

**UAMS Academic Senate Council, Minutes
Zoom meeting, August 26, 2020**

Attendees:

Voting Members Present:

Tiffany Huitt, Mary Burgess, Edgar Meyer, Gunnar Boysen, Brendan Frett, Saleema Karim, Leanne Lefler Bradley Martin, Ashley McNatt, Priya Mendiratta, Grover Miller, Corey Nagel, Cherika Robertson, Dana Moser, Andrew James, Ginell Post

Voting Members Absent:

Eric Rosenbaum, Elizabeth Riley, James Selig

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Steven Post, Lee Ann Macmillan-crow

Guests:

Abdallah Hayar, Jonathan Laryea, Bittu Majmudar, Nadja Vawryk Button, Daniela Ochoa, Carrie Hyde, Ronda Henry-Tillman, Se-Ran Jun, Roopa Ram, Jason Mizell, Gitanjali Bajaj, Dwana McKay, Paul Stover, Emily Kocurek, Kostas Arnaouta, Kandi Stalling, Kedar J, Nick Zaller, Wendy Ward, Philip Palade, Nirvana Manning, Kandi Stallings, Laura Huffman, Keith Sexton, Katie Kimbrough, Joseph Sanford

- I. Call to Order
 - a. Tiffany Huitt, President of the Academic Senate Council, called the meeting to order at 2pm. She welcomed the guests, and let everyone know that the meeting is recorded.
- II. Approval of Minutes.
 - a. Reporting of approval of minutes was not conducted.
- III. College Officer Reports
 - a. President Huitt called for reports from the College Representatives.
 - b. Graduate School: No report.
 - c. College of Health Professions: No report.
 - d. College of Medicine: Representatives met with Dr. Westfall and discussed the following:
 - i. Appreciation of Town Hall meetings, and decreasing anxiety of finances.
 - ii. Lack of PPE in some areas, primarily outpatient areas. Dr. Westfall was supportive, and working on plexiglass, but there are shortages in certain supplies such as hand sanitizer and

masks. It was suggested that senate receive PPE requests, perhaps set up an online area to receive the requests?
Plexiglass need is being met.

1. Discussion: It was stated that there is a process for ordering and receiving PPE. Concern was raised about aware of this process and faculty purchasing the PPE themselves. Dr. Ward offered to help disseminate the information properly.
- iii. Balance of work life and increased childcare demands.
 1. Discussion: President Huitt asked for updates on childcare. In response to the loss of UAMS day camp, HR has pulled together a number of childcare resources, and this was sent out to faculty and colleges. Eldercare resources were also provided. Faculty Center is also willing to connect people who have similar concerns, and creating a “social bubble”. An e-mail was sent, and people can enter the information, so that these connections can be built.
- iv. Transition to Virtual teaching, and lack of support for GME faculty in Virtual teaching and best methods. The Office of Educational Development has put out things online. However, it is difficult for many faculty to attend these workshops.
- v. MaskUpUAMS, and there were no further recommendations.
- vi. Other Discussion: There was concern about the need for more flexibility in the outpatient clinic – which currently requires a 90-day notice to make changes to provider calendar. The Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs in COM and the Deans will be contacted by Dr. Ward to see if this concern can be better addressed.
- e. College of Nursing: No report.
- f. College of Pharmacy: COP has extra PPE, and it is available for free. Faculty should follow up with Latrina Prince. COP faculty received results of the engagement survey and are working on the items that were scored low. No other reports.
- g. COPH: No report.
- h. President Huitt proceeded to the next item of business.

IV. Committee Reports

- a. Research: No report.
- b. Communications: Abdallah Hayar said they met Aug 6; there are 5 members. The information is on the Academic Senate website. He added the 5 members to the website. They are trying to enhance

communication by adding information to the website. They are also planning a newsletter, information on the faculty engagement survey. He would like a survey to address faculty concerns. President Huitt added that Zoom link, the agenda and minutes are also posted on the website.

- c. Faculty Affairs: No report.
- d. President Huitt proceeded to the next item of business.

IV. New Business

a. COM Faculty Group Practice, LTD changes

- President Huitt gave a synopsis of the issues that had been brought to council for discussion. The COM has a faculty group practice plan (FGP), and this is only available to COM faculty. The changes in the long term disability (LTD) are not impacting all faculty across campus. The changes are effective Sept 2020.
- Two prior issues that have been raised are the timeline for implementation which is relatively quickly, and a request that changes be delayed until January 2021. President Huitt said that the Provost (at a prior meeting) communicated that they are unable to negotiate the term, since this is a standard contract with an insurance carrier. Another issue is potential loss of coverage. President Huitt asked for clarification from those impacted. She presented a Human Resources slide, comparing the current plan and the new plan. Both cover 60%, and max up to \$500,000 – both are no change. The new policy will use income at time of disability (rather than at time of purchase), which is a benefit. Mental Health benefit was decreased to 24 months (rather than until no longer disabled). And Survivor benefits improved to 12 months from 3 months.
- President Huitt opened the floor for discussion.
- It was pointed out that part of the slide presented is factually incorrect. To say that the current policy uses income at the time of purchase is factually incorrect. The disability policy is paid at the salary at the time you are disabled. The other important issue is there is an expanded disability portion that is going away. It covers catastrophic coverage that is not available. To make such a drastic change, there has not been enough communication, and it is being rushed through –so people do not know what to do. Guests pointed out that an e-mail from the current LTD provider, Jim Foss, was deleted from the server, and now all his e-mails have been blocked. There is no transparency, and there is the appearance that something is being hidden.
- President Huitt said the new plan has \$500,000 which is similar to the expanded plan. She said her understanding is that in the new policy, the expanded plan is what allows up to \$500,000 max so that even though the expansion is going away, the new plan has the same

coverage built in. Someone said that is not true. The problem is that they have not allowed communication with faculty, so that faculty can ask questions.

- A member added that there has been a complete lack of communication, including that similar changes were made to the Health Insurance policy changes a few months ago with very little communication. Faculty have now received an e-mail regarding the parking issue, and the disability issue. Where is this coming from, and why is it happening now?
- President Huitt said she is hearing that there is lack of communication, and what request can we put forward at this point?
- Faculty added the issue of decreasing mental health disability is concerning because these are irreversible changes. Also with COVID-19 there could be mental health issues, and this is concerning that the mental health changes were made in this policy.
- It was pointed out that the timing is very hard to swallow during a pandemic, and that faculty feel largely unheard and not consulted. Clinicians felt as though they are left to interpret an insurance policy, because they feel that there is no one from HR to assist them in looking out for their own best interests. There was a comment suggesting that faculty feel unprotected, unheard, and nicked and dimed. Partial disability is not paid at all, versus with the old policy in which a person was entitled to some coverage. It is concerning that no physicians participated in the conversation regarding the change in LTD policy.
- Someone suggested a meeting sponsored with HR, to discuss changes and have time for questions.
- In response to that suggestion, a faculty member reported that he received a message from the Department Chair that this is a done deal. There is no opportunity for discussion, no opportunity for negotiation, no opportunity for understanding. Issue 2 is that this was done by HR and the institution in a very underhanded way. It is especially concerning that they deleted the e-mail and UAMS blocked Mr. Foss's e-mail from contacting us.
- The June letter that was sent regarding this change was very vague. That letter said as a result of COVID-19, the institution is trying to cut costs. The question was posed: Why is the institution making a permanent change, when COVID-19 is a temporary situation? This seems like an extreme action for a short-term problem. Faculty didn't question the June email, because it was during COVID-19, and faculty assumed the university had their best interests in mind, and they also didn't have the time. Also, it is not clear that this change is widely known by all faculty.
- President Huitt asked if the LTD change had been discussed with Dean Westfall, and Priya Mendiratta said that they had not discussed the LTD changes – but discussed the parking changes only. Someone

added that it is concerning that the Dean did not discuss the LTD changes during the representative meeting. Mary Burgess said that to bring it up with Dean Westfall, faculty should have a plan of action, including what should be done differently and what faculty want. Someone added that the topic was brought up in the leadership Chairs meeting. However, the message during that meeting is the same as the PowerPoint slide from HR (with faulty information).

- Wendy Ward said that she does not know a lot about this issue, but what she has heard today is concerning. She thinks the policy change was done at the UA system level. But the communication and clarification of details does need to be addressed.
- Faculty members added that their concerns are not being heard, and nothing can be done for a year. The new policy has prior conditions that are not covered. There were options available in the old option with riders that are not currently available. All the new hires are being affected too. There was a question regarding pre-existing conditions being effected versus not being affected. Faculty added that it is hard to advocate that this is a good place to come. This is completely a financial decision. It feels like it is retribution for the people who are on the front lines taking care of people every day. President Huitt summarized that the issue will be discussed with HR. Brad Martin said that this issue falls more under the House of Delegates. One of their charges is to look at faculty and staff benefits. We should work with HOD on this. President Huitt said they are discussing this at their next general assembly meeting too.
- President Huitt proceeded to the next item of business.

b. UAMS employee parking rates

- President Huitt gave a synopsis of the issues that had been brought to council for discussion. The parking rate change is effective October 2020. All faculty will now have to pay for parking; none are losing their spots, but they must pay. Concerns raised included communication of this change, and how this was presented as an equity issue. President Huitt said that in a prior meeting with the Provost, the Provost said this could have been communicated better. This issue underlies a larger issue about perceived faculty value and raises the issue about all other inequitable practices.
- President Huitt opened the floor for discussion.
- Members pointed out that this is another issue that chips away at the faculty benefits and recruitment. For most physicians, they are not paid at national average, but these other benefits like retirement, free parking, good disability coverage, are highlighted to make UAMS more competitive. Now physicians are left with salaries that are unchanged, but their health insurance is more expensive, LTD is not as good, and free parking has gone away. It makes it harder to recruit and retain good faculty. And it makes us feel undervalued. Faculty do not want to stay because they don't feel appreciated. For example, one option was to park at War Memorial or Ray Winder Field, which is not an option for physicians coming in for emergencies. It gets flooded during

major storms, and the shuttle is not available 24 hours per day. Decisions are made and communicated poorly, faculty feel very undervalued and unprotected, and there is potential for patient care to suffer.

- There was concern raised that this is a safety issue: That doctors arrive very early and leave very late, and it is important to recognize that physicians come in when there are not a large number of people in the parking structures.
- President Huitt said the access is not currently changing, but what is changing is that they are now charging for it. Someone added that there is access to a lot of things if they pay for it – the country club, Pulaski Academy. Someone clarified that not all faculty were getting this benefit, and that the UAMS benefits are not communicated well. There is little transparency and equity. A faculty added (via typed message) that safe parking is required for trainees, so how will this be addressed?
- The fact that the communication was a result of a robotic e-mail is part of the problem. President Huitt said the Provost absolutely acknowledged that the communication was poor, and incorrect information was included. Senior leadership is working with the departments. She was told they are looking at all cost cutting measures. She was quoted a \$2 million (figure not confirmed, later redacted) savings by having everyone pay for parking. It was perceived as an easy, relatively painless measure. A member pointed out it would be about ½ million in savings (estimate from personal calculations). He said that this makes people angry, and only saves a little money.
- There is concern that we are the only hospital in town where physicians have to pay for parking. Also, now to hear that it is a financial decision, faculty feel they are getting two sides to the same story.
- A member added after hearing the discussion on LTD and parking issues, that faculty need to try to be in front of these issues and need better representation in the HOD to get in front of their benefits. Someone pointed out that they have known this every budget year, and is concerned about the spin being given to us. Normally when faculty get changes, they get the fine print of the changes in the mail. All faculty have received is the spin being given to them. What else is on the table for cuts? Someone heard that retirement is next, possibly taking away some of the match for retirement.
- A member added that we are suffering mass faculty exodus. We are losing money by losing doctors, and losing morale. It is hard to find physicians within UAMS, because of the number who have left.
- President Huitt said that they are reviewing the Constitution, and identifying all the university councils, committees, and basically the decision making groups. She said these ideas are coming from faculty groups and are getting approved at certain levels. The council wants to elucidate this list, who are these groups and who is being represented? The council wants to find out who are the faculty representatives in these groups. The council wants to find out if

faculty have a voice in these groups. Someone pointed out that the administrators are counted as faculty, so it may be just administrators involved in these decisions. She said the next step is finding the membership of all these groups.

c. Next steps:

- LTD - Dr. Ward is going to speak to the Provost. The council can list the concerns from this meeting that can be shared with the Provost.
- The council will follow up with HOD.
- The council will follow up with HR, to get clarity on the details of the policy, decide if Town Hall meetings need to be set up.
- If a Town Hall meeting is set up on this issue it was recommended by a faculty member that faculty are able to communicate what their competitors are offering. Prior to the meeting, bring real data concerning what the benefit packages are at competitive institutions. The real way to make an impact is through recruitment and retention, and to show what competitors are doing so that UAMS can be competitive. The data will speak louder, and show that UAMS needs to be competitive to recruit.
- President Huitt asked if the member was making a motion to form a subcommittee, and he responded something more informal. She said we need to create a group with a point person. A member asked if we can send out a survey very quickly or maybe a petition – something to get their attention.
- Other possible next steps after additional discussion:
 - i. An emergency meeting with HR.
 - ii. Write a letter with our concerns, send to the Chancellor, and he has to respond back within two weeks. However, an Academic Senate representative said that we need a resolution, have to vote and pass a resolution, and send to Provost and Chancellor. And council is not to the point where it can pass a resolution. In the future: if faculty have a concern, the plan is for council to write a resolution, vote, and send to the Chancellor.
- President Huitt said these are the immediate action items:
 1. Request that HR meet with faculty immediately and clarify the inconsistency with communications to at least get details of the policy.
 2. Request a Town Hall meeting with the Chancellor to discuss these issues: LTD, parking, and equity in general.
 3. Have a discussion with HR about renegotiating this benefit package. A member asked to add “and to comment on additional reductions in faculty benefits.”Suggestions by members: Collect data from competitors on benefit packages and address the issue from recruitment and retention standpoint. One way to collect data is via a faculty survey, and signatures can be acquired. The council can send a letter to the chancellor. The council does not need an approval or vote to share its consensus items. The council can solicit specific questions that can be directed prior to the Town Hall with the Chancellor so that people are not silenced. President Huitt suggested that she would like a Senate-

facilitated Town Hall, so the moderator would be someone from the Senate.

- The Chancellor's Tweet chat and AskUAMS were discussed as modes of communication with the Chancellor. A member asked if the sheer number of people who bring up these issues, would it catch their attention? Members pointed out that Twitter is public, and it could polarize the issue and should not be discussed there.
- Additional Summary: President Huitt said that she will draft a letter for the Provost and Chancellor's office, requesting clarification from HR on these issues and discussion with HR regarding negotiation of benefits contract. If the representatives of the COM are in agreement that this is a large concern of the faculty they represent, the council has the authority to act on their behalf. A member said that historically the Senate representatives have not been seen this way, and that is her only concern.
- One last item of discussion: The Press Ganey data has not been presented anywhere. Some said their Department Chair made the results available to them. A member pointed out that this survey was from the past. President Huitt said there could be a benefit in pointing out if the results were positive, and that this may have changed.
- President Huitt proceeded to the next item of business.

V. Ad Hoc Committee

- a. President Huitt said the Provost e-mailed this morning, and asked about faculty input into the faculty retirement process, specifically a phased process for senior faculty.
- b. A motion was made to form an ad hoc committee. The motion was seconded. The motion was passed, none opposed.
- c. A member suggested including senior faculty who are near retirement. A member said that was a problem with their last plan, and no one took the retirement set forth. President Huitt asked if the council should open the group to non-faculty members. A member said yes, and no one opposed. President Huitt asked for a volunteer to chair, and she said that she will do this offline.

VI. **Adjourn: 3:49 pm**

- a. **A motion was made to adjourn. The motion was seconded.**
- b. **The meeting adjourned at 3:49pm.**
- c. **Addendum: An additional vote for the ad hoc committee was completed via e-mail, and was approved by majority vote.**

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Burgess
Academic Senate Council Secretary