

FACULTY SENATE COMMUNICATIONS REPORT | 4 February 2016 meeting

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OVERVIEW

The 2015-16 Faculty Senate held its tenth regular meeting on 4 February 2016, from 3:45 to 5:35 pm in the Riggle Room of ADUC. The bulk of this meeting was spent on an extensive discussion of the looming university funding crisis; this discussion was sparked by the Provost's report, which was itself largely focused on the budget. Additional discussion (including contributions from the Provost) focused on the administrative response "with stipulations" to the revised PAC-22 (see also the previous Communications Report); this discussion culminated in the passage of a resolution. Aside from these major points of business, there were a few small announcements from the Chair and reports from a few (but not all, due to time constraints) of the Senate subcommittees.

BAD NEWS, EVERYONE

The Provost focused his official report largely on the looming university funding crisis posed by Governor Matt Bevin's recent budget proposal. The Provost described the budget news as a "shock," and went on to state that the proposed cuts to higher education funding at MSU and across the state could be "catastrophic." To briefly recap, Governor Bevin intends an immediate 4.5% cut to MSU's general fund appropriation for the current 2015-16 fiscal year (FY) followed by a 9% cut for the new fiscal year beginning this July. The governor's long-term budget plans call for continuing cuts over time and steadily increasing the amount of the university's appropriation tied to the new performance funding metrics. The Provost stated that the President has been in Frankfort practically every day lobbying on MSU's behalf and attempting to reverse the proposed cuts. Among other measures, the President has met personally with the governor, although according to the Provost, that meeting was not productive.

The immediate cut for the current fiscal year is particularly problematic as most of the money has already been spent, and it also comes on top of an existing shortfall in tuition revenue for this year (due to enrollment being slightly down from projections). Governor Bevin has magnanimously allowed for the possibility of returning the 2015-16 FY money within a year or so rather than immediately. The possibility also remains that these higher education funding cuts may be ameliorated by legislative input, as the governor's proposed budget is not necessarily the final word. The legislature will put forward its budget proposal in April, although it is important to note that the governor can use a line-item veto to selectively delete appropriations. Nevertheless, the consensus points to at least some degree of funding reduction, and the only question remaining is just how severe it will be.

The Provost spoke repeatedly about the need for the university to consider carefully how it should proceed in dealing with this crisis. To paraphrase, there will be difficult choices to make, and unpleasant actions to take, but MSU will still be standing when the dust settles. It is incumbent upon us, the university community, to decide what we will look like in a few years' time. To that end, the President is, as announced in his campus-wide email, forming a budget task force. This group will include the President's Cabinet, the College Deans, a representative from Faculty Senate (which will be Chair Adams) and from Staff Congress, as well as a student representative. The budget task force will be charged with the work, described by the Provost above, of evaluating budget priorities and making recommendations for those unpleasant actions. According to the Provost, all aspects of the MSU budget will be subject to review, and essentially all options are on the table, at least at this early stage.

During the budget discussion, several questions were posed to the Provost by Senators, mainly related to what the budget priorities might be and where the inevitable hits will be felt. One such question regarded the recently reported news (after the governor's budget was announced) that MSU's head football coach was given a contract extension, and whether this was appropriate in light of the present situation. The Provost's response was to state that the President believes strongly in athletics as an important part of our identity as a regional public university. Another question regarded whether the administration would be opening itself up for potential cuts and/or personnel reductions. The Provost responded that, despite the sentiment expressed by the Senator, MSU is not administratively top-heavy and that, while the administration could undergo reductions, so could the faculty. Obviously, things are very unsettled at the moment; be on the lookout for much more information to come, especially once the task force begins its work.

A question was also asked about the recent legislative rumblings aimed at freezing state university tuition. There has been legislation proposed to lock tuition for four years, but at least according to the President (via the Provost), it has not been well-received. Further, Governor Bevin is not opposed to tuition increases, in accordance with the ideological position that if students want a college education, they should have to make an investment and largely pay their own way.

The other major focus of discussion in the budget area was the potential for university students, faculty, staff, alumni, etc., to protest the funding cuts. There seemed to be a general sentiment that faculty should, en masse, write letters, send emails, and place phone calls to their state representatives, urging them to resist these cuts, and that students should be encouraged to do the same. Senator LaFleur in particular also mentioned the potential power of faculty and staff as a unified voting bloc. To these ends, the university has established a webpage (<http://www.moreheadstate.edu/fundthesolution/>) which can be used to email state representatives. The person composing the message enters his or her zip code and the system will automatically add the appropriate legislators as recipients. Concerned faculty members are encouraged to take advantage of this and any other means to contact their state government.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE PAC[-22]

Building on discussion relayed in the previous communications report, the Senate revisited the issue of PAC-22 revision, particularly the administrative stipulations in response to the PAC-22 version passed by the Senate on 19 November 2015. As mentioned previously, the administration rejected the increased timeframes for an accused faculty member to initially respond to a “Notice of Intent” and produce a formal written response if necessary (10 and 15 days, respectively, in the reconciled version versus 20 and 30 days in the November 2015 Senate-approved version). Essentially, the administration intends to revert back to the 10 and 15 day windows agreed to by the Reconciliation Committee. Although the administration did accept numerous minor grammatical and factual corrections, it was noted that they rejected the only substantive change made (i.e., the increased timeframes).

Chair Adams and Senator Carlson, both members of the Reconciliation Committee, stated that they were not really cognizant of the timeframe issue during the reconciliation process, and that it wasn’t a point of contention during those negotiations. Rather, they became convinced that the longer timeframes were needed during debate, sparked by Senator McCormick, on the reconciled version last term. Obviously, the rest of the Senate also became convinced as well, ultimately voting to lengthen the timeframes.

The Provost, being still present, was asked to justify the reversion to the shorter timeframes. His response was that there are a number of parties besides the accused faculty member who are affected by this process and that shorter timeframes are warranted in consideration of those parties. He also made oblique reference to a previous disciplinary incident under PAC-22 which apparently dragged on, becoming a very long and painful process. In short, it would seem that the administration is concerned with moving the disciplinary process along as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The President intends to take the “concur with stipulations” version (i.e., the reconciled version with the minor language clean-ups but the shorter timeframes) to the Board of Regents, possibly at the next quarterly business meeting on 18 March. At this point, the only recourse available to the Senate is to pass a formal resolution expressing discontent. To that end, Senator Sharp made an official motion for such a resolution. After a relatively brief debate over the precise wording, the Senate voted on and approved the following motion:

“The Faculty Senate resolves that, in the interest of fairness, the dates for the accused to respond to a Notice of Intent should be lengthened to 20 business days in line 144 and 30 business days in line 157 of the administration’s version of PAC-22. These lengthened time frames match what is articulated in the Senate-approved version of PAC-22.”

This motion will be routed to the President along with an accompanying statement from Chair Adams clarifying the reason, namely the concern over accused faculty having adequate time to consider their options and find appropriate legal counsel for the Senate passing the resolution. This accompanying statement was requested by the Provost. The resolution and accompanying statement are available on the Faculty Senate Blackboard shell. Faculty Regent Berglee also stated that, assuming PAC-22 is on the agenda for BoR approval, he will be able to mention the resolution as part of its discussion.

SUBCOMMITTEE TIME

Governance: Senator Simpson announced that the annual university committee interest survey is being finalized, with distribution to faculty occurring sometime around the middle of this month.

Evaluations: Senator McBrayer provided an update on the work and future plans of his subcommittee, having finally had the chance to meet the group. He requested that, if any faculty members have a copy of an “Are We Making Progress?” survey

(hereafter referred to as AWMP) more recent than 2006 (which is the most recent version he has), to please let him know. The subcommittee intends to use AWMP as a starting point for their own survey aimed at evaluating the general mood of faculty and, more specifically, what faculty would like to see Senate working on. Senator McBrayer also mentioned that his subcommittee had the idea to include a representative from the administrative side as an observer in the process of preparing said survey. The goal here would be to give the administration “buy-in” on the survey to counter the criticism that last spring’s survey targeted them unfairly. The Provost suggested Jill Ratliff as a possibility for this role. During discussion of the forthcoming survey, some Senators expressed a desire that it include questions evaluating the performance of the College Deans, and potentially other academic administrators. The ensuing debate, which included helpful input from the Provost, revealed that evaluating Deans and other administrators is a thorny issue that will have to be looked at in more detail by the subcommittee.

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Constitutional questions: At their most recent meeting, the Executive Council had some discussion over whether the Faculty Senate Constitution is being strictly followed at present, particularly with respect to Senate membership and election rules. To summarize, it was decided that, while enforcement has certainly been lax at least in recent times, it would be counterproductive to take corrective actions mid-year. Instead, the goal should be to turn over a new leaf heading into the next academic year, and ensure that all constitutional rules are strictly enforced moving forward.

More on the budget task force: As mentioned earlier in this report, Chair Adams will be serving as the faculty representative on the new budget task force being organized by the President. She expressed a desire for open communication with the faculty community during this process. The possibility of fora, either virtually on the Faculty Senate Blackboard shell or in-person, was raised; to wit, a discussion board for budget comments has now been created on the Faculty Senate Blackboard shell. If faculty members have any additional ideas to facilitate such communication, they are encouraged to contact Chair Adams.