

Modified Minutes of the Faculty Assembly, April 27, 2012*

Senate President Allen referred to the Faculty Senate Constitution and said that only members of the faculty assembly should be in attendance. (This is defined as tenured/tenure track members of the faculty at or below level of chair, excluding those on leave). Faculty who did not meet these criteria left the room. There were about 80 faculty at the beginning of meeting. (Numbers went up a little later, and down a little near the end). Quorum would be 138. Without quorum, any resolution made by the body assembled would need to go to the entire faculty assembly for a vote via the Faculty Senate Credentials and Elections Committee.

Allen gave a little background for the purpose of the assembly: we are here to discuss the new core curriculum being implemented by TX, we need to make revisions to our current core in order to be compliant with the new mandates, a structure has been provided to us by administration, and there has been little conversation among faculty about how to revise the core.

The discussion began with Allen reading from questions on notecards that had been gathered from faculty during the morning meeting and lunch period. As most of the notecards were not read (because discussion took over after the first few were read), the questions will be typed up and sent to faculty separately.

Initial notecards identified the following concerns: that THECB recommends that the institutional option be a faculty decision, that the provost should have no role other than insight and presenting the new core to THECB, and why did the provost do an “end run” around Gen Ed and University Curriculum Committees, thereby fashioning a process to create the core without broad-based faculty input? It was noted Senate has asked questions like these as well and not received answers they deemed acceptable.

Faculty asked where is President on this? Other faculty said President Flores has stated that the core belongs to faculty and that his main concern is that we comply with THECB. President and Provost do not seem to be on same page; perhaps we can use this to shift the decision-making process into a more faculty driven one.

It was asked why minutes were being taken. Secretary Schmertz said the Senate constitution states that the Faculty Senate Secretary takes minutes at meetings “and assemblies.” She noted that the body could vote to go into closed session, at which point recordings would stop. Motion was made to go into closed session, and then withdrawn after some discussion. It was requested during and after the meeting that no names be used in these minutes in order to protect junior faculty who might wish to speak.

There were concerns about why the UHD’s traditions and structures of shared governance had been ignored in setting up the process of making decisions on the core. Faculty wondered why administration has chosen not to have a Gen Ed committee made up of faculty. Perhaps the Gen Ed committee could be the Oversight committee to which the subcommittees report. However,

according to the shared governance policy, the University Curriculum handles curriculum matters, so the Gen Ed Committee would need to work with them. Also, it may not be wise to eliminate the Oversight Committee without a smooth transition into a new regime where Gen Ed handled the changes. One of the things UHD came under fire for in the last SACS review was Gen Ed Assessment. As a result, then-president Moosally recommended at the time a structure for the Gen Ed committee. The recommendation was that the committee be constituted with an elected, tenured rep from every department. The committee would be primarily faculty and be run by faculty. It would be a long-term committee that would go beyond the issues of the core and monitor courses and assessment.

Chairs of subcommittees need to communicate regularly with each other as well as with the Oversight committee. From reading minutes of individual subcommittees, it is clear that the committees are proceeding differently. One committee, the History committee, has begun to address problems with the current setup and to look for solutions, but these solutions can't move forward unless the subcommittees are in agreement about how to proceed.

Is the entire committee structure insufficient, or will better communication between committees solve the problem? It was noted that while the minutes of the History committee put into words what other committees had been struggling with, overall the minutes were not providing a clear or sufficient opportunity for committees to benefit from each others' work. One committee had been told by administration that they were out of line with their minutes and subsequently began to communicate less. Also, when the provost met with the chairs, minutes were not recorded. (Notes from that meeting may be found in the minutes of the History Committee).

The only overarching constant in a highly fragmented process is the Oversight Committee, which is driven by the provost. There needs to be a more formalized process enabling chairs of committees and subcommittees to meet.

A member asked the assembly to define the problem faculty were discussing. An answer offered was that we were handed a dictate for how to proceed that did not include faculty input. As a result, committees are running around in circles and we may end up with a curriculum that fails to meet our students' needs and puts us into hot water with SACS again. The provost developed the committee structure and committee charges on the basis of minimal information about what was going on in our courses, and on erroneous assumptions that UHD was doing everything wrong. This resulted in a "scorched earth," "reinvent the wheel" approach to meeting the THECB requirements.

A member agreed that the process was fundamentally flawed but noted that the new core opened up opportunities that had not existed in the core before. We need to be sure that we do more than fix the current core to meet the requirements; we have an opportunity to rectify existing omissions in the core. Another member noted that even if the current committee structure continues, members on committees must check the credentialing requirements of SACS to make sure nobody teaches in the core without the appropriate credentials. There was discussion on where interdisciplinary courses would be housed and how they would count, both for SACS

purposes and toward the disciplines. SACS and THECB will allow faculty who are not credentialed in a discipline to teach in the core because the core courses don't count toward the discipline—replacing disciplines with skills is part of the state's agenda. We do not necessarily have to follow the state's agenda, however. If we allowed, e.g., a Chemistry course to count as part of the History component area, we as faculty would be contributing to the problem we've identified.

A faculty member stated that the provost seems to be attempting to meet THECB mandates and improve retention/graduation rates at the same time. The push for new courses comes from the latter impulse. The problem is there is no way to ensure that the new courses won't turn out to be "barriers" for students. If student success is the primary driver, it makes most sense to start with courses we already have data on and improve them.

It was pointed out that the process had proceeded in the wrong order—advertising for new courses before assessing the current core. The simple solution would be to reverse the process. For History, this works fine, and that committee has learned that most universities are doing very little and are modifying their core. However, this would not work in all cases: the reality is that we now have a smaller core and we have to cut courses.

The conversation returned to whether the system for making decisions about the core needed to be scrapped or just tweaked. In the provost's vision of the process, a course in a discipline could bypass the relevant departments in gaining approval for inclusion in the core, yet those departments have a responsibility to certify that their programs teach what needs to be taught. Would it be possible to work department/discipline approval into the process, and would this tweak suffice?

It was pointed out that small fixes might not work, as the system was designed to disempower discipline experts and make them unable to direct the curriculum decisions which properly belong to them. The Coordinating Board has said repeatedly that the faculty must own the curriculum or the curriculum will not be successful in meeting its goals (or student needs). The Coordinating Board has also said that in the discipline of history there are pre-existing rules that preclude courses taught by faculty outside that discipline—a course on the History of Opera taught by a musicologist, for example. Also, majors rely on the core to provide certain specific kinds of knowledge. The only "tweak" that can be made to the system that might return the process to the faculty lies with changing the Oversight Committee in such a way that it answers to the faculty rather than the provost.

The Oversight Committee has worked very hard but are in a very difficult position in which they are not able to answer to the faculty. One suggestion is to replace Gary Stading (who is now an administrator who reports to the provost) with a member of the faculty assembly. With a slightly restructured Oversight Committee, problems such as the disciplinary makeup of the committees could be addressed subsequently. Also, the Oversight Committee's timeline for decisions needs to be made in ways that recognize faculty work cycles (Fall and Spring).

As the time set aside for the assembly was drawing to a close, discussion focused on actions the body assembled could take, given the fact that they could not represent the entire faculty body without quorum.

The members of the faculty assembly who were present at the meeting of the faculty assembly on Friday, April 27 voted unanimously to make two recommendations to Faculty Senate:

1. that the General Education Committee be reconstituted with elected, tenured faculty from each department by Sept 10, 2012
2. that a tenured member of the faculty assembly replace the Assistant Vice President and Dean, Undergraduate Studies as chair of the core curriculum oversight committee

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Johanna Schmertz

*Minutes have been modified to trace general themes, rather than individual speakers, and to omit names where possible.