



Minutes from Faculty Senate Meeting

Friday, January 19, 2024 at 12:00 pm in SAB 202

Members Present:

COASN – Dr. Curtis Bensch, Dr. Kristy Calloway, Tenoch Ramon
COAE – Dr. Marjory Hall, Dr. Jarrett Kaufman, Stacy Norquist
COBT – Vicki Pasque, Hue Helms

Call meeting to order:

- Meeting called to order by Dr. Bensch at 12:07 PM. One faculty also attended the meeting in person, Tony Hardman, and several remotely via online Teams – Judy Unruh, Kimberley Conyers, Shawna Tucker, Amber Hollis-Fesmire, Sarah Green, Julia Bird, and Hasib Chowdhury.

Reading / Approval of Minutes:

- January 12, 2024 minutes approved by consent.

Unfinished/Old Business:

- Discuss information and procedures for conducting the “Vote of No Confidence” referendum.
 - Dr. Kaufman moves that we table this discussion in light of the motion to table the vote (see Other Business).
 - Dr. Marjory Hall seconds.
 - Unanimously approved.

New Business:

- Next Special Faculty Senate Meeting to be held Friday, January 26 at 1:00 pm.

Other Business:

- Tony Hardman addressed the Senate for the following concerns: 1) would like to see the Faculty Senate’s referendum for the vote of no confidence; 2) recommend and request that an open Senate meeting take place to allow anything contained within the referendum, or anything else, to be discussed.
- Dr. Bensch read Dr. Wagenbach’s email into the minutes (see attached).
- Monday, January 22, at 11:00 am meeting with the Staff Association for input from Faculty Senate. Dr. Curtis Bensch, Vicki Pasque, a proxy for Marjory Hall, and Jarrett Kaufman will meet with them for an open conversation.
- Dr. Curtis Bensch proposes an open meeting for all OPSU Employees for Wednesday, January 24th, with Faculty Senators having time to address the group.
 - Discussion followed.

- Dr. Marjory Hall moved that on Wednesday, January 24th, 2024 Faculty Senate will hold an open meeting at 4:00 pm in the Library Auditorium to allow conversations to occur.
 - Tenoch Ramon seconds.
 - Approved unanimously.
- Stacy Nordquist moves that the campus be notified of this meeting today.
 - Dr. Marjory Hall seconds.
 - Approved unanimously.
 - Vicki Pasque will reserve the Library Auditorium and notify all OPSU employees today.
- Dr. Jarrett Kaufman moves that we table all proceedings related to the vote of no confidence until further discussion of all issues can occur among all parties.
 - Dr. Marjory Hall seconds.
 - Discussion followed
 - Roll call vote passed unanimously.
- Dr. Marjory Hall entered the email sent from herself and Dr. Jarrett Kaufman into the minutes along with her statement (see attached).

Adjournment:

- Dr. Curtis Bensch adjourned meeting at 1:10 pm.

From: Wagenbach, Rebekah M <rebekah.wagenbach@opsu.edu>
Sent: Friday, January 19, 2024 6:54 AM
To: Bensch, Curtis <cbensch@opsu.edu>
Subject: Email

I sure hope that email that went out is NOT the Senate's way of articulating their goals and grievances as I had asked. That was disgusting and sexist. But that's all I can assume because the Senate hasn't released their own statement.

Dr. Wagenbach,

The faculty senate is concerned with the direction our university is going. 75% of the faculty senators do not have confidence in our administration. The vote is simply that... do the faculty have confidence in the leadership of Dr. Dinger and Dr. Billiot? Many feel that if things continue as they have been that the sustainability and continued existence of OPSU is at risk. The upcoming referendum will give data as to where the faculty as a whole stand on this issue.

Respectfully,
Curtis

Curtis Bensch Ph.D.
Department Chair & Professor of Agronomy

From: Wagenbach, Rebekah M <rebekah.wagenbach@opsu.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 9:26 AM
To: Kaufman, Jarrett <jarrett.kaufman@opsu.edu>; Hall, Marjory Lynn <marjory.hall@opsu.edu>; Nordquist, Stacy <stacy.nordquist@opsu.edu>; Bensch, Curtis <cbensch@opsu.edu>
Subject: Please explain the goals

Hello,

I am addressing you all in my role as a faculty member which is my primary role on campus. Can you guys please share the clear cut political goals you are trying to accomplish with this "Vote of No Confidence" referendum"? The fact that only the administration has addressed this while the Faculty Senate remains quiet is indicative of a weak stance. You are putting ALL of our hard work at risk and there is a concern that is this vote because of personal or individual grievances or issues from the past. Can the Senate please share their goals with this Vote as well as the data that drives this decision?

Dr. Rebekah Wagenbach
COAE Associate Dean

January 12, 2024

Dear Mr. President and fellow Faculty Senators:

For the past several months, there has been intense discussion over the question of faculty credentialing. Other issues such as declining enrollment, program viability, and OPSU 's reputation have become entangled in the credentialing debate to the point that every campus deficiency is being laid at the door of that issue, obstructing clear understanding of OPSU's current situation. While there are valid arguments on both sides of the question, there can be no doubt that the administration has made responsible efforts at solving the problem with good faith and in fairness.

Regardless of one's personal position in the faculty credentialing situation, it is the responsibility and obligation of OPSU's administration to apply existing policy with recognition of its far-reaching implications. HLC has clearly indicated that it expects alternative credentialing to be an uncommon exception, not the rule, and OPSU administration has made the decision to apply policy likewise. While individuals have the right to express their disagreement with this application, their opinions are not binding on administrative action.

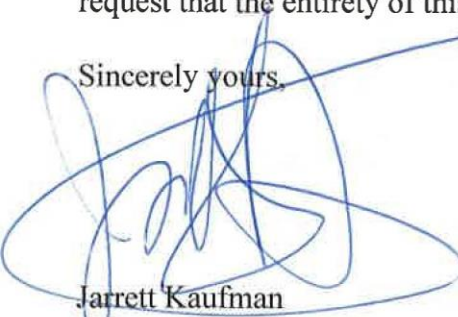
Dr. Dinger and Dr. Billiot have demonstrated their intention of fairness by providing an appeal process that includes outside evaluators, potential tuition reimbursement for faculty seeking further academic credit, a reasonable timeline for compliance, and the convening of the Credentials Committee. The administration has never been obligated to take any of these steps.

In conscientiously applying policy, OPSU's administration has done nothing more than execute the duties of their offices. Just as no professor would compromise their classroom autonomy to the whim of someone else's opinion, Dr. Dinger and Dr. Billiot cannot be restricted to making only those decisions that meet with general approval. Retention of regional accreditation is of paramount importance for OPSU's continued existence; all efforts must be made to operate within the nationally accepted standards of higher education, even when those standards are different from historically-based expedients at this university.

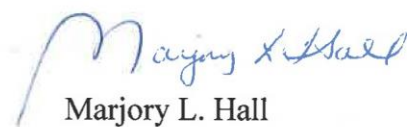
We cannot in good faith participate in any action that we can reasonably foresee as profoundly damaging to OPSU. The Faculty Senate's intention to hold a campus-wide No Confidence referendum is irresponsible and reckless, violating the Senate's stated policy of good-faith cooperation. Such an action can only perpetuate the divisions at OPSU and further damage its reputation in the Panhandle and academia at large.

Seeing clearly that no amount of discussion will dissuade the Senate from its course of action, we wish to express our unconditional dissent to the No Confidence question, and we request that the entirety of this message be read into the minutes of the next Senate meeting.

Sincerely yours,



Jarrett Kaufman
MFA, PhD



Marjory L. Hall
MLA, DBS

Comments from Senator Marjory Hall

1. The workplace is not a home. Its purpose is not to nurture its employees. Of course, the best-beloved managers at every level nurture their employees, but there is no requirement for a manager to be beloved. If one feels nurtured in the workplace and develops rapport with one's colleagues, that is a wonderful benefit, but it is not a human right.
2. Managers are neither obliged to coax employees to comply with policy, to make policy attractive, nor to justify policy. Their job is to set and apply policy in compliance with expectations from their own supervisors.
3. Reference to specific examples of past employees' experience is inappropriate because:
 - a) There are elements of each situation that are known only to those involved. Outsiders do not have the requisite knowledge to comment.
 - b) The authorities in supervision of OPSU administration have placed personnel matters in the hands of that administration. Barring illegal activity, the Regents will not intervene in HR decisions.
 - c) The authorities in supervision of OPSU administration have the authority to intervene in extreme situations, and it is within their purview to mandate the termination of a given employee if they deem it necessary.
 - d) There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that OPSU administration consults their supervisors before and during processes that can be expected to become contentious. OSU Legal will support administrators acting in compliance with the instructions of their supervisors.
4. HLC demanded that OPSU strengthen and apply its accreditation policy without consideration of the identities of our administrators. Any President and Vice President of Academic Affairs would be implementing the same changes for which Dr. Dinger and Dr. Billiot are being criticized.
5. Trusting, liking, or appreciating one's manager are not human rights. Every employee has the right to come to OPSU if they have the opportunity, stay at OPSU if they believe that the benefits of working here outweigh the disadvantages, or depart from OPSU if they decide that they are not happy here.
6. *Status quo* is not a human right. When changes occur, every employee must make his or her own decisions in response to that change, with the same three options listed above.
7. Hurt feelings, indignation on behalf of friends, nostalgia for a past time, frustration at perceived slights or dismissive response from management are emotional phenomena. Every person has the choice of how he or she will react to a given situation. No person can "make" another person feel a reaction. Emotional reactions in the workplace are personal; they are not grounds for professional consideration by the workplace as a whole.
8. The anonymous and despicable email that has been distributed is an example of emotional responses being treated as professional considerations. The actions of a disgruntled former employee spreading gossip to a news outlet, the public's appetite for salacious and unconfirmed media, the news outlet's titillating the public without any effort at providing context or opposing viewpoints, and another disgruntled former employee's decision to disseminate that salacious media are all example of emotional reactions. Emotions are the substance of the Senate's proposed referendum; that substance does not rise to the level of professional grievance. Damage is already done, and every malcontent who propagates such gossip and persists in abiding by emotional responses to professional matters contributes to the damage.