

Faculty Senate President's Report

August 21, 2024

The following report is a demonstrative summary of some of the activities undertaken by the Faculty Senate President as well as various members of the Executive Committee over the summer months of 2024, including the months of April, until August 2024. It is primarily written by the FS President, but substantively edited by other members of the executive committee.

If there are questions on any point, please feel free to reach out any time. Thank you.

Introduction:

A great many moves have been made over the summer, by your VP, Secretary and the Committee Chairs as well as your past president and me. Our goal was to continue seamlessly with the work of our predecessors, as well as to build on the priorities that were part of my position statement prior to the election in April. We have met often as a full committee but also in smaller groups when we note that some of the key initiatives we are focused on as faculty cross some of the individual committee boundaries. We have found this to be a useful mechanism for sharing information as well as leveraging various resources for ideas and connections around the campus. We have also made a point of meeting with key academic affairs offices in one-on-one settings to gain further insight and access to specific groups who are directly involved with decisions that impact faculty but who sometimes might not have a window into faculty life, and vis versa.

Key Initiatives:

1. Senate Committee Strategic Planning – Over the course of May and early June, Bret Webb and I met with each of our committee chairs to gain an initial understanding of their priorities for their committees in the upcoming year, knowing that once the summer passed and full committees starting meeting, that some of those priorities would change to varying extents. These meetings were useful as they allowed the development of planned activities – some that carried over from the previous years (e.g. Handbook changes, unfinished business on the Salary & Benefits committee related to the Inversion and Compression process), etc. Chairs have been asked to share their two/three priorities with the full Senate at the August plenary meeting.
2. Salary/COLAs – The June, 2024 Board of Trustee meeting offered an opportunity to again raise the matter of salaries at the University, and the continued purchasing power loss, which we took as part of the Senate Report to the BoT.

3. Inversion/Compression/Equity – This process continues to be a source of back and forth debate with the Senate, CAD and AA. The question centers on the idea of merit as a mechanism to support a person receiving an adjustment, rather than having fallen behind due to market forces increasing the salaries of new hires. We continue to push the viewpoint that these salary increases should not be viewed as a function of evaluations or merit, but rather are based on economic parity and should be a continuously budgeted line item. The chair of the Salary and Benefits committee has offered to help AA model some cost scenarios, which has been accepted. More information will be forthcoming as it develops on that project, but in the meantime, Dr. Webb proposed to AA that we pilot our proposed version this year, as the back and forth is becoming onerous. Upon consideration, a counter proposal was offered by Dr. Kent where three scenarios would be modeled, by her team as well as ours (in the fall of 2024) based on some additional salary information that would be forthcoming in the (late) Fall. The way they have been doing it (slightly above the mean and higher), the way we proposed (slightly below the mean and higher) and then all at or above the mean. By mean, we are referring to the average departmental evaluation scores as determined during annual faculty evaluations. After thoroughly reviewing those results in full transparency with the Senate, discussions with AA on an appropriate course of action will occur.
4. AL SB 129 – Meetings have taken place around campus throughout the summer to help inform stakeholders of the impact of this new law. Plans related to compliance across locations/division such as the comprehensive USA website, courses, material activities, scholarships, organizations, clubs, offices, positions, etc. have been evaluated for compliance. The internal goal for completion of all changes and program eliminations is September 16th, 2024 as the law officially takes effect October 1st, 2024.

Faculty Concerns:

1. Of primary concern to faculty has been the discussion on R1. A goal date of 2028 has been established for the university to meet the general metrics that are part of this status (<https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/carnegie-classification/carnegie-2025-basic-classifications-fags/>). This process will entail increasing our overall PhD student production to 70 PhDs per year (we are currently ~52/year) and maintaining our R&D expenditures above \$50M/year. In order to determine who meets this threshold, they will use the higher of either a three-year rolling average or the most recent year data. At our current rate of growth, we will ‘naturally’ achieve both of these metrics by 2028. Clearly, the conversation must and will continue about teaching loads both for research active and teaching faculty, compensation, research assistant classification and salaries, as just some examples.

2. Of concern to faculty has been that there have been key academic searches that occur during the months not covered by a typical faculty nine-month contract. We have asked the administration to consider this in scheduling interviews for these key positions, as well as if they do progress to interviews during that non-contract time that they at minimum record presentations and offer zoom as an option to the interviewing group. They agreed and this went forward in that way this summer, allowing some of our traveling faculty to participate in a productive way.

Administrative Updates:

1. The Executive Committee was actively involved in two administrative searches this summer. One in May/June, for the open Vice President of Research and Economic Development that was vacated by the retirement of Dr. Lynne Chronister as well as the search for the Dean of the College of Engineering that took place in June. The search for the VPRED concluded with no offer extended to any of the finalists, and the official search was reopened in mid-July. The goal will be to narrow the field in the search committee early in the semester.
2. Currently, the CoE search appears to be coming to a resolution and the goal of the senior administration/Academic Affairs is to make an announcement on that search by the first week of September.
3. The open VPRED position has been split into several temporary solutions, so as not to impede the work of research or economic development. Dr. Michael Chambers has been appointed Interim VPRED and Chief Economic Development Officer. He is assisted by Dr. Matthew Reichert in maintaining continuity in this office.
4. Earlier in July we asked the Provost to consider a 'course' of training for new and existing chairs. The development process for that training is underway. Faculty Senate will continue to be consulted on the content and development. We have asked for this training to be extended to all mid-level academic managers, as well as some sort of regular coaching for Deans.
5. The process for moving Handbook changes or other items of business through CAD is too slow, and we have mutually agreed to quickly develop a process for managing the time that initiatives spend with each decision-making stakeholder.

Faculty Achievements: We want to start building up a repository of key accomplishments for our colleagues around campus, mainly focused on teaching excellence, innovative research or other essential academic pursuits. As several examples:

1. Dr. Joseph Hair, at the MCOB and director of the PhD programs there, will achieve 500,000 citations in Google Scholar sometime in October. He is currently at 486,987 and

has calculated the rate of citation (his area of work is multivariate analysis so...) as early October. But to be safe. Let's say October.

2. For a further sample of faculty activities:

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/pressreleases/051424goricka.html>

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/pressreleases/060424science.html>

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/pressreleases/072324davids.html>

Future Actions:

1. On August 21st, the first meeting of the Institutional Planning Committee will take place at 8:30am. This committee is charged with evaluating the current university strategic priorities, for potential updates, additions and changes as well as devising a process for changing them to meet the changing needs of all university stakeholders. I have met with Angela Coleman, who is aware of the Senate's clear desire for faculty to feature more prominently in the strategic priorities going forward, and offered that we will be the 'test case' for how to manage the process. Hopefully that will cut a substantial amount time off the change/update process and get faculty needs met more specifically as there will be clear priorities to build metrics upon.