**LSUS FACULTY SENATE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

**December 12, 2024**

**11:00 A.M.**

**Webster Room, University Center**

**I. CALL TO ORDER** 11:08 a.m. President Williams called the meeting to order.

**II. PRESENT:** Senator Gifford, Senator White, Senator Felice Williams, Senator Siska, Senator Dunnavent, Senator Shepherd, Senator Widmeyer, Senator Zhao, Senator Si Chen, Senator Yeh, Senator Cassandra Williams, Senator Noor, Senator Saleh, Senator Zaidi. Senators Kim and Mikaberidze attended remotely. **Absent:** none. A quorum was present.

**III.** **COMMENTS:**  President Williams opened the floor for comments from non-senators who signed up to comment, under prescribed time limits. Per parliamentary procedure, only those present in the room may comment. No one signed up for comments.

President Williams asked for a roll to be taken and asked senators to introduce themselves.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Senator Gifford moved to approve; Senator Felice Williams second. Motion approved.

**V. PRESIDENT’S REPORT:**

President Williams opened the meeting by welcoming the faculty and inviting the administrators to present their reports.

**V. ADMINISTRATORS’ REPORTS**

**Chancellor:**

Dr. Robert Smith reported that it has been a “very good semester” and congratulated faculty and staff on their accomplishments. He highlighted a record-breaking achievement of 1,500 graduates at the December commencement ceremony. Dr. Smith reminded faculty of the ceremony is scheduled for December 13 and encouraged them to attend, particularly given the significant number of first-generation college students among the graduates.

The Board of Supervisors recently met at LSUS and approved two key items on the agenda:

1. Certificate in Dual Enrollment – This program aims to prepare teachers to teach dual enrollment courses.
2. Health Service Fee Increase – A $5 per credit hour fee increase was approved to enhance health services, which will initially be offered online and gradually transition to in-person services.

LSUS submitted a written report to SACSCOC which responded with 29 recommendations. Most of the recommendations involve providing additional evidence requested by SACSCOC. The SACSCOC site visit is scheduled for the spring.

The administration has received feedback on the LSUS Strategic Plan from faculty and students. This input is currently under review and once the plan is finalized, it will be submitted to LSU President Tate for approval.

Dr. Smith concluded his remarks by apologizing for the brevity of his report, explaining that he had to leave the meeting early to attend another engagement.

**Provost:**

Dr. Taylor began her remarks by expressing gratitude to the faculty for submitting final grades on time and contributing to a successful fall semester. She emphasized the importance of attending the upcoming graduation ceremony. She reminded the faculty that the last day on campus for the fall semester is December 13, 2024, and that spring semester kickoff event is scheduled for January 9, 2025.

She noted that an LSUS delegation attended the SACSCOC meeting in Austin, Texas, last week as part of the reaffirmation process. The delegates learned “a good bit about our own improvement.” As part of this process, LSUS must develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which involves selecting a theme through a dedicated committee. The LSUS QEP committee has been meeting for several months to focus on three primary areas:

* Quality of Instruction and Teaching
* Course Availability and Scheduling
* Quality of Advising

The QEP ultimately selected the first area as a new theme for the next five years. Its formal title is "Navigating Student Success and Charting the Course for Teaching Excellence."

Dr. Taylor also reported that all low-completer program reports have been received and will be conveyed to LSU by December 16.

During the discussion, Senator Gifford and President Williams inquired about the QEP themes, while Senator White asked about the low-completer reports. In response, the Provost clarified that additional information had been requested from some low-completer programs to provide greater clarity on assessment and plans for improvement.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS:**

No new business.

**VII. CONTINUING BUSINESS:**

President Williams noted that over the last three months, the Faculty Senate has been reviewing and discussing several policy drafts, and emphasized the importance of reaching a decision on them.

**Drop for Non-Attendance Policy**: Dr. Atkins, the Dean of Students, presented changes to the policy based on the feedback received at the Faculty Senate’s meeting in November. She noted that LSUS is not an attendance based institution but it does have an internal policy that requires us to report attendance. The most significant change involves the drop date. Financial Aid has requested moving the drop deadline to the 10th day of classes, instead of the 14th, to allow sufficient time for processing their reports. Senator Siska asked who would initiate the process. Dr. Atkins explained that faculty will recommend students for the drop to their respective deans, who will then initiate the process.

Senator Gifford moved to approve the revised policy, and Senator Cheryl White seconded. The motion was approved.

**Faculty Due Process Policy**: President Williams reminded the Senate that the revised draft had been distributed for review. Senator Siska raised concerns about the selection and composition of the committee for due process, as discussed in the second paragraph on page three. President Williams specified that the Faculty Senate is involved in the process. She and Senator Gifford also clarified that while P&P Committe’s further revisions to the policy are in progress, the Senators need to act today only on the currently proposed changes; any additional revisions would be presented next year.

Senator Widmeyer identified editorial issues on page 3 of the draft. President Williams acknowledged the point, noting that technical corrections could be made after the policy is approved.

Senator Gifford moved to approve the policy, and Senator Dunnavent seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Faculty Tenure Policy:** President Williams stated that the proposed changes to the Faculty Tenure Policy aim to better reflect current practices. Senator Siska raised several concerns about the policy, including about the department chairs being ex-officio members of the tenure committee but President Williams reminded him that the Senate is only reviewing a specific change to the policy at this time. Namely, the need to reconcile LSUS policy statement with LSU’s permanent memorandum. To accomplish this, a key revision stipulates that the LSUS Chancellor makes a “recommendation,” while the “final decision” rests with the LSU President. She noted that further changes would be considered in the new year and encouraged Senator Siska to compile a list of possible revisions and submit them for review to P&P.

Senator Yeh highlighted a discrepancy in the proposed text, which still refers to a "formal decision" by the LSUS Chancellor rather than a recommendation. A brief discussion followed regarding the procedural steps needed to amend this text. Senator Shepherd also pointed out that multiple references to "formal decisions" by the LSUS Chancellor appear throughout the policy and should be revised for consistency. After reviewing the relevant sections, the Senators agreed to correct these instances. Senator Gifford moved to approve the proposed change, with the necessary textual corrections. The motion was seconded by Senator Yeh and approved.

**Student Evaluations**: President Williams invited Dr. Carpenter, who chairs the Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) Committee, to present additional findings on student evaluations of courses and faculty. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that evaluations accurately assess the intended aspects of teaching and performance (“we evaluate what we intend to evaluate.”)and that her committee will continue to work on revising evaluations throughout the spring semester. President Williams asked her to ensure that the Instruction and Professional Development Committee incorporated best practices into their review of the evaluation process. While the matter was tabled for discussion at the next meeting, Senators engaged in a dialogue about the differences in evaluating online and in-person courses.

**Syllabus and Moodle Template**: This issue was presented and discussed at the last Senate meeting. Senator Siska expressed his appreciation for the IPD Committee's efforts to improve the syllabus and Moodle templates but raised concerns about mandating a standardized template for all courses. He highlighted the diverse backgrounds of our students and argued that standardization could negatively affect students who have diverse backgrounds, infringe on faculty academic freedom and creativity, and add to the burden of faculty responsibilities. He noted that while the university expects faculty to be creative and to teach critical thinking skills, enforcing a standardized approach could make it difficult to achieve these goals without stifling creativity and freedom.

President Williams acknowledged the importance of creativity in teaching and clarified that academic freedom would be affected only if the Senate voted to impose a blanket mandatory template on all the faculty. However, the current proposal would make the syllabus template available as an option for faculty who wish to use it, allowing individual faculty members to decide if they want to adopt it. Senator Siska then raised concerns about software algorithms used to evaluate Moodle course pages for accessibility and ADA compliance, noting that they often flag course material incorrectly; he cautioned against overreliance on such software. President Williams and Senator Siska engaged in a discussion on the balance between software’s utility in identifying accessibility issues, its potential impact on faculty’s freedom to devise a course, and the need to be ADA compliant.

Senator Felice Williams emphasized that faculty would retain significant flexibility to customize their Moodle pages. Provost Taylor and Rhonda Failey (Director of Online Learning) responded that while faculty could make many changes, some adjustments—such as altering colors that might impact colorblind students—would be required to meet ADA compliance standards. They also noted that faculty could create their own syllabi but this would require them start from scratch, attend a special training, and ensure their syllabi are ADA compliant. With 1,200 unique courses offered at LSUS, the university must ensure all courses are ADA compliant by April 2026. Senators, along with Dr. Heather Carpenter and Rhonda Failey, discussed differences between the syllabus template and the Moodle course page template. Dr Carpenter states that the IPD committee recommends implementing this initiative during the summer semester, thus giving the faculty the whole spring semester to familiarize themselves with the template.

Senator Siska pointed out that some course materials, previously accessible to students, might now be prohibited due to potential disability concerns, potentially impacting course quality. He cited examples such as PDF versions of articles and book chapters that might not meet the ADA compliance requirements. A lengthy discussion followed, highlighting the significant implications of limiting the use of PDF files. The discussion also touched on copyright issues and whether faculty can legally use PDF versions of published materials without explicit permissions. Mr. David Gaither, Scholarly Communications and Analytics Librarian, explained how the Noel Memorial Library can assist the faculty on these issues.

Senator Zhao inquired about possible technical challenges in importing existing courses into the new template. Failey explained that while the template should accommodate importing courses, some segments might appear distorted and require corrections. Senator Noor concluded the discussion by urging Senators to consider the broader goal of higher education: providing accessible education to everyone. President Williams agreed, stating, “if our courses are not accessible to all our students, what are we even here for?”

Senator Gifford moved to approve the Instruction and Professional Development (IPD) Committee’s syllabus template as *recommended* for all faculty to ensure ADA compliance. Motion was seconded, and it carried.

The Senate then discussed the IPD’s proposed template for Moodle courses. Senators Siska and Gifford sought clarification on whether the template would apply to both online and in-person courses. Failey responded that all courses, regardless of format, must be ADA compliant. Senator Williams noted that faculty would not need to redesign their entire courses but would need to make course materials available in multiple formats to ensure accessibility for all students. Senator Gifford moved to approve the Moodle course template as *recommended* for use in the spring semester, with further discussion and Senate approval required before making the final decision. The motion was seconded and approved.

**Chair and Administration Evaluations**: President Williams raised the issue of how faculty receive feedback on evaluations of chairs and administrators. Senators Gifford, Williams, President Williams, and Provost Taylor discussed the current practices, which vary significantly across departments and colleges. Senator Widmeyer questioned why the evaluations are not conducted online. Provost Taylor explained that LSUS had previously attempted to standardize the evaluation process by transitioning to an online format, but this resulted in significantly lower completion rates, dropping to “single digits.” She emphasized the need for a more standardized process. Senators proceeded to discuss aspects of the evaluation process, including writing rebuttals to evaluations. They highlighted limitations within the DocuSign platform and suggested the possible inclusion of a new component in annual evaluations (FPR). A motion was made to table this issue for further consideration next year.

**VIII. OBSERVATIONS & CONCERNS:**

Senator Gifford inquired whether the university is transitioning toward a centralized advising system. Provost Taylor confirmed that efforts are currently underway to implement such a system.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:** A motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded. The motion was approved, and the meeting wasadjourned at 12:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexander Mikaberidze

Secretary