

FACULTY SENATE MINUTES
SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

November 19, 2020

3:30 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Remote via Zoom

Senators Present (26).

Samuel Adu-Prah (COSET), Mario Aschauer (CAM), Natalie Baker (CJ), Maria Botero (CHSS), Timothy Brown (COE), Patrick Buzzini (CJ), Valencia Browning-Keen (COHS), Rhonda Callaway (CHSS), Brandy Doleshal (COSET), Jamie Durán (COE), Debbi Hatton (CAM), Damon Hay (COSET), Soo-Yeon Hwang (NGL), John Lane (CAM), Lee Miller (CHSS), Carolyn Moore (CAM), Marianne Moore (COHS), Jan Taylor Morris (COBA), Dwayne Pavelock (COSET), Benjamin Park (CHSS), Mary Petróon (COE), Kevin Randall (COHS) Stephen Rapp (CHSS), Karen Sherrill (COBA), Aneika Simmons (COBA), Susan Skidmore (COE).

Senators Not Present (5).

Siham Bouamer (CHSS), Kevin Lord (COM), Geraldine Monjardez (CJ), Debbie Price (COE), Kyle Stutts (COSET).

Called to Order.

3:30 PM, Remote via Zoom, by Chair Lee Miller.

Approval of Minutes.

The minutes of the October 16 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report.

The Chair led a discussion on the Chair's Report which was distributed ahead of the meeting.

Unfinished Business.

Senators Baker and Duran presented recommendations for consideration in the form of document titled "Faculty Senate Recommendations for University Course Delivery Policies Post-Thanksgiving 2020 and Beyond" (See attachment). After discussion Senator Rapp moved that the document be approved by the Senate and forwarded to the President, the Provost, and the COVID Workgroup. The motion was adopted.

New Business.

On behalf of the Faculty Affairs Committee, Senator Adu-Prah presented the proposal "Scholarship for Faculty/Staff Spouse and Dependent Children." (See attachment.) After discussion Senator Botero moved that the Senate forward this proposal to the administration with the phrase "under 26 years of age" struck from the proposal. The motion was adopted.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 5:01 PM.

Faculty Senate Recommendations for University Course Delivery Policies Post-Thanksgiving 2020 and Beyond

Post-Thanksgiving 2020

The justification by the University for non-remote course delivery after Thanksgiving is students tend travel to and from campus from other locations and therefore, risk is minimized. There is no indication, however, if the University is aware to the extent this might have changed over the semester given the ongoing pandemic.

Non-uniform mask wear positively impacts viral spread.¹ This will likely continue to be an issue during the holiday as people travel and gather differently than normal to celebrate. The risks should balance, however with the probability many will also avoid holiday gatherings given the propensity for viral spread.

The major concern is that gatherings, which will inevitably occur over the break, will likely increase student, faculty, and staff risk for COVID exposure. More alarming is the potential to increase the burden of disease in communities surrounding the University and the beyond. Hospitals beds, ICUs and ventilator availability are the main concern in this respect and can be monitored via the Texas Department of Health and Human Services COVID dashboard, which keeps daily totals of available hospital beds and ventilators by region:
<https://txdshs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ed483ecd702b4298ab01e8b9cafc8b83>

Recommendation: Given risks, the Faculty Senate strongly recommends in-person classes should not be held after the Thanksgiving break, or leave the ultimate decision to the discretion of the instructor. We ask the administration to consider the cost versus benefits; what do face to face interactions add to the student experience to justify overriding risks posed by through the resumption of in-person classes after the Thanksgiving holiday?

Spring 2021

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts the numbers of COVID-19 positivity will continue to increase through spring 2021, bringing the predicted death toll to roughly 500,000 between September 2020 and March 2021, even with physical distancing mandates. However, this projection is tempered by the prospect of COVID-19 vaccines, which are targeted for availability by April 2021.² It is likely the positive effects of a successful vaccination are not going to be realized for a while, however.

¹ As of Sept. 21, only 49% of Americans reported that they always wear a mask in public.
<https://huddle.uwmedicine.org/news/yes-wearing-your-mask-still-important#:~:text=Infection%20rates&text=And%20based%20on%20IHME's%20predictions,even%20with%20physical%20distancing%20mandates.>

² The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said at an Oct. 21 press briefing.
<https://time.com/5902460/covid-19-vaccines-spring-2021/>

It is believed many universities will continue Spring with a similar approach as the Fall for many reasons.³ However, we acknowledge how to approach the upcoming academic year is a complicated and difficult decision.

Recommendation: Given the following considerations; 1) COVID is currently on the rise, 2) holiday celebrations are projected to contribute to a large increase in disease burden, and 3) vaccinations will not be widely available until April, the Senate strongly recommends classes have the option to be offered online, if not moved to this format entirely. The course instructor should have the option to put the class online since this is already an option for students.

Summer/Fall 2021

Decisions about course delivery in Summer/Fall 2021 must responsibly center around whether or not an effective vaccination is available and taken by a significant proportion of the University population in addition to the burden of infections on the larger communities the University purports to serve. Therefore, the Senate provides the tentative recommendation:

Recommendation: If a demonstrably effective vaccine is widely available to the general population and there is a downward trend of COVID cases, then normal operations are recommended. If vaccinations are readily available in early April, we recommend that summer be online to have time to collect trend data, and assess the safety of in-person return.

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidrosowsky/2020/10/25/pandemic-marches-on-higher-eds-spring-semester-the-new-normal-and-the-lost-year/?sh=7f60c8ad5a49>