduled to be addressed in the fall. Faculty Senate currently seats no NTT faculty. Town hall meetings are planned for this summer. Faculty had no snow days built-in the schedule last year; faculty were expected to teach anyway. Therefore, some students without internet access & technology were at a disadvantage. A mass vaccine drive happened with 25% of faculty & staff being partially or fully vaccinated. Can we ask who is vaccinated this fall? There was a response that we need to ask our campus administrators whether we can ask students. Currently, the answer is a negative, we cannot ask a student if they are vaccinated.

TTU: Campus will be in full-flight. Mask mandate has been relaxed. Building projects in progress are Science building, Engineering and a mixed dorm/residence/multiple-use building. Administrators thanked faculty with a \$500.00 bonus and in spring an across-the-board \$1,000.00. Faculty elected a new FS President-elect. All FS meetings will remain on-line. FS is advisory with 2 councils: Administrative and Academic. A carryover issue at TTU is Intellectual Property (IP) for improved policies. Who owns the work? Standardized with LGI's showing different with some update needed. There is an IP standing committee.

UT Law School: They could create a white paper about IP best practices. In addition, as they start the fall 2021 term, they can touch-on protecting faculty as determined through the campus survey, broadband access communication to legislators and bias in faculty evaluations. Some populations score lower: older faculty, women in a male-dominant setting and faculty of color. How are student evaluations to be used? These are constructs where TUFs can be at its best to improving our lot in TN with race, IP and critical race theory before us. Reports & documents can be placed and reviewed in Google docs for future usage.