

March 20, 2025, Meeting of the SAU Faculty Senate

Faculty Senators in Attendance: Nelson, Valenzuela, Faucett, Tucker, J. Logan, Ivory, Karim, Lowther, D. Wilson, Djiguimde, Al-Shami, Mayo, Filbrun, Samples

Proxies: Nelson served as proxy for Fanning, Valenzuela served as proxy for Wise, Faucett served as proxy for Dobbins, Ivory served as proxy for Greathouse

Ex-officio and guests: B. Logan, J. Mancil, A. McLaughlin, McLelland, Plumlee, K. Landry, B. Lenard, D. Allen, B. McCartney, B. Hicks, S. Reed, M. Bryan

Minutes:

Call to Order 3:43

Nelson – Call to order, identification of proxies, request for motion to approve the minutes from February.

1. **Approval of Minutes** – Sen. Fanning moved to approve the February 2025 minutes. Sen. Samples second. No discussion regarding minutes. Motion to approve February minutes passed.

2. Special Orders of the Day –

Invitation to Dr. Hicks for remarks.

- Dr. Hicks started by greeting the senate. He began his updates by letting the faculty senate know that the ACCESS bill was signed and will soon take effect. There are elements in the ACCESS bill that need to be reviewed by the faculty or faculty representation. He asked what the faculty senate's preference is for reviewing. Elements that need unpacking include a new return on investment funding formula. Some of the formula includes what students are majoring in and the jobs they get after college. Rationale needs to be provided on how the college education the received at SAU benefits the students. He noted that data that has already been collected could help the university get more funding.
- He continued by asking what the faculty senate's preference is for discussing the elements included in the ACCESS bill as there are elements related to tenure and post tenure review that will need a faculty lens. He suggested a presentation to the faculty senate regarding these upcoming changes as well as an option of having an open forum discussion with interested faculty that could be sponsored by the faculty senate.
- Senators Nelson and Tucker noted that there is only one remaining faculty senate meeting where new members will be sat. A whole forum might be better given the one remaining faculty senate meeting. Faculty Senate could sponsor the forum and encourage participation by the faculty.
- Dr. Hicks also informed the Senate that the quiet phase of the capital campaign has started. Previous donors seem willing to give again, which is good news. The campaign is designed to address a variety of areas.

- There were questions from Senators Filbrun, Nelson, and Tucker regarding the process and what is on the list for improvements. Dr. Hicks noted that information can be provided internally amongst the campus.
- Faculty Senate guest Dr. Plumlee asked Dr. Hicks for any updates on enrollment for next year. Currently, there is an uptick in the number of dorm rooms that have been booked compared to this time last year. So that is good news.

Reports from Guests.

- Dr. Bri McCartney addressed the faculty senate as a member of and on behalf of the Faculty Research Grant Committee. She started by noting that committee members agree that there is room for improvement regarding the committee including membership, application, and processes. These changes come about as an effort to increase transparency, fairness, and accessibility.
- She noted that the committee structure may need to change. Specifically, whereas the current committee format is for there to be one member representing each college for a two-year term, it may be a good idea to expand the membership to two members from each college bringing the committee total up to eight. Additionally, representatives from the colleges would come from different departments so that there is a wider range of expertise on the committee. She notes that this committee is a lot of work compared to other committees that never or rarely meet, and the hope is that there are more people willing to get involved.
- Further, the current committee structure has the chair of the committee serving a one-year term. Given everything that is involved in that position, they are recommending the chair serve a two-year term instead. That way, once the chair gets their feet wet it isn't time to change to a new chair.
- She also noted that the review process has a great deal of room for improvement. Clarification to the language on the application for example would certainly make for better applications.
- As such, the research committee wants guidance on how to undertake the adjustment process.
- Additionally, she noted the committee recommends a review session on the application process prior to the start of the first funding cycle. That way expectations and requirements for the application process are clear beforehand. This would hopefully result in better applications and more research being funded.
- She reasserted that the goal for this process is increased understanding, fairness, accessibility, etc., and to make the processes better.
- Senator Nelson noted that in previous years, funding for travel was okay in the research grant. Now funding for travel is limited to \$750.00, which hasn't been made clear.
- Dr. McCartney agreed that that hasn't been made clear, and the goal of revisions is to give clarification. These improvements are fueled by the confusion that has been expressed by faculty members regarding the denial of their applications. Hope is to get everyone on the same page.
- Senator Tucker noted that larger committees aren't necessarily better committees.

- Dr. McCartney concurred but noted that there has been pushback from faculty regarding whether all scholarship is being viewed and evaluated the same way. Expanding the committee is in an effort to have all kinds of scholarship/research represented on the committee so that better appraisals can be made of the applications.
- Senator Tucker asked if there was a publication process where who/what was funded is published anywhere internally.
- Dr. McCartney noted that transparency is a great idea but how that will be done has been the source of some confusion before. How that can be done now is something the committee is absolutely open to discussing with faculty and administration.
- Senator Karim noted that it would be good to know not only what was funded but what was accomplished from the funds.
- Dr. McCartney agreed.
- Senator Valenzuela recommended considering the makeup of the individual colleges when making these adjustments. He noted that in the Rankin College of Business there are only two departments so someone would always have to serve on the committee. Consideration should be given to the size and variety of the departments within the colleges themselves.
- Senator Nelson also suggested potentially doing away with the fellowship so that more people can receive funding.
- Senator Filbrun, who is a member of the research committee, noted that many applicants only request the fellowship because the research may not be that expensive to fund just require time to conduct. The research grant is getting more competitive because of the number of applicants applying. He also noted that there are some academic units who have a much larger number of applicants than other departments on campus. Some units may rarely apply. Additionally, he noted that there are issues with applications because the work won't necessarily be done during the funding cycle's year. He informed the senate that each grant awarded must also be billed during that academic year. If the bill for the work were to come in the following year, the research cannot be funded. Everything must be completed funding wise during the same fiscal year.
- Dr. McCartney reminded the senate that the research committee serves as a recommender to the VPAA. The final choice remains with the VPAA to sign off on the recommendations.
- Dr. McCartney was also intentional in expressing that the committee does not evaluate the quality of the research as 'good research/scholarship' or 'bad research/scholarship.' Rather, decisions are made regarding the application itself.
- An appeals process is possible.
- And again, she noted that the goal is fairness.
- Senator Djiguimde asked what some common reasons for denials are.
- Senator Filbrun answered this question and noted: not following instructions on the application, asking for more money than is allowed, doing work outside of the funding window where the bill would come during the next fiscal year.

- Senator Tucker asked whether there are additional issues with people not getting funded because they did not submit the necessary progress reports for a grant they have previously received.
- Dr. McCartney said this is absolutely a reason for denial.
- Senator Djigumde asked if there could be a better reminder process for when those progress reports are due.
- Senator Filbrun noted they are included in the application each cycle.
- Senator Al-Shami asked about the possibility of including external (to the committee) reviewers like journals do. He suggested the application can be anonymized and individuals within the University can assist in the evaluation process.
- Dr. McCartney noted the committee has not considered that but will do so.
- Senator Tucker noted that this grant is great for faculty and can add in faculty retention.
- Senator Filbrun added that there are very few student groups applying for the student research grant. There are more undergraduate applications of higher quality than there are graduate applications. The graduate funds often go unused, and the undergraduate funds frequently run out. If there was a way to fund undergraduate applications with unused graduate funds that would result in more undergraduate research being funded.
- Dr. McCartney noted they expected an increase in graduate research grant applications especially because of the EdD program but to date that hasn't materialized.
- Dr. McCartney concluded by thanking everyone for their time.

3. Reports of Committees –

Handbook Committee – Sen. Ivory reported that the Handbook Committee has met with administration and made some updates to the Tenure and Promotion language for the handbook which will need a vote by the faculty. See Appendix A. The main clarifications were made to address when tenure and promotion applications can be submitted. That clarification is after the faculty member has completed 5 years.

Senator Nelson asked if faculty members can still go up early in special circumstances.

Senator Ivory noted yes that is still a possibility.

Budget Committee – Nothing to report. Have not met.

Parking, Building, and Grounds Committee – Nothing to report. Have not met.

4. Old Business –

None

5. New Business –

- The AI Committee needs to be referred to the Handbook Committee for addition as a standing committee. After some discussion about whether this will be a standing academic committee or a standing University committee by Sen. Tucker, Sen. Nelson, Mr. B. Logan, and Sen. Faucett, it was determined to be a standing University committee since some of the language in the policy is relevant to staff as well as faculty.

- Elections need to be held to replace outgoing faculty senators. A volunteer was needed from LPA to hold their election. Sen. D. Wilson volunteered. A volunteer was also needed from the CSE. Sen Filbrun volunteered.
- Dr. Karim also noted at the end of the meeting that there was a discussion at the February meeting regarding high performance computing systems. There will be a training that takes place soon on how to access the state HPC system. Be on the lookout for an email.

Sen. Nelson asked if there was any other business. No.

Motion to adjourn – Sen. J. Logan

Second – Sen. Tucker

Vote to adjourn the meeting passes.

Meeting adjourned at 4:53.