



ROBERT HOLLAND FACULTY SENATE

Uncorrected Minutes of May 6, 2022

The Robert Holland Faculty Senate of Mississippi State University held a special called meeting in Bettersworth Auditorium at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, May 6, 2022.

Members absent and excused were Jenna Altomonte, Beth Baker, Thu Dinh, Alexis Gregory, Amanda Stone, and Kimberly Wood.

Members absent were Rachel Allison, Andrew Jarosz, Santanu Kundu, and Sorina Popescu.

The meeting was called to order by Senate President Rebecca Robichaux-Davis.

President Robichaux-Davis said the general faculty voted overwhelmingly in favor of adding the additional faculty tracks and ranks to the Faculty Charter. This meeting was called as a result of this vote. As a specially called meeting of the Faculty Senate, the agenda is limited to the consideration of one item. The item under consideration today is the adoption of edits to Section V of the Faculty Handbook which is the Promotion & Tenure section.

GUESTS

Dr. David Shaw, Provost and Executive Vice President

Dr. Shaw asked the senators to give themselves a round of applause. He said the vote this week was a monumental step forward for this institution. Dr. Shaw thanked the senators for all of their hard work.

Dr. Shaw said as the senators begin the discussion of the revision to Section V, he would like to stress that Faculty Senate is a representative body. He said the senators need to think about the proposed revisions from the perspective of the constituents they represent. He said if we get too much in the weeds, what will work in one department or college may or may not work in others. Dr. Shaw said his encouragement to the senators is to take the job they have today

very seriously to make sure that we give enough clear guidance so the departments and colleges can edit their documents, but not so constrictive that it prevents a department or college from doing the job they need to do. He said a department in Veterinary Medicine which has a majority of clinical faculty does not need to be artificially constrained by what is passed today even though it might work really well in the Department of English. Dr. Shaw said in almost every case, the senators represent colleges which will have faculty across the spectrum of the available ranks. He said he will remain in the audience in case the senators have any questions which he may be able to answer.

Senator Tagert asked Dr. Shaw to give an update on the campus-wide evaluation form and how that fits with the edits of Section V being undertaken today. She also asked for an update on the recommendation from the task force which asked for training or continuing education for administrators on how to perform annual evaluations. Dr. Shaw replied that the task force report is being examined to determine how to best implement the recommendations. He said his goal is to have the new form finalized and ready to be used for the next review cycle beginning in the fall. He said the passing of the ranks and the work the Senate is undertaking today will most likely have an impact on the form, so it is probably a good thing that it has not been finalized at this point. Dr. Shaw said deans and department heads will receive training on the new form. He said this training will focus on two things. First will be to make sure that faculty are being fairly evaluated against the position description they were hired into. The second item will deal with the results of the other task force that looked at the evaluation of teaching and teaching excellence. He said student evaluations cannot be looked at as the sole documentation for teaching excellence. Dr. Shaw said we have a lot of work yet to be done on this front and Jim Dunne along with President Robichaux-Davis and others have had several conversations about how we need to move forward. Dr. Shaw said one unfortunate thing is that during the task force efforts on this, we had one of the most nationally recognized experts in this arena scheduled to speak on campus and due to Covid it had to be cancelled. He said he is looking into lining something up with this expert in the early fall.

PENDING BUSINESS

President Robichaux-Davis said the item of business for today's specially called meeting is the edits proposed by the Executive Committee to Section V, Promotion & Tenure, of the Faculty Handbook. The proposed edits were included in the agenda for the April meeting. The edits included in today's agenda are the same with two exceptions. The additional edits were included due to recent changes in IHL's involvement in tenure. President Robichaux-Davis said the change to the tenure process is that the final tenure decision now rests with the institution's President or Chancellor. Line 837 and 869 contain the additional edits which

change “recommend tenure” to “award tenure” and remove the IHL Board of Trustees and remove “on campus”.

President Robichaux-Davis said the primary edits are the addition of two new sections on pages 5-7 and 12-15. There are other edits throughout the document, but they are not as substantial. Most of the other edits are just cleaning up existing language and clarifying where the new ranks impacted what was there.

Senator Grala said the university is named in three different ways in the document. He said it is referred to as “Mississippi State University”, “Mississippi State”, and “MSU”. Senator Grala suggested that the naming of the university be consistent throughout the document. President Robichaux-Davis said the name used would be made consistent throughout the document.

Senator Williams said when Instructor ranks are listed, and it talks about Instructor rank 1, it says “a faculty member with a minimum of a Master’s degree or higher who possesses teaching credentials appropriate for the position and the potential for successful performance...”. He said in his department they will hire someone who has a Master’s degree in another field with at least 18 hours within the field of the position. Senator Williams said he wants to make sure that the wording is appropriate for that case. He said on the face it seems good but he wonders if “as determined by the department” should be added after “appropriate for the position”. President Robichaux-Davis said she believes it is a SACSCOC accreditation requirement that in order to teach they have to have certain credentials. She said she did not think the proposed language would harm us, but she does not believe it is necessary since the 18-hour requirement is covered by SACSCOC.

Senator Freeman said that in the portion describing the make-up of the departmental P&T committee it says tenure and non-tenure track. He asked if it should say professional-track. President Robichaux-Davis replied that it should say professional-track and it will be changed.

Senator Pelaez asked why the language of ranks is used. President Robichaux-Davis replied that when looking at the composition of the University P&T Committee, the Executive Committee found that a term was needed to describe all of the ranks which are at the same level such as Instructor II, Associate Clinical Professor, Associate Professor, and so on. She said the decision was made to use ranks which could describe all the different positions at the same level.

Senator Chamberlain asked why “or higher” was included in the earlier citation by Senator Williams. He asked if the intention was to allow departments to require higher than a Master’s degree. President Robichaux-Davis said she could not speak to the intent of the language selected. She said the language was pulled directly from the previously existing Instructor requirements.

Senator Priddy said there are additional occurrences of “non-tenure track” in the document beyond what was previously mentioned. President Robichaux-Davis said the document will be searched to replace all instances non-tenure track with professional-track.

Senator Williams said he would like to address something held over from the original document. He said there is a statement that says you cannot participate at more than one level. The word participate can be interpreted in different ways. He said he believes the intent is that you cannot vote at more than one level. President Robichaux-Davis said she believes the intent is to mean you cannot vote at more than one level. Senator Pelaez said her department does not allow members of higher-level committees to participate in discussion at the department level to get two different perspectives. The member of the higher-level committee may know the outcome of the vote and why, but they do not participate in the discussion. She said if participate is changed to vote it would negatively impact the departments that interpret participate literally.

Senator Grala suggested using the word serve. Senator Williams said serve is very ambiguous and participate is ambiguous enough. Senator Rai said he believes participate is better than vote. He said a person could be involved who has a strong opinion. Although they do not vote directly, they can have an impact on the outcome. He said, in a way, that person could have the opportunity to affect the outcome twice. Senator Spurlin said he agrees with Senator Rai’s comment and would even make it stronger by saying neither participate nor vote. He said he agrees that some people have strong personalities and can strongly impact the outcome even without a vote. Senator Pelaez said this debate has been undertaken in the College of Arts & Sciences Promotion & Tenure Committee. One thought is that if they can participate but not vote they can give the perspective of why the committee went in the direction they did. Others say that by participating twice the person gets a two-fold opportunity to intervene in the process and could create a biased assessment. She said she believes it is best to leave participate and not change it to vote to allow the department to further restrict it if they choose. President Robichaux-Davis asked Senator Pelaez if neither participate nor vote would be acceptable. Senator Pelaez replied that it would be acceptable to her.

Senator Grala said there is another issue if the word vote is used. He said you could have a faculty member who serves on the P&T Committee but cannot vote on the promotion of a faculty member with a higher rank. President Robichaux-Davis said this is speaking to more than one level. Senator Williams said he has seen cases where the college representative has requested to be present during the departmental meeting to gain context for when they have to advocate for the candidate at the college level. Senator Zuckerman said she agrees with Senator Williams’ statement. She said she has experienced the same issue in her department. She said she believes observation at the departmental level without participation or voting can

be very beneficial when the college representative has to speak to non-traditional packets. Senator Zuckerman suggested that it be worded “may observe but neither participate nor vote”. Senator Williams said he would accept Senator Zuckerman’s change.

Senator Haynes asked if at the college level we need to specify that they can only vote at the college level. She said right now they can choose to vote at the department level or the college level. They will have to speak at the college level so we would have to specify that they vote at the college level. Senator Haynes suggested the language be “a faculty member serving on the college promotion & tenure committee may observe but neither participate nor vote in a candidate’s promotion or tenure review at the department level.”

Senator Wang said promotion & tenure committees should be run independently regardless of the level. If a faculty member is serving on the college committee, they should not participate at all in the department committee. She said this change does not make sense to her. Senator Grala said Senator Wang makes a valid point. He said at the department level you evaluate the candidate portfolio, make a decision, and prepare the letters. At the college level the committee evaluates the candidate and makes sure that they were evaluated fairly at the departmental level. It is a valid point that the discussion at the department level could somehow influence the vote at the college level.

Senator Breazeale said by saying that they may be allowed to observe but not participate nor vote would allow the departments to choose how to handle it in their department. Senator Spurlin said this would protect the committee but not the candidate. Senator Grala said in departments who do not operate as a committee of the whole this would work. In departments with a committee of the whole, the original language would preclude any faculty member in the department from serving on the college committee. Senator Pelaez said she believes that observation can influence decisions which would break the independence of the two committees. Senator Zuckerman said she understands Senator Pelaez’s concern, however, if observation is eliminated at the departmental level for the college representative it would do a disservice to the candidate. She said the college representative would be ignorant of the packet and the general consensus of the faculty in the department as to the packet and application. Senator Spurlin asked what more could be gained by observing over seeing the vote and a good set of minutes from the discussion. He said he understands that the political power of some individuals, when they sit in a room and others know what their thoughts are, may intimidate some people and influence the vote.

Senator Rai said he believes we have to go on the principle that one person should participate or have influence at only one level. He said the role of a departmental representative on a college committee is to represent the department as a whole. He said the person would bring the knowledge base as to what the program is and what the expectations are since they would

have gone through the process themselves. He said he believes they have sufficient information to comment in a meaningful and constructive way without having observed the departmental discussions. There is also a department head report and a committee report to help inform the person. Senator Zuckerman said she chaired a departmental promotion and tenure committee meeting for a third-year review in the past few days in which half of the meeting was spent discussing the strength of the candidate's publications and whether or not they met the criteria. The candidate had a strong packet and the discussion arose due to one of the committee members being in another field whose publishing standards were different. The committee member questioning the publications also serves as the college committee representative. She said within departments where there are a lot of diversity, specialization, and sub-field and field specific differences the college representative may not know what the requirements are in a candidate's specific field. Senator Pelaez said she understands that there are departments who allow observation, and it works for them. She said she would like to find language that would allow ambiguity. Senator Grala said this issue seems like it may need a separate consideration in the future when senators are prepared to discuss it.

Senator Williams made a motion to amend the document to say: "A faculty member serving on the college promotion & tenure committee may observe but neither participate nor vote on a candidate's promotion and tenure review at the department level." Senator Zuckerman seconded the motion. The motion to amend passed by a majority hand vote.

Senator Freeman asked if there will be guidance released once this is approved. He said he is getting questions about what the best practices should be for departmental and college committees moving forward. President Robichaux-Davis recognized Dr. David Shaw to address Senator Freeman's question. Dr. Shaw said he believes we will be consumed this fall with addressing this. The task force tried to strike a balance of giving enough guidance for the departments especially and the colleges to a lesser extent. We have to grapple with what does representation mean because we do not need to be creating a situation in which people are having their packet evaluated by people that are not representing them. Dr. Shaw said this will be different between departments. He said he has already been in discussion with President Robichaux-Davis and President-Elect Barrett about the need for ongoing engagement as we move into the fall semester. He said he is not sure he is fully envisioning the scope of the issues that we will be grappling with, but he believes there is some really good foundational guidance that has been drafted in this document to help set the tone for this conversation.

Senator Pelaez said in lines 630 to 632 it discusses external reviews for instructors. She asked if it could say that the external reviewers are not instructors. President Robichaux-Davis replied that she believed it should be up to the departments to determine this. She said the intention is to leave it as broad as we can but with some guidance.

Senator Sutton asked that his/her be changed to their throughout the document. She said it is more gender inclusive and less clunky. President Robichaux-Davis said the edits would be made.

Senator Pelaez asked if the earlier amendment changes the fact that the college representative cannot be the chair of the departmental committee. President Robichaux-Davis replied that the amendment does not affect this.

Senator Tagert said she wants to make sure that after these changes are made the annual review form reflects this document and vice versa. She said the discussion of teaching in this document does not capture the type of teaching done in Extension. She said she likes the language included in the annual evaluation form and feels it captures all units on campus.

Senator Pelaez said there is still a reference to the University President recommending tenure. President Robichaux-Davis replied that legal counsel will edit any references to the IHL Board and the awarding of tenure as is required.

The motion to adopt Section V, Promotion & Tenure, of the Faculty Handbook as amended passed by unanimous hand vote.

President Robichaux-Davis said the next step in the process of approval of this document will be to send the accepted version to Dr. Shaw so he can send it to the University Promotion & Tenure Committee for their review and feedback. Once Section V is approved by Dr. Shaw and Dr. Keenum, they will notify colleges and departments so they can begin discussions to modify their promotion & tenure documents.

Senator Fincher made a motion to adjourn. Senator Banik seconded the motion.

The motion to adjourn passed by unanimous hand vote at 3:13 p.m.

Submitted for correction and approval.

Stephanie King, Secretary

Jason Cory, Administrative Assistant II