Notes on the November 7th Faculty Senate meeting.

**Chair Clark Jones** called the meeting to order at 3:30.

The minutes from the October meeting were approved as distributed.

**Jones** opened with remarks about the **importance of campus conversations**, as illustrated at the recent Town Hall meeting. He proposed including more discussions in the process of developing and approving Senate resolutions. That is, the Senate begins the process in our meetings; senators then take the issues back to departmental and college constituents for consideration; finally, the Senate comes back together at the next meeting with the ability to make a more informed and impactful decision in our votes. More conversations and discussions will make Faculty Senate resolutions more effective.

**Chris Stolarzyk**, of the **United Way of Tarrant County,** spoke to the Senate about this year’s United Way campaign. Last year, the campaign raised around $105,000 for charities from TCU. This year’s campaign will run from **December 2-13**. Chris is available to speak to groups on campus, if anyone invites him to provide more information. The annual United Way campaign is an opportunity for TCU to give back to the community in an efficient manner. He also made a plug for November as men’s health month.

Jones also made an announcement about the **Frogs Feed the Fort** initiative currently underway on campus and collecting food and funds for the Tarrant Area Food Bank. Andy Fort, an emeritus faculty member and former Senate chair, is the current president of the Food Bank’s board, while Don Mills, former VC of Student Life, is the president elect, and the current CEO, Bo Soderbergh is a TCU graduate. This food drive ends on **November 14th**.

**Claire Sanders** brought a brief update from the **DEI Implementation Committee**. As the Co-Chair of this committee, she reported that the group’s “campus tour” is almost complete. She is very grateful for and impressed by the multiple conversations they have had and feedback they have received in meeting with colleagues across campus. This week, they had a productive conversation with Registrar Mary Kincannon regarding the logistics of adding a DEI element to the Core. The committee plans to wrap up the work before Thanksgiving and have their documents ready for presentation at the December Faculty Senate meeting.

**Pam Frable**, **chair of the Governance Committee**, reported that her committee has read the updated Alcohol Policy and recommends that it now be updated in the Faculty-Staff Handbook. Because the policy is subject to annual review and revision, it will be included as a link in the handbook. The motion passed without objections or abstentions.

**Michael Sawey**, **chair of the Educational Evaluation Committee (EEC)**, brought a revised resolution from the EEC on the Appropriate Use of Student Evaluations. He noted the volume of discussion and the number of emails he has received on this topic in the month since the last meeting. First paragraph is not changed, but the second paragraph has been revised:

# Resolution from EEC: Appropriate use of student evaluations

TCU is committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and seeks to “promote a campus environment that is welcoming for all and free of bias.”[1] Academic research, however, demonstrates that student evaluations of teaching “systematically disadvantage faculty from marginalized groups,”[2] including women and minorities[3], and are poor indicators of teaching quality[4].

Therefore, while SPOT data may be useful in (a) helping faculty members reflect upon and improve their teaching and (b) giving students an opportunity to voice opinions about their class experiences, SPOT data should not be used by colleges or departments in consequential decisions, such as annual review, tenure and promotion, or merit pay.

# References Cited

[1] Texas Christian University Strategic Plan. (2019). https://inclusion.tcu.edu/about/strategic-plan/

[2] Statement on Student Evaluations of Teaching. (Sep 2019). *American Sociological Association*.

[3] Mitchell, Kristina M.W., Martin, Jonathan. (July 2018). Gender Bias in Student Evaluations. *Political Science & Politics*. 51(3), 648-652.

[4] Supiano, Becky. (Sep 9, 2019). Sociologists Caution Colleges Not to Over-Rely on Student Evaluations of Teaching. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Guidelines from 2011 Senate resolution on the Evaluation of Teaching and a list of Best Practices in teacher evaluation are still in force. See: <https://fsn.tcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TeachEvalDoc05-11.pdf>.

Discussion among senators emphasized the need for equitable and judicious use of SPOT feedback. Implementation of this recommendation will be up to the Provost and Deans. Colleagues are still concerned about this resolution—as removing student information can hinder an Advisory Committee’s ability to evaluate teaching for tenure and promotion recommendations. One senator suggested making a link in the recommendation to the Best Practices 2011 document. (See above.) Another senator suggested that Deans and the Provost should read this recommendation as a notice that SPOTs are biased and that there should be other mechanisms for teaching evaluation. Faculty reflection on their own SPOT feedback could be a valuable resource, according to another senator. In answer to the question, What is the impact on SACS/accreditation of this recommendation? Clark Jones replied that he has checked on that question and that, no, it’s not an issue. Another senator reiterated that students need to have a voice, and that administrators need to have data. Nevertheless, SPOTS is a problematic instrument that disadvantages women and marginalized groups. One senator insisted that TCU shouldn’t use SPOTs for even 1/3 of teaching evaluation (per the 2011 FS document).

At last, the question was called, and the Senate voted. The resolution passed with three senators voting against it, and one abstaining.

Next, **Phil Esposito, chair of the Student Relations Committee,** and J**osh Witkop, Student Body President**, brought the **Pass/No Credit Resolution** (developed in partnership between the SGA and the Student Relations Committee) to the Senate. This resolution will add flexibility for students who declare P/NC in a class to decide, within 48 hours of receiving their letter grade for a class, to have the opportunity of taking the grade or not. Their P/NC option will be considered “used,” by having been opted for; however, students could still opt to keep their grade.

Core of the resolution: **Let it be resolved that the TCU Faculty Senate, in its role as the representative body of the TCU faculty, joins with the TCU Student Government Association (SGA) in increasing and reaffirming our commitment to student learning and success by amending the current Pass / No Credit option to allow students an opportunity to forfeit their Pass/No Credit to receive the actual letter grade earned.**

Comments and questions from the Senate highlighted the need to clarify that the 48 hours begins after the grade is posted, that timing issues will be critical for graduating seniors, that responsibility for changing the grade from P/NC to a grade belongs to the student, etc. Mechanics and timeframes are still uncertain and will depend on the Registrar. Lots of discussion followed comments questioning a “whereas” clause, implying that it’s the current policy’s fault that students opting for P/NC become disengaged from these classes. Different perspectives were noted between faculty teaching upper level classes v. faculty teaching in the Core. No “downside” to the resolution emerged. Rather, this recommendation would incentivize students’ continued engagement in classes in which they have declared P/NC. Senators were urged to take this issue back to their departments for discussion. Please **send your feedback and recommendations to Phil Esposito**, p.esposito@tcu.edu

**Ted Legatski, co-chair of UCAC,** brought an update on the **UCAC’s charge from the Chancellor regarding Benefits**. The charge (from 9/10/19) reads: ***UCAC is to recommend a new employee benefits package (for future employees only) that is competitive, fiscally sustainable, and socialized with university governance.***

Legatski emphasized that the matter is **in the feedback stage**. No decisions or recommendations have been made. UCAC’s next meeting is on Tuesday of next week (11/12/19). Currently a small working group from the larger committee—consisting of 3 faculty and 3 staff—is in dialog with Human Resources to come up with recommendations.

Deadline for the recommendation has been postponed to March 31st of 2020 (from November 19th). This is still soon, but an improvement in timeline. UCAC co-chairs will make merit pay recommendations to the Chancellor’s Cabinet on 11/19, but the benefits recommendation will be presented in late March.

**What UCAC has been told**:

* Population of traditional college-age in the US is declining
	+ Number of foreign students studying in US is also declining
	+ Will TCU be able to maintain current number and quality of students in an increasingly competitive environment?
* Future annual tuition increases will be much smaller
* Political pressure on higher education to lower costs, driven by high student loan debt
* TCU’s current benefits are unsustainable
	+ Restructuring retirement benefits seems to be the primary target
* Any change in benefits will not affect current employees

**What have they learned?**

* TCU Benefits are only part of the total compensation package.
* Total compensation as a percentage of the total operating budget is growing at a very small rate.
* The cost of retirement benefits are increasing and projected to continue increasing, with an aging workforce.
* However, retirement costs (the big target) are decreasing as a percentage of the university’s total operating budget.
* TCU spends a lower percentage (of its overall budget) on compensation than every other one of our self-defined peer and aspirant institutions.
* TCU spends a higher percentage of total compensation on top officers (an IRS defined status) than all of our peer and aspirant universities. (based on IRS 990 data).
* Based on ranking data (from US News & World Report): TCU’s academic spending is lower on students per capita than all our peer and aspirant universities.
* **It’s a question of priorities.** And the priorities don’t seem to align with what we profess to value.

**Benefits most important** to current TCU employees: Health insurance, retirement benefits, and tuition benefits. Benefits most important to future employees (Millennials and Gen Z): short term disability (maternity and paternity leave, for ex.), health insurance, tuition benefits, childcare, student loan repayment assistance, and flexible remote working schedules.

**What do we need to learn?** Definition of key terms. What does “fiscally sustainable” mean to the board? What is the target number for the cost of TCU benefits—as a percentage of compensation? Per capita costs across all employees or within ranges? UCAC has not been told. It’s hard for HR to project costs if we don’t know what’s in the package. What is competitive? How important are benefits in recruiting and retaining the best talent? What is sacrosanct here about TCU’s culture? Anything we do will affect the culture.

Senators responded with observations and questions: If we are 95% tuition-dependent, could this issue mean we need a different business model here at TCU. The current business model IS unsustainable. TCU needs a more endowment-dependent business model. Question of the power of UCAC in this conversation. Need to look at this matter more holistically. What is the financial exigency? Any benefits cuts should be a function of a campus wide cost-cutting endeavor. Information gaps: IRS 990 data tells us about faculty, but not staff (in comparison institutions); also need more info on peer and aspirant universities’ benefits. What are the cost estimates, and the savings estimates? UCAC needs more info on these items.

**Challenge:** how do we do this to reduce costs and not compromise core elements of the new Lead On Strategic Plan.

If you have some good specific ideas, please email them to Ted Legatski: t.legatski@tcu.edu . He would appreciate it.

**Andrew Ledbetter, Faculty Relations Committee (FRC) chair**, addressed the Senate on the Compensation Analysis Report his committee has created. FRC’s requested Senate endorsement of the report: “The TCU Faculty Senate endorses the FRC’s Compensation Analysis Report as evidence that (a) TCU’s benefits are not too rich and that (b) to be competitive, compensation levels should not be reduced for current or future faculty.” The vote was taken and passed, with one senator opposed (because the resolution was deemed too weak).

**Josh Witkop (SGA President) and Abby Vernacchia (Academic Affairs Chair of SGA)**: brought a recommendation that the Senate endorse electronic testing to replace paper testing. Currently, TCU pays to provide Scantrons and Blue Books for student testing. The SGA recommendation is to switch to electronic testing. Josh noted several types of benefits of this recommended change: Academic benefits (security and automatic recording of grades, randomizes questions; software formats tests); Environmental benefits (much less paper waste); Budgetary benefits ($35,000 saved, as TCU already has a contract with **D2L** and electronic testing capacity is included in the platform). When they approached Provost Dahlberg, she asked about the impacts for students with accommodations and for the Testing Center. Josh asked for initial responses from faculty senators. One senator spoke to his positive experience with the platform, but was frustrated that it wouldn’t work in class time as not every student has a suitable laptop to use. Another senator asked, What might this look like if computers are included in tuition? What about the Testing Center? Witkop asked for a show of hands as to how many senators would be open to transition to this e-testing in a 5 year window?

We can’t commit our peers to this, one senator said. That’s an element of academic freedom. Chair Jones thanked the student leaders for opening this discussion.

Pam Frable, GC chair, brought a brief question from the Governance Committee which is working on the Faculty Senator Emeritus designation. Is the body interested in them working on this matter? Show of hands requested. The majority signaled their support.

Clark Jones thanked the students and noted that the meeting was adjourned, at 5:00.