

University of Tennessee UTK/UTIA Senate Report for TUFs
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Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement

Just after the TUFs meeting last fall, UTK saw two instances of Nazi and white supremacist scrawl on our free speech Rock, both covered over quickly by other students. Administrative response was initially tepid. The Senate took the moment to lean in on the need to restore a chief diversity officer, a Senate concern since the office was terminated in 2016. Senate leadership lobbied hard in various quarters and passed a resolution, amid heated debate about free speech and hate speech definitions, arguing the urgent need for a chief diversity officer at the Chancellor's cabinet level and giving the Interim Provost a January 1 deadline. December 18, Wayne Davis announced that Tyvi Small would serve as our Interim VC for Diversity and Engagement. The new VC has reached out to the Senate multiple times for support for and consultation on our United at the Rock event and for a "faculty brain trust" of people who are historians, researchers, and scholars of institutional racism, access, equity, speech, critical race theory, women's and gender studies, and LGBTQ+ issues. His efforts to coordinate extant programming and hold administrators to meaningful action are remarkable. Our most recent "blackface" incident, an image of several students in charcoal masks with a text overlay suggesting being black meant free college access, led to an enormous town hall and the embarrassing spectacle of a row of white male administrators uncomfortable with student's questions about their approach to racism, flanked by a new, unseasoned female VC for communications and the new African-American VC for Diversity and Engagement. There were many awkward moments.

Volunteer Core: New General Education

The Senate passed the new Volunteer Core set of general education requirements in our March meeting, on the heels of the blackface incident. In fact, senators had to leave the town hall meeting early, with that conversation ringing in our ears, to assemble for our own Senate meeting. The curriculum had been mapped out by the Undergraduate Council over the last 3 years, and the Senate had engaged several times in workshopping various of its elements. The curriculum almost didn't pass because of last-minute objections that it didn't do enough to address diversity issues until we clarified that there are 2 courses (Global Citizenship International and Global Citizenship US) designed to host conversation and study about transnational and national constructions of "social class, disability, ethnicity, gender, human geography, language, race, religion, and sexual orientation" to better understand the "transnational, historical, and contemporary forces that affect American society, in order to foster students' awareness of their own identities and responsibilities in a deeply pluralistic nation and globally intertwined world." Implementing this curriculum will take the next year, but we hope to foster new course development and course revision to make this new approach to general education, which is spread throughout all levels of coursework, a substantive address to urgent social problems and questions.

Communications and Athletics:

We made 2 short videos, with the help of student volunteers, a PR class, and the VFL films unit of Athletics. The first, “Tennessee: Home” was homemade:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laOo13uX01o>; the second, “A Seat at the Table,” was a

VFL assisted production: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FSRo7yrF8U>. Both focus on the

contributions of professors in the broad, shared mission of the university, to supplement those

more individual profiles and to counter more negative images of faculty as lazy, uncaring,

isolated from students, or liberal demons twisting the minds of innocent youth. We also worked

with Athletics to have them honor a faculty member before home games, which started with

basketball season. We hope to shift the administration of that project over to the Provost’s

office soon. We discovered a certain amount of curious jealousy from administrators as this

project blossomed, reminding us that it’s possible for faculty and faculty senates to make

independent connections with Athletics and their SM megaphones. It has boosted our Twitter

following, and the second video has had over 23,000 views across various platforms. We

continue to work through the OpEd Project produced pieces, have met with the new KNS editor

about them, and hope to work with TUFs and a Critical University Studies group at UTK on a

non-monetized defense and talking points about universities and their mission.

Sex Week and Student Funding:

The TN Comptroller’s report on student activity funding, a thinly veiled attempt to torpedo Sex Week, came out on February 20th. It uses the language of embarrassment, disgust, and

explicitness to condemn the events in an expensive report ostensibly to audit the use of state funds in student programming. It reflects a national trend based on exaggeration and content-

free assumptions that has created great hysteria and misperception about the event in a state with abstinence-only sex education. In response, Boyd and Davis immediately announced they

would eliminate the existing process (SPAC—Student Programming and Activities Committee, made up of students, faculty, and staff) that distributes student fee-generated funds for

student speakers to groups and replace it with an as-yet undisclosed system. The March 1, 2019 change in Board policy in light of this report eliminates all references to student groups having a

voice in student programming from that pool of funds. It attempts to eliminate the legal

“forum” created by a governmentally administered good (a park, public space, or pool of funds), which must be available to all on a viewpoint-neutral basis. The Board policy destroys

the forum by removing any reference to student control of student activity fees. As the

libertarian FIRE organization put it, “Boyd and Davis’ decision to stop funding student organizations raises serious First Amendment concerns. Ending student group funding will

silence a multitude of student voices on campus simply because members of Tennessee’s

legislature disapprove of the message of one student organization. Depressingly, the university traded its prior defense of students’ expressive rights for unquestioning obedience to state

legislators — and it doesn’t appear to have any plan to replace its current system.”

The Faculty Senate has weighed in on three distinct aspects of this issue. First, we pointed out

that it was an embarrassing failure of shared governance that made clear administrators

withheld the report (it was “embargoed,” though by whom exactly it is still unclear) and were

prepared to act in a matter that affected hundreds of co-curricular efforts, hundreds of faculty

advisors to student organizations, and an intensely public issue about free speech and education on our campus. In the wake of this failure, I requested to be added to the Council of Deans and Department Heads, which was denied but a compromise will put the FS President in that meeting once a semester. I am waiting to hear on my request to add the FS President to the Chancellor's Cabinet (FYI, the UT Martin FS President sits on the Chancellor's Cabinet). Second, we met with FIRE attorneys via Zoom, with groups of student and administrative leaders locally, and sought information about other R1 universities and their systems. We have added faculty members to the new working group tasked with coming up with something to replace the old system, other than naked administrative control of all student programming. Third, we passed a resolution of support for the SGA's public position, which is that students should have primary control over student programming. They represented themselves with great composure and thoughtfulness at the Board meeting, as did our one faculty representative Bonnie Ownley, but the tide of events had determined that the axed policy regarding registered student organizations would push through, in spite of good and reasonable questions from some of the Board. The new UTK policy is due for review at the Jun 21st Board meeting. We will be monitoring it closely and making case that faculty play a vital role as advisors and collaborators on co-curricular programming.

PPPR/Additional Post Tenure Review Update:

As I reported last fall, we worked with the new Provost and interim Chancellor to close a back door in the policy that could have left faculty without due process. The messaging campaign around the new layer of paperwork-intensive review has also had an impact. The implementation has been delayed by a year, and most leaders privately admit they think it will only be around for a year, citing waste, redundancy, and questionable purpose, all of which we had raised in the debate. That has not stopped other universities from trying a version of it and referencing ours. We all need to continue to make the case for tenure, to define it as distinct from K-12 tenure, and to underscore its relation to the integrity of research. This document, prepared by the University Faculty Council, <https://senate.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/09/UFC-Guide-for-Board-FINAL.pdf> might be of help.

Various Handbook and Tenure Issues:

Our tenure clock adjustment policies have been thrown into chaos by a new Board policy that puts all "early" cases before the full Board, including those who chose to freeze their tenure clocks at the birth of child in case of complications but then chose to go up on the original tenure year. We clarified the distinction between extensions (only for procedural errors) and suspensions (which comply with ADA, FMLA, and internal policies that keep someone from being accountable for work during a "suspended" period). The present approach will be to ask the Board to adjust the additional review for "early tenure" to less than 4 years on campus, which still presents as the most elegant solution to a problem we clearly need to address. We are near the end of a year-long process of updating our woefully out of date Faculty Handbook and in the midst of a related project to combine the Faculty Handbook and Manual for Faculty Evaluation, which were no longer in full accord with one another and creating confusion. We also altered our bylaws to increase the number of available candidates to run for Senate president.