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Dalton State Faculty Senate: Minutes of September 9, 2021, Meeting

Members Present:

Christian Griggs (Senate President), Ali Akdeniz, Karren Bennett, Jacqueline Boals, Alicia Briganti, David Brown (proxy for Laura Tolliver), Amy Burger, Omin Chandler, Cindy Davis, Cecile de Rocher, Carl Gabrini, Nick Gewecke, Tom Gonzalez, John Gullledge, Matt Higgs, Calley Hornbuckle, Leah Howell, Elizabeth Hubbs, Mike Joseph, Clint Kinhead, Jon Littlefield, Luke Manget, Nancy Mason, Annabelle McKie-Voerste, Travis McKie-Voerste, Hussein Mohamed, Jennifer Randall, Tammy Rice, Patrick Ryle, Sharlonne Smith, Caleb Watkins, Lirong Yu, Xinghai Zhao, Margaret Venable (*ex officio*), Bruno Hicks (*ex officio*), Jodi Johnson (guest), Mary Nielsen (guest), Stacie Kilgore (guest), Lisa Peden (guest), Barbara Tucker (guest), Mike D'Itri (guest), Barbara Tucker (guest), Elizabeth Dunaway (guest), Lorraine Gardiner (guest), Lisa Peden (guest), Tammy Byron (guest), Lee Nimmons (guest), Sarita Gale (guest), Susan Eastman (guest), Jean Johnson (guest), Kim Hays (guest), Susan Burran (guest), Gina Kertulis-Tartar (guest), Melissa Whitesell (guest), Catherine Clinard (guest)

I. Call to Order

The meeting of the Senate was convened remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Senate President Christian Griggs called the meeting to order at 3:15pm and established that a quorum was present.

II. Approval of Minutes from Last Senate Meeting (April 8, 2021)

Christian asked for approval of the minutes of the April 8, 2021, meeting; Hussein Mohamed made the motion, and it was seconded by Nancy Mason. The motion was passed via electronic poll.

III. Reports from Officers

- a. Welcome – Christian Griggs, Faculty Senate President reminder all in attendance of the virtual meeting procedures, including staying on mute and using the raise hand feature when wanting to speak whereby Christian will recognize attendees in order. Cameras are not required to be on, especially if it will lead to connection problems. Attendance is taken within Teams, so there is no sign-in sheet, and Alicia Briganti, Faculty Senate Secretary, is taking the minutes. The meeting is not being recorded so that people can feel more comfortable speaking freely. Attendees are welcome to make comments using chat function as well; however, only senate members can see chat. Christian will read any comments made in the chat so that others know what is being said. The chat area is also where Senate members will be voting on measures via online polling. As Christian stated, we are one month into the fall semester, and it is proving to be a challenging semester. We had hopes, as COVID-19 cases declined over the summer, that we would be back closer to normal, but things have turned out very differently. We are back in classroom with COVID still being a significant issue, especially with no real precautions in place, and we will try to address some of the concerns today. Christian appreciates the efforts of communication between faculty and the Senators because it lets us know what we should focus on and how to move forward. Please continue to share concerns with Christian and rest of Executive Committee, as well as your Senate representative. Christian also mentioned that he has been able to talk to Dr. Hicks on several occasions as things have come up, and he appreciates Dr. Hicks's, and others in Academic Affairs, willingness to meet with him and further communicate about these issues.
- b. Parliamentary Procedures—Travis McKie-Voerste, Parliamentarian stated that the main way that we, as a Faculty Senate, do business is via motions. We cannot just have

conversations about issues that are brought up, so a motion must be made for discussion to ensue for any business that needs addressing. Most motions will be on the agenda if we know about them ahead of time, but motions can be brought up during the meetings. Travis clarified that motions are separate from resolutions. If we have a motion that warrants a response from the President of the college, we need to word the motion to include the term “resolution.” A resolution doesn’t necessarily have to be a demand; it could also be one that recognizes contributions of the Student Government Association, for example. It may be helpful in the future, that if you have a specific resolution in mind, to have it in writing so that it can be voted on during the meeting and then passed on to the President. Once any motion is brought up, it needs a second before discussion can ensue and then voted on. Even something like limiting discussion on a particular issue or tabling an issue until the next meeting can be a motion. Something like discussing audio issues that someone may be having is a point of privilege and does not need a motion. If anyone has concerns about procedure not being followed, they can point it out during the meeting.

IV: Reports from Committees

- a. Committee Assignments. Christian state that committees have not met yet this semester. Next week he will contact members of each committee, and explain to Senators their role on these committees, such as organizing the first meeting of the year during which a chair of the committee is elected. Senators are not required to serve as chairs of these committees, but they are responsible for providing a brief committee report at each Senate meeting.

V. New Business

- a. COVID-19. Christian shared his screen to show results of the COVID-19 survey sent out to the faculty earlier this month. There were a total of 147 responses.
 - 80% of respondents support a mask mandate.
 - 69% support a vaccine mandate (or periodically showing a negative COVID test for those who are not vaccinated).
 - 52% support social distancing in classrooms, even if that means having to divide classes.
 - 75% support the ability to change the format of one’s class with the approval of their chair or dean.

Now that we have this information, Christian asked what do we do with it? It is clear faculty want something to be done. The last three weeks are the highest we've had with reported COVID cases on campus. The challenge is that we are very limited in what we can do because of policies mandated by the Board of Regents (BOR). This has been part of the frustration for the past year. What we can do is share with the administration what we would like and ask them to argue for what we want or some flexibility for what we are allowed to do.

Matt Hipps made a motion to discuss this issue, and it was seconded by Carl Gabrini. Matt stated that he had some context from a meeting with the system that may be helpful for this discussion. As the chair of the USG Faculty Council, he had a meeting with Dr. Denley, Dr. Venn and other members of the BOR. Members of the faculty Council voiced faculty concerns from all over the system. They primarily expressed frustration with the fact that it feels as though faculty are being asked to be flexible in a way that puts a significant burden on them while also accommodating students in a way that seems pretty onerous. They also expressed concern that a lack of a COVID-19 policy seems particularly bothersome given the fact that several of the members of the BOR who insist we don't have mask or vaccine mandates have them at their personal workplaces that they run and operate. Dr. Denley and Dr. Venn were very responsive, but their hands are also tied because of the governor's order that does not allow state agencies to mandate masks or vaccines in any way. As we decide what actions to take as a collective body, Dr. Denley did mention that there are faculty who are taking it upon themselves to make choices about modalities and how they are going to offer classes. They have had discussions with Provosts about cracking down on that by disciplining faculty who are making such changes on their own. Dr. Denley offered as a point of caution that, as we bring attention to these issues, especially when they make the news, the national spotlight not only brings attention from those who are concerned that the system is not doing enough, it also brings attention from outside entities that faculty are not doing enough and about how faculty are responding to COVID and behaving in their classes. We need to be aware of all ramifications of the decisions we make. Matt is meeting again with them in two weeks and will inform Christian about what is going on at that time.

Christian opened the floor up for further discussion. He stated we need to decide what action, if any, to take. We could vote on and pass a formal resolution that would be passed on to Dr. Venable and require a response. Because of the BOR policies, she would be forced veto any resolutions involving mask or vaccine mandates, so the purpose of passing such resolutions would be to voice our opinions and concerns and to make her act. We could also organize a petition with our demands and present it to administration, or we could send out an official report with the survey results and highlight the comments in more detail to let them know what we want and invite them to request changes.

Travis McKie-Voerste made a motion for a resolution to mandate mask on campus. After Travis read the prepared resolution, the motion was seconded by Patrick Ryle.

Matt Hipps asked whether Dr. Venable is able to accept a part of resolution without accepting the entirety of the resolution? Christian answered that the bylaws are not overly specific, but he believes she could accept parts of it and veto other parts. After no other discussion, the resolution was voted on and passed via online poll. Christian stated that what this means, according to the bylaws, is that the resolution will be sent to the full faculty for consideration, as well as to Dr. Venable, who will then have a period of time to provide a written response to the resolution.

Christian then stated that the other COVID-related issue that came up is a vaccine requirement. Part of the reason this came up as an issue is that, during the town hall meeting we had prior to the beginning of the semester, a faculty member brought up the fact that the BOR has a policy (4.8 Immunizations) about vaccines during a pandemic. Christian read the policy and mentioned that this policy has not been implemented even after a state of emergency was declared in Georgia. He wanted to bring this matter to the Senate to see how we wanted to respond to this situation. Do we want to address it with another resolution or to figure out another way for this to be implemented? The number of vaccinations in the community is not very high and probably reflects the vaccination rates on campus, but we have no way of knowing.

Matt Hipps asked whether the system could make the argument that COVID-19 is not preventable by immunization; rather it just reduces the likelihood of death or severe illness. Christian said they probably could and that may be partly why it has not been implemented yet, along with other concerns people have about the vaccine.

Annabelle McKie-Voerste made a motion that we follow the BOR policy about mandating vaccines, and it was seconded by Jon Littlefield. Travis McKie-Voerste proposed to amend the motion to make it a resolution instead; he then read the prepared resolution.

Nick Gewecke asked whether there should be a recommended deadline to receive the vaccine if this becomes mandated. And should the deadline be for the first vaccination or both?

Matt Hipps asked what is it that we are wanting from this resolution? Are we asking Dr. Venable to sign on to the notion that the USG is to do something, and does that then get sent to the BOR? Or is this more to make us feel better that Dr. Venable agrees with us? Christian stated that the goal, if this is passed, is to send the message that the faculty at DSC would want a vaccine requirement on campus. John Gullledge stated that the secondary intent, assuming she approves, is that she can then go to the BOR, along with other Presidents, stating that our faculty are in favor of this resolution and force them to respond with reasons why they would or would not make this change.

John Gullledge called for a vote to make the current motion a resolution; it was seconded by Annabelle McKie-Voerste and passed via online poll.

Nicholas Gewecke made the motion to amend the "resolved" portion of the resolution to "Be it resolved that the Dalton State Faculty Senate calls on the USG Board of Regents to enforce BOR Policy 4.8.1 by requiring COVID-19 vaccinations at USG institutions, with appropriate exceptions for conscience-, religious-based, and medical justifications, to be effective January 1, 2022."

This motion was seconded by Jon Littlefield and passed via online poll.

Pat Ryle asked about what we are going to do for students who do not want to get vaccinated. Is this mandate, if passed, going to make a permanent impact on them forever? Will we make accommodations for students who are excluded from campus because they are not vaccinated?

Annabelle McKie-Voerste stated that there are other vaccines that are already mandated to be a student at DSC. She then brought up the issue that we don't have a formal policy on how to handle students who have to miss class because of quarantining due to COVID, and we need one.

Carl Gabrini stated that there was an article in the Dalton State paper in which Dr. Venable was quoted as saying that DSC is prepared to accommodate students needing online instruction. However, faculty were given instructions that a face-to-face class must only be offered face-to-face, so there is some confusion and conflicting information that is being given to faculty versus to the public.

In response to Pat's concern, Travis stated that the resolution includes the language from the BOR which does not seem to preclude students from online instruction. Dr. Hicks stated that nothing prevents faculty from having course content online for students who must miss class due to quarantine. What the system office really wants is to make sure faculty do not take a face-to-face class and fully convert it to an online class without permission to do so. He also stated that they are considering using funds to create C session classes to help students who get really far behind be able to stay on track by enrolling in a C session class. The reality is that there are challenges out there. Dr. Hicks really wants faculty to talk to their chairs and deans about special circumstances and temporary online instruction when it is warranted. Faculty should also not turn a face-to-face class into a hybrid class without permission.

Annabelle McKie-Voerste further clarified the potential consequences of not being vaccinated. If they are vaccinated, they'll be less sick. We have some students whose symptoms are still there even after two weeks. Some students are so sick that they cannot do work or attend virtual lectures. There are others who have had to quarantine multiple times, and these students are missing weeks of class. We could accommodate them to an extent, but it's unfair to pass them on to the next class when they may not have mastered the content because of missing roughly half a semester. But these are the challenges and consequences we'll have to continue to deal with if students do not get vaccinated.

Mike Joseph pointed out that there are other colleges and universities that are requiring vaccines. But these tend to be in places where vaccination rates are higher to begin with.

Jon Littlefield acknowledged that it seems clear this is not going to do anything to convince the USG to implement their policy; it's really a signal that we're making as Faculty Senate. The role of Dalton State is an academic institution. For the people who are getting misinformation about the vaccine, by us taking a strong stance, it could potentially push some people who are hesitant to get vaccinated. He is sensitive to Pat Ryle's concern about marginalizing students, but the stronger the resolution that we pass, the more likely it's going to positively signal to people in the community, even if the BOR doesn't do anything.

The resolution for a vaccine mandate (to implement BOR rule 4.8.1) passed via online poll. Both resolutions related to COVID-19 passed. These resolutions will be sent on to the full faculty and to President Venable to get her response. We will consider her response at the next Senate meeting in October.

- b. Academic Calendar. Christian stated that every year it seems as if issues related to the academic calendar pop up. There is a feeling that we have longer semesters than other USG institutions. There is no official role of faculty in setting the academic calendar, which is created by Jodi Johnson. He did acknowledge that she has come to Senate meetings and sought feedback from faculty about the calendar. However, Christian

wants to address the lingering concerns about the calendar, so he wants to create an ad hoc committee to address these issues. Matt Hipps moved a motion to create an ad hoc committee to address academic calendar issues, and it was seconded by Nick Gewecke. The motion passed via online poll. Christian will send an email to the Senate next week to seek volunteers to serve on the committee, with the goal of having it completed by the end of the year.

- c. Other New Business. Annabelle McKie-Voerste made a motion for a formal policy from DSC administration regarding faculty expectations for how to handle students who miss class due to COVID quarantine. The motion was seconded by Travis and passed via online poll.

VI. Announcements

- a. Next Faculty Senate meeting on Thursday, October 14 at 3:15pm via Teams
- b. Other announcements. There were no other announcements.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia Briganti, Senate Secretary