

Faculty Senate Polls of Senators and Departments: The Faculty “Voice”

October 20, 2018

Introduction

On March 11, 2018, a message was forwarded to Faculty Senate from the Department of Agriculture at Southeast. This message asked,

“In your opinion or your perception of the faculty senate members that you serve what are the five most important issues that need to be addressed to provide the faculty senate its ‘voice’ in supporting the faculty? “

Since this suggestion was received so late in the 52nd Senate session, it was forwarded to the 53rd session for consideration. The 53rd Senate Executive Committee took up this challenge and decided to use this as a foundation from which to gather a much broader base of feedback, by extending the invitation to the entire Southeast faculty.

Methodology

At the first general session of the fall semester, on September 5, 2018, a session traditionally open to the entire university community, note cards were distributed with the invitation to respond anonymously to the following prompt: “What are the five most important issues that need to be addressed to provide Faculty Senate its ‘voice’ in supporting the faculty?”

Responses were collected up by the Faculty Senate Administrative Assistant and delivered to the Faculty Senate Chair for analysis. Out of approximately 50 Senators and guests, 14 returned cards with responses, including at least one or two senior administration guests. Responses were analyzed using the constant comparative techniques of grounded theory as described by Creswell (2009) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). Each response was analyzed to determine irreducible content units, which were open-coded and sorted to identify a minimum number of common categories. The results were compiled and shared with the Faculty Senate at the next scheduled meeting on September 14, 2018.

The Faculty Senate agreed to extend this poll invitation to the faculty at large, using the same reporting method at the next department meeting, or by email communication with individual Senators if this was not possible. Responses were to be delivered anonymously to the Faculty Senate Chair at the next Senate meeting on October 3.

Although most Senators delivered the original response cards, three returned compiled summaries. Several Senators indicated that their department still had not met for the month, so provisions were made to extend the period of data collection, to be finished by the October 17 Senate meeting. There was no sharing of ongoing results until the extension expired. The initial data collection period yielded 74 individual response cards plus 12 compiled responses. The extended collection period yielded 96 individual response cards plus 3 compiled responses. The total sample population (for both polls) was 144 individuals. In 2016, before faculty retirement incentives and the recent slow-down in rehiring, there were 410 permanent full-time faculty positions at Southeast (https://www.semo.edu/pdf/ir_factbook_17_18.pdf, p. 101). Taking this census as a minimum benchmark, and assuming that only full-time faculty members participate in departmental meetings, the response rate for the combined Faculty Senate Department Poll was at least 35.1% of the total full-time

faculty population (notably higher than the 31% rate of faculty response for the 2018 Chronicle “Great Colleges” survey).

Results

The results of the initial poll of Senators and guests are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Poll results: Senators and Guests, September 5, 2018 ($n = 14$)

Communication (14)

With Administration (5)

- Representation of faculty issues and concerns with administration
- Better communication regarding changes (reorganization?)
- Timely, accurate communication throughout the organization structure
- Build a working relationship among colleges and departments

With Senate (4)

- Better training for new senators and committee chairs
- More effective feedback from faculty (open forums?)
- Time in Senate to discuss department issues

Civility (3)

- “Academic bullying”
- Educate and enforce consistent application of Faculty Handbook
- Development/orientation to college mission

Shared governance, more effective advocacy for faculty (9)

- Advocate for more tenure track lines
- Advocate for departments
- Faculty representation on Board of Regents
- Oversight of implementation (and streamlining) of “faculty processes”
- Discuss unionization

Faculty morale/value faculty/recognize faculty success (6)

Workload fairness (6-12 – many times repeated on the same card)

- Shortchanged credit for contact hours
- Increased teaching loads without additional credit
- Credit for experiential learning
- Duties outside of classroom

Salary/health care/benefits (4)

- Merit pay increase
- Salary equity between colleges and departments
- Competitive salaries

Recruitment (2)

- Diverse faculty, staff and students
- Time for recruiting with increased responsibilities

Role of research/creative activity in P&T
Efficient use of limited resources
Campus technology resources
Safety (mental health issues, gun laws, etc.)
Electronic dossier
Student evaluation issue

Responses from department faculty were analyzed using the same constant comparative analysis methods described above, independently of the original pilot poll of Senators and their guests at the September 5 meeting. No effort was made to fit these responses into the categories or groupings identified in the pilot survey. The poll of the departmental faculty was analyzed as a separate data set.

Significant differences were immediately evident, both in the identification of categories of concern and the specificity of issues noted by each group. The initial poll of Senators and guests on September 5 identified broad areas of communication, faculty role in shared governance, and morale, particularly as related to workload and compensation. The poll of faculty members at the department level resulted in many more areas of concern, most of which were detailed with concrete focus (see Table 2). However, even a superficial level of interpretation would suggest that a majority of these concrete issues could easily be read as communication and shared governance concerns. This secondary interpretation has been noted in Table 2 with the abbreviations “SG” for shared governance and “Comm” for communication.

Table 2. Poll Results: Faculty Departments ($n = 130$)

Faculty Issues

Workload (98) [In many cases, mentioned specifically in conjunction with compensation]

- SG – doing more with less (17)
- SG – non-teaching essentials, advising, service hours (10)
- SG – overload/covering for open positions (7)
- SG – enrollment caps/overlarge classes (6)
- SG – inequities between colleges and departments (4)
- SG – mandated administrative tasks and training/paperwork (3)
- SG – equity in field/clinical/lab supervision (4)
- SG – recruitment expectations (3)
- SG – credit for experiential learning (3)
- SG – hiring freeze (redistributing workload, extra burdens) (3)
- SG – empty faculty lines will not be filled (3)
- SG – graduate faculty workload credit (2)
- SG – credit hour balancing/balancing between semesters (2)
- SG – change to 4-4 teaching load (1); 3-3 course load for TT faculty (2)
- SG – grad assistants to support faculty (2)
- SG – lack of department control over clinical loads (2)
- SG – (high?) “compared to other universities”
- SG – reduced load for new faculty
- SG – RNTT workload

SG – burden of data processing for reports shifted to faculty

Compensation (78) [in many cases mentioned specifically in conjunction with workload]

- salary and benefits (20)
- health care (cost and quality of insurance) (17)
- no raise/COLA in X years (13)
- inequities between colleges/departments (6)
- salary compression and inversion (5)
- inequities in per diem allowance (4)
- competitive RNTT/part-time faculty pay (3)
- faculty “rewards”/free admission to school sponsored events (2)
- compensation for advisees, non-load courses, etc.
- equity study due every 5 years
- “salary equity” (generic comment)
- compensation for research and experiential learning
- “thank you” marketing materials to reward external field/clinical partners

Recruitment and retention of faculty (37)

- retaining experienced, highly qualified faculty (5)
- lack of funds– quality, timeliness, and support for faculty hiring (4)
- cost and time spent on recruiting (2)
- SG – centralization of faculty hiring decisions (2)– promote diversity (2)
- Comm – encourage sabbatical, esp. for newly tenured faculty to avoid burnout (2)
- Comm – lack of support for reassignment requests (2)
- use of part-time faculty to cover needed classes (2)
- Comm – research and collaboration opportunities
- Comm – interaction with local industry
- Comm – faculty internship opportunities
- Comm – high burden/little recognition for teachers of first-year courses
- Comm – high turnover– “jobs on the line if student’s aren’t happy”)
- SG – “decisions about (hiring of) academics made by non-academics”
- mentorship for TT faculty (writing cohorts, workload, research time)
- SG – social events & networking opportunities
- promotion opportunities for faculty at regional campuses
- lack of focus on faculty retention relative to student retention

Faculty morale (26) [Explicit use of the word “morale”]

- burnout (2)
- “lack of respect” from President and Provost (2)
- SG – general mistreatment of faculty
- SG – risk of “mass exodus” at the end of the year
- SG – “ineptness of middle management”

PD (21)

- funds/support for faculty development, esp. for junior faculty (10)
- excessive requirements for filing expense reports (ChromeRiver) (3)
- more travel funds (2)

- Comm – sharing best teaching practice
- pooling/allocation of funds by college, department, etc.
- international opportunities
- 70% reimbursement for doctoral studies at school of choice
- SG – quality standards for publishing
- peer mentoring for new faculty

Tenure and promotion requirements (8)

- SG – clarification of requirements, timeline for new units (2)
- SG – keep timeline for post-prof merit intact (2)
- SG – recognition of differences between fields
- SG – consistency between departments
- SG – importance of department control of standards
- SG – Merit requirement time-consuming and stressful

Teaching assignments (5)

- SG – reductions in summer stipends or access to summer classes (3)
- SG – criteria for chair decisions (seniority, qualifications, course authorship) (2)

Advocacy on labor issues (5)

- SG – part-time/adjunct faculty representation
- SG – collective bargaining
- SG – stability of employment
- SG – RNTT job security, ability to voice complaints
- SG – strong faculty advocate

Administrative Leadership

Transparency and confidence Issues (38)

- SG – [explicit mention of] shared governance/"imbalance of power" (6)
- SG – slow decision-making at the top/overburdened leadership (4)
- SG – changing standards/arbitrary decision-making "in crisis"/lack of continuity (5)
- replace Dean of Graduate Studies/Provost/university studies leadership (5)
- SG – faculty voice not heeded in decisions, "president listening to faculty" (4)
- SG – top-heavy administration, too few faculty (2)
- SG – follow Faculty Handbook (2)
- SG – "some colleges viewed as less valuable/respected than other colleges" (2)
- SG – President's "covert anti-faculty agenda"; "general culture of disruption" (2)
- no confidence vote in President
- Comm – "broken promises"
- SG – President micromanaging..."his" university "to do with as he sees fit"
- Comm – meetings with President and Provost do not result in meaningful changes
- Comm – "President's apparent lack of concern" about needed faculty hires
- sudden reversal of previous decisions causing undue hardships on departments
- SG – Presidential inaction on stalled Senate bills
- SG – lack of faculty input in senior administrative appointments
- hire high quality executive staff, Provost and Deans

- Comm – disorganization (“classrooms, events, etc.”)
- SG – lack of awareness from upper administration regarding reorg details
- SG – “lack of support for graduate education”
- “Poor decision making is rampant among chairs and deans”

Budget decisions (14)

- SG – balance need and benefits/transparency (5) (general decision-making, 2); (Support Net, 3)
- SG – cost cutting; “no funds for resources” (2)
- SG – accountability for administrative spending
- money to recruit quality students– difficulty of purchasing
- “firing dozens of staff” and still hiring an Associate Provost
- SG – strategic revenue growth
- SG – program funding
- SG –academic priorities sacrificed for “other” budgets

University image (14)

- Comm – beer bong/Responsible Redhawks/party school image (6)
- Comm – name change for university (5) [especially, mentioned by one department]
- Comm – leadership seems to promote “community college culture” (2)
- Comm – beer bong responses from President and Board out of touch/double standard

Vison, mission, strategic direction, marketing (12)

- Comm – “money making instead of education”; too much power in budget and finance (3)
- Comm – update mission statement (2)
- Comm – related to policies
- Comm – strategic gaps and glitches in transition (reorg)
- Comm – “crisis management all the time”
- Comm – “quality teaching” vs. “quantity teaching”
- Comm – “lack of respect for being a teaching institution”
- Comm – academic program diversity should be a priority

Clarify university structure (5)

- Comm – department autonomy (3)
- Comm – update handbook references
- Comm – elevate status of academic affairs

Communication

(Explicit mention of) Communication (25)

- Comm – faculty and administration (10)
- Comm – top-down communication causes resentment (4)
- Comm – poor communication, lack of faculty input in changes/reorganization (3)
- Comm – faculty and students (2)
- Comm – request special meeting with President and Board to share faculty perspective
- Comm – more open discussion with President
- Comm – need clear process for filing complaints about “higher-ups”
- Comm – civility

- Comm – process for reporting bullying/hostility/incivility in workplace
- Comm – faculty input solicited, but ignored or disregarded – networking with faculty across campus
- Comm – post most recent HERI data
- Comm – more visibility in St. Louis (recruitment of donors)

Students

Recruitment and retention of students (19)

- Comm – access/assistance with financial aid (3)
- need more rigorous admission standards (3)
- focus on international students (3)
- lack of funds/focus to support students (3)
- focus on domestic students (esp. underserved, e.g., Bootheel) (2)
- lack of faculty and resources to enhance learning (2)
- Comm – communication of expectations
- counseling services
- SG – lack of support for graduate programs
- experiential learning opportunities

Infrastructure and Scheduling

Enrollment and scheduling (11)

- SG – fall break (5)
- inequities between “successful” and “unsuccessful” departments
- head count for double majors
- extending online faculty drop period
- Comm – “admissions scheduling and appointments”
- SG – Mon-Thu class schedule
- Comm – major enrichment activities (Integrity Week) scheduled during class times

Facilities (6)

- equipment/software malfunctions (2)
- inadequately maintained/outdated facilities (2)
- lack of classroom and lab space
- Comm – improve response by facilities management to reported issues

Tech/online support (7)

- better LMS (integrated with student support system) (2)
- status of QM
- Comm – recurring problems, lack of response
- “outdated” technology
- larger email attachments (10 MB) for research
- internet access in dorms (can’t do homework)

Miscellaneous

Need a more “culturally humble climate”; “cultural competence” (2)
Ethics (2)
Sexual assault on campus
Treatment of retirees
External curriculum mandates (state, articulation)
Resume lunches at Towers
Sustainability/cutting food waste
“Get rid of Kent Library and provide shuttle to SIUC”

It is not the purpose of this report to presume to draw conclusions or make recommendations. That is the challenge to the university community, not just for the faculty or administration, but the university as a whole.

The original message from the Department of Agriculture at Southeast, which provided the impetus for this poll, contained a follow-up challenge: “development of a process to prioritize the issues that faculty deem important for the faculty senate to address during the academic year.

Now that we have this valuable information, what will we do with it?

Respectfully submitted,

David V. Powell, Ed.D.
Faculty Senate Chair

The links to the most recent Chronicle “Great Colleges” and HERI surveys are posted below:

Chronicle (“Great Colleges”) Survey – 2012-2018 comparison (posted October 2018 under the “Employees” tab on the Southeast Portal):

<https://semo.edu/pdf/GreatCollegesSummaryComparison2012-2018.pdf>

HERI Survey report (posted October, 2017 on the President’s web page):

https://semo.edu/president/initiatives/informational_items.html