

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO**

**DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY**

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE  
FACULTY SENATE MEETING  
Of March 7, 2024**

The regular monthly meeting of the Faculty Senate for the 2023-2024 academic year was held March 7, 2024 at 3:30 p.m. via Zoom (online meeting) with Dr. René Zenteno, Chair of the Faculty Senate, presiding.

I. Call to order and taking of attendance.

Present: René Zenteno, Alexis Godet, Chris Packham, Kirsten Gardner, Mike Baumann, Sonya Aleman, Mary Dixson, Ginny Garcia-Alexander, Andrew Lloyd, George Perry, Valerie Sponsel, Victor Villarreal, John Alexander, Edwin Barea-Rodriguez, David Beheshti, Cristian Botez, James Chambers, Xun Chen, Neil Debbage, Victor DeOliveira, Glenn Dietrich, Kimberly Garza, Dmitry Gokhman, Zaid Haddad, Marcus Hamilton, Lauren Hoffman, Jie Huang, Michael Karcher, Kim Kline, Jusung Lee, Ashwin Malshe, Alex Mejia, Valeria Meiller, Jeff Prevost, John Quarles, Rica Ramirez, Lauren Riojas-Fitzpatrick, Devon Romero, Humberto Saenz, Kirk Schanze, Susan Thomas, Marie Tillyer, Jelena Todić, Armando Trujillo, Zijun Wang, and David Weber

Absent: August (Gus) Allo, Mark Bayer, Curtis Brewer, Jimi Francis, Huy Le, Dennis Lopez, Harry Millwater, Branco Ponomariov, and Catalina Zarate

Guests: Melissa Vito, Claudia Arcolin, Kelvin Bentley, Debra Del Toro, Ximena Grau, and Debbie Howard Rappaport

Total members present: 46    Total members absent: 9

II. Consent Agenda

- Approval of Minutes – February 15, 2024 Faculty Senate Meeting
- Graduate Council item – approved at the March 5, 2024 meeting
  - Graduate Council By-laws

The Minutes of the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Council item were approved.

Dr. Zenteno welcomed Dr. Melissa Vito and Ms. Claudia Arcolin from UTSA's Academic Innovation Office and Dr. Kelvin Bentley from UT System's Office of Academic Affairs to the Faculty Senate to discuss microcredentials.

### III. Reports

**A. Academic Innovation Update** – Melissa Vito, Vice Provost for Academic Innovation, Claudia Arcolin, Executive Director, Teaching & Learning Experiences, and Kelvin Bentley, Program Manager from UT System Office of Academic Affairs – presentation on Texas Credentials for the Future; *presentation uploaded to Faculty Senate SharePoint site and [website](#)*

Dr. Bentley provided a brief overview of his 20+ years background in higher education, supporting academic innovation, mainly developing online programs for 2 – 4-year schools. In 2021, he created a fully online bachelor of science program for Northwestern State University in Louisiana. He stated this program was the first fully online program at the bachelor's level and was created collaboratively between faculty, staff, students and industry. In March 2023, Dr. Bentley began working at UT System on the microcredentials project, which is supported by many constituents, including the Chancellor and Board of Regents, allowing access to alumni, faculty, staff and students to a number of courses that reflect the working environment that is always changing.

Dr. Bentley stated that from this initial interest and funding from Strada Education Foundation and organizations (Google) and the vendor (Coursera), the UT System campuses have access to Coursera platforms. Faculty are able to review the content for microcredential pathways available and embedding that content so that once students complete the modules they receive an industry recognized credential. One campus, UT Arlington, has developed a co-curricular pathway allowing students to start and complete the industry-recognized credentials – a student success co-chain cohort model.

Dr. Bentley stated that the program is exciting and growing, but has a long way to go in explaining the how and what so that students understand the benefits behind the program. The campuses are highlighting students who have benefited from completing a microcredential pathway so that others will take advantage of what is being offered. One unintended outcome, which is not part of the grant, is that faculty have become energized in creating their own microcredentials. It helps our institutions think about the skills and competencies that students are mastering in their courses which allows our students to communicate what they know and can accomplish.

Dr. Vito acknowledged UT System's endeavors for negotiating with external providers for funding so that the UT System campuses have access to a large suite of microcredentials that are recognized by industry as providing specific types of skills that are valued in the workplace. Academic Innovation is working with faculty and students to communicate this platform is available and begin adopting it into the classroom through embedding them in a course or work alongside in a curriculum that already exists. Dr. Vito's team is also looking into the co-curricular opportunities and possibly piloting a program with student workers on campus to add a microcredential which will add value and a skill to their portfolio. Dr. Vito also stated that their office is looking at the UT Arlington model of adding the coaching model to help the students get ahead in the job market. UTSA has a team of approximately fourteen individuals that meet on a monthly basis to discuss this project. Ms. Claudia Arcolin represents Academic Innovation on this team and works with faculty development. Dr. Tammy Wyatt, Sr. Vice Provost for Student Success, assists and connects the Student Success Centers in each of the colleges so that everyone is aware of

what is available. Academic Innovation also conducts trainings using an external company called [Skyepack](#) which is very helpful to faculty in understanding a microcredential and current best practices if the faculty wants to use them in their curriculum.

Ms. Claudia Arcolin stated Academic Innovations has created a [Microcredentials website](#) which has all of the information regarding the [UTSA Coursera Career Academy](#). The site contains more than 400 courses which you can choose based on the needs of your students or the discipline you are teaching. Ms. Arcolin mentioned a few of the approaches that are currently being piloted are faculty utilizing microcredentials as extra credit activity, part of a final project, or a major assignment. One example Ms. Arcolin highlighted was utilizing the Google Project Management Certificate into Humanities courses so that students could apply critical thinking skills, and problem solving to project management. At the end of the course, the students will earn the Google Project Management Certificate. Ms. Arcolin also mentioned that faculty are implementing the Artificial Intelligence Certificate offered by IBM into a Linguistics course so students can learn about linguistics while developing skills in data engineering. Ms. Arcolin further stated they worked with Coursera to develop a link into Canvas which then links to the Coursera Career Academy board.

Ms. Arcolin stated Academic Innovations is working with the points of contact and faculty champions within each college to identify courses in the catalog that could create more competitive skills for our students that would be relevant for the programs.

**Question** – What are the goals for UTSA in shaping the skills for our students?

**Answer** – Dr. Vito mentioned that we have groups of faculty who are already embedding certificates into their courses. She also stated that everyone has access to the Coursera catalog. Faculty, staff, and alumni can enroll in a microcredential course. She further stated that faculty do not need to change an entire curriculum, but it allows the faculty member to add specific skills to enhance the value of the traditional curriculum. She reiterated it was why it was important to add the project management certificate to the humanities courses as a lot of the students do not have that skill and adds a significant value entering the workforce. Dr. Vito mentioned their office is also working with the Career and Engaged Learning office. Mario Vela, Asst. Vice Provost, and his team are asking employers to identify skills that are most important to them which will allow the university to target certain skills to certain types of students. Further, our Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) is offering microcredentials to working adults or certain industries who want their employees to be “upskilled.” These individuals do not, unless they are UTSA alumni, have free access to the Coursera Career Academy, but the value is still significant. For example, PACE is offering a series in Generative AI. So, the goal is preparing our current students to be competitive in the workforce, understanding our faculty and what is important to them in using microcredentials, and understanding from business and industry what is important to them so that we can match these up.

**Question** – How is microcredentialing being integrated into UTSA pedagogy? Are we being encouraged to use it? Does it create a new currency within the student body from the standpoint that the student is completing their credit hour requirement and now they will complete a microcredential credit requirement? What is the impact on their education?

**Answer** – Dr. Vito mentioned that UTSA, along with other UT System schools, are early adopters in using microcredentials. She stated UTSA is aware from business and industry regarding the skills they value, which is proving valuable to the university. However, the

initiative is in its second full year, so it's too early to determine the impact/success of the project. In addition, the university is not mandating faculty to use microcredentials, but encouraging faculty to review it. Academic Innovation is working with faculty who are interested in embedding a microcredential into their course. Their office is also working in areas that may not have a particular course/certificate built into their curriculum (i.e. project management in the humanities) which would benefit students in the workplace.

**Question** – What is the cost for the microcredentials?

**Answer** – Dr. Bentley stated the UT System office is covering the cost for the Coursera benefits for at least the next two years. Students use their UTSA ID to access the courses. Dr. Bentley reiterated the co-curricular pathway is an avenue faculty are utilizing because faculty may not have the time to review the curriculum and embed it into their course or it may not be the best fit for their course. In addition, Dr. Bentley stated UT System has started the Credit for Prior Learning initiative which is a function of the Texas Credentials for the Future project. This project looks at whether or not the institution will give credit for the course if it's offered outside of the university setting. This has brought up conversations surrounding CPL policies and how will universities weigh prior learning. Dr. Bentley stated that Google has enlisted the American Council on Education to provide a credit recommendation for their certificates. The UT System wants to support this initiative to the campuses.

Dr. Bentley provided the following form to complete for those interested in joining the community of practice designed to offer good practices in integrating microcredentials with the undergraduate learning experience: [www.tinyurl.com/microcredcop](http://www.tinyurl.com/microcredcop)

**B. Report of the Chair** – Dr. René Zenteno (*PowerPoint presentation uploaded to Faculty Senate SharePoint site and [website](#)*)

Dr. Zenteno provided the following update regarding the meetings between the Faculty Senators, their respective Deans and the Interim Provost, Dr. Heather Shipley. He stated that these meetings included topics that were determined at the retreat and at the beginning of the academic year which were relevant to the Faculty Senate:

- The goal of being R1 and securing the resources faculty need;
- Support and protection of faculty;
- Shared governance.

The reception by the Deans went very well, and they would like to add two topics:

- Evaluation guidelines at the college level and department level; and,
- Shared governance – how faculty want to be more involved in the decision making on many of the committees at the college-level.

There have been only two meetings so far– COLFA and COS.

The University sent out an email on March 5th approving the suspension of classes between noon and 2:00 p.m. on April 8<sup>th</sup> during the time of the eclipse. Further information may be found on [UTSA Today](#).

Dr. Zenteno provided an update on SB 17 and SB18. He stated that SB 17 has been in effect since January 1, 2024. There was a brief recap on the university's organization and

review of SB 17 (DEI) activities with teaching, research and short-term speaking engagement activities being exempt from the bill. However, at the Department Chair's Council meeting on March 6, 2024 there was a question as to who/where do we go to seek clarification since the implementation of SB 17? Dr. Zenteno stated that one should start with the department chair/school director, then dean and eventually to legal counsel for clarification. Dr. Zenteno stated he would be available for consultation as well.

**Question** – How does the university plan to address diversity in hiring at the faculty and administrative levels now that SB 17 is in place?

**Answer** – Dr. Zenteno mentioned that securing representation should be of concern, but the law clearly states that we cannot target specific groups when hiring. However, he would seek further clarification from Dr. Shipley and report his findings to the Faculty Senate.

**Comment** – The month of March is Women's History Month and it would be helpful to have clarification on programming that is allowed to occur. The Vice President for University Relations office now oversees the responsibilities for all of the heritage activities (Hispanic History Month, Black History Month, etc.). The theme for Women's History Month which was decided at the national level is Women who Advocate for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The plan for programming of events for the month was to include research, workshop and speakers. However, the interpretation of SB 17 has impacted Women's History Month because the Women's Studies Institute, who takes the lead in the programming, has been informed they could not hold events around this theme.

**Response** – Dr. Zenteno stated he would seek further clarification with the Provost and Legal Counsel and provide feedback.

Dr. Zenteno provided an update regarding SB 18 which has been in effect since September 1, 2023. The UT System has provided additional time to each institution to shape, not define, the two major issues in the bill – the good cause dismissal of faculty and the summary dismissal of faculty at any public academic institution of higher education in the State of Texas. Dr. Zenteno mentioned that according to the law, institutions need to adopt policies which need to be approved by the Faculty Senate by the end of the academic year. Dr. Zenteno understands there has been a delay while UTSA and other academic and health institutions seek clarification regarding the language in the law to change policies so that they support faculty and provide due process that is needed in case the institution decides a faculty member needs to be dismissed from their position either through good cause dismissal or summary dismissal.

Dr. Zenteno stated he had communicated with the representatives of the Faculty Senate who are serving on the working group (Sonya Aleman, Marcus Hamilton and Marie Tillyer). They shared their concerns as well as concerns from members of the Faculty Senate with moving ahead with the policy process. Dr. Zenteno mentioned that he will attend a meeting with other UT System academic representatives to address the challenges of the policy and to attempt to find a consensus. The law is very clear and the university is not allowed to change the definitions of why someone may be dismissed for good cause or summary dismissal, but we want to develop procedures that are fair if a faculty member is asked to leave their position, the process for placing a faculty member on leave (paid leave or unpaid leave), and developing a fair hearing process with faculty

representation once it is determined a hearing is granted. Dr. Zenteno further stated that SB 18 touches many HOP policies so the working group is very mindful of their deliberations.

There was a discussion surrounding various questions and comments regarding areas that need clarification on SB 17 and SB 18. Dr. Zenteno stated that he would consult with Dr. Heather Shipley and Dr. Kelly Nash and provide an update at the April meeting.

### **C. Secretary of the General Faculty – Dr. Chris Packham**

Dr. Packham stated that he and Dr. Alex Godet recently attended the Texas Council of Faculty Senates. Two items of note from that meeting:

- SB 18 – if faculty are placed on leave – should it be paid or unpaid leave during the investigation? Several institutions have reinstated paid leave. Brian Evans, Interim President of Texas AAUP would be able to assist on knowing which universities were able to modify their policy on paid/unpaid leave.
- There was a strong indication that during the next legislative session which begins in January 2025, bills regarding higher education, including SB 17 and SB 18, will be re-introduced.

Dr. Packham noted from the meeting that he found it interesting that some universities across Texas, (not just UT System or Texas A&M System) evaluate their Chair, Dean, Provost and President by the Faculty Senate on a yearly basis. It was a purely advisory evaluation, but the premise was based on that if faculty are evaluated on a yearly basis then the reverse should be true and evaluations should be conducted and administered by faculty. Dr. Packham wasn't sure if the AFEM Committee needed to look into evaluations of administrators.

There was a brief discussion of exploring evaluation of administrators on a yearly basis. Questions that arose included: who would conduct the evaluation, what would be the nature, purpose and outcome of the evaluation? Dr. Packham reiterated the presentation from the Texas Council of Faculty Senators was the evaluations were advisory in nature. ([HOP 1.03 Evaluation of Academic Administrators](#)).

In addition, Dr. Packham learned that at some universities, the Provost's also teaches a course, or is part of someone else's course, as it was felt important to continue to keep their hands on that side of the institution.

Dr. Packham stated he attended a meeting at UT System with the Health offices regarding the Texas Space Institute, which is a \$350M investment from the Texas Legislature. Over the summer months there will be events occurring overseas that will include medicine and engineering.

### **D. Committee Reports**

**Academic Freedom, Evaluation and Merit Committee** – Ginny Garcia-Alexander, no report

**Budget Committee** – Mary Dixon, no report

**Graduate Council Chair** – Victor Villarreal, no report

**HOP Committee** – Sonya Aleman, no report

**University Curriculum Committee** – Andy Lloyd, no report

**Research Committee** – George Perry, no report

IV. **Unfinished Business – None**

V. **New Business – None**

VI. **Adjournment:**

There being no further business, a motion was made by Dr. Alex Godet and seconded by Dr. Lauren Riojas-Fitzpatrick; the meeting concluded at 4:45 p.m.