FACULTY SENATE MINUTES

September 16, 2013

Meeting Date: September 16, 2013 at 3:15 P.M.
Location: Houston Cole Library, 11th Floor Conference Room #1101C


Members Absent: Jeffrey Hedrick, Kory Hill, Bryce Lafferty, Jim McIntyre, Nancy Mellen, Charlcie Vann, Mike Davis

I. Call to Order

Faculty Senate President Teresa Gardner called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone back, and introduced the following guest speakers. (Jade Wagner, SGA President, was unable to attend.)

II. Guests: (1) President Meehan thanked everyone for assistance with the SACS self-study report; those documents were submitted to SACS last week. Referring to his first stapled set of handouts on Credit Hour Production (CHP), Dr. Meehan pointed out the decreased CHP (in red and parentheses) in most departments, with an overall head count decrease of 468 students as compared to Fall 2012 (8693 in Fall 2013 versus 9161 in Fall 2012). Referring to summer CHP (p.3), he said that, in the future, the administration would be looking at those summer terms that had the best CHP. Continuing (p.4), Dr. Meehan explained that our decreased numbers were largely due to changes in federal financial aid—most notably Pell Grants, as Congress took money out of this program to help pay for the Affordable Health Care act, lowering the income cap for eligible families to $23,000 annually (near poverty level in Alabama, but much lower than poverty level in many states). JSU has lost 874 Pell Grant students over the last two years (284+590). Otherwise, he felt that we would be up in enrollment.

Dr. Meehan continues to pledge to students that JSU will aim to be at or below the median cost for higher education in Alabama. After the latest increase in tuition and the addition of our first-ever fee this year, JSU is currently 7th highest in cost out of the 14 Alabama institutions which offer undergraduate degrees ($20 over the actual median of $8770). As a result, Dr. Meehan will NOT recommend an increase in tuition to the Board of Trustees. JSU is 10th in graduate tuition [out of 13], $300 below the median cost. (See pp. 5–7.) He did mention that Athens State can and may offer graduate classes in the near future.

The number of honors students is down (to 409 from 494) this fall (p. 8). Dr. Meehan recommended that we encourage outstanding students in our classes to consider taking honors classes. The number of students receiving the Elite Honors Scholarship is up (to 31 from 30). Distance Education numbers are down (pp. 9–11): CHP is down by 906 (down 1084 in undergraduate but up 178 in graduate) and the number of distinct students taking distance education courses is down by 156 (148 undergraduate, 41 graduate). Dr. Meehan touted the success of our faculty scholarships in changing the composition of our student body—the average entering freshman ACT scores continue to rise, reaching 22.5 this fall (pp. 12–13). Quickfacts (pp. 14–15) showed no big changes in student demographics. Graphs on p. 16 showed significant success in first-year retention (up to 71% from 67% last fall) and an upturn in the 6-year graduation rate (up to 31% since Fall 2007 over 29% Fall 2006).

With regard to the budget, revenues are down because student enrollment is down. There was an increase of $2.7M (million) in budget needs this year; we are still down $1.2M in meeting requirements. Nevertheless, he said he can balance the budget, while still requesting from the Board of Trustees a 2% faculty/staff raise (retroactive to Oct. 1, 2013). To do this, he will be asking for budget trimming in every division—athletics, academics, etc. (For example, his own division will keep two positions unfilled for now.) He, of course, cannot predict how the Trustees will vote, but he did not believe they will turn down the request.

Dr. Meehan said that he appreciates our efforts in Supplemental Instruction (SI)— 900 slots available in various classes and 75 tutors available at ACE. He asked us to encourage our students to take advantage of these resources. Further, he indicated that GradesFirst would be rolled out for use with all students across campus soon and encouraged faculty to make use of it.

This summer, the Alabama legislature passed HB 424, which allows in-state tuition rates for out-of-state scholarship students. Our Trustees have embraced this and enacted this policy in order to further bolster our new student enrollment. As a result, JSU is now a better buy for many out-of-state students—such as those from Georgia, where fees are typically much higher than ours. (The Hope Scholarship program has forced Georgia colleges to cap tuition, but they have raised fees extensively.)
JSU also wants to increase the number of scholarships for students transferring from 2-year colleges, both to increase our enrollment and to assist community colleges meet their mandate to increase their baccalaureate graduation rates. (Currently in Alabama, only 5% of students earning an associate’s degree go on to complete a baccalaureate degree.) JSU already offers Presidential scholarships to such students—at least one for every Alabama community college—but those are named by the community colleges, not JSU. Dr. Meehan stated that JSU would offer new tuition scholarships—24 credit hours per year for two years—for students who complete an associate’s degree in Alabama by Fall 2014 with at least a 3.5 GPA and who continue to maintain a 3.5 GPA at JSU.

(2) Dr. Rebecca Turner. Provost and VPASA, reiterated that new transfer scholarships would help us attract high-performing students and reminded faculty that we are not required to look at ACT scores for transfer students, hence the scholarships based on GPA. She also elaborated on the SI programs at JSU, targeting 16 separate sections of various courses (in MS, BY, PSY, CY, PHS, EC) selected on the basis of traditional struggles among students and willingness of faculty to work with the SI program. SI student leaders work under Janet Moore—they are assigned to a course and work with students after class in small groups or one-on-one with those who need additional help. She hopes to see good results this year and even more student success in the future. Referencing Vincent Tinto’s “Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action,” the result of a 10-year research study on student retention, Dr. Turner noted that our students—especially first-generation college students—need extra help to be successful at the college level. Since they do not always come properly equipped, we need to be more deliberate with advisement and make more tools available to help students “manage their world.” GradesFirst and SI are two such tools. She mentioned that JSU is already paying the fee for everyone to use GradesFirst, so faculty not already trained to use it will be in the near future. (Contact Janet Moore, moore@jsu.edu, with questions.)

The other side of the Pell Grant loss of eligibility is the lack of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) among many students. Dr. Turner emphasized that we need to help students make good choices in order to complete their academic programs as efficiently as possible, so as not to waste money and time. Many students have lost their financial aid eligibility and then cannot return to school because their grades don’t merit it. Dr. Turner pointed faculty to the AASCU website (policy section), where there is a set of resources about the impact of federal student financial aid on our students.

Speaking of the need to find resources to help us help our students, Dr. Turner mentioned NROC (National Repository of Online Courses)—which JSU joined on a pilot basis with Dr. Jan Case for certain math courses. (See handout on NROC.) Our university-wide membership now gives faculty access to all of these online resources, which they may make available for student use outside of class to help them be more successful. Scott Beckett, at Dr. Turner’s request, summarized current efforts in the LS Department with NROC and pointed faculty to JSU’s HippoCampus website, www.hippocampus.org/?user=myjsu, which links to NROC and other online resources. He indicated that instructors could, for instance, set up a playlist of these resources for their classes within Blackboard. Many available resources are designed to help lower-performing students track the best path to their goal. Dr. Turner said that we would get a targeted email containing this and more information in the near future.

(3) Dr. Alicia Simmons, Executive Director, Office of Planning and Research and the Institute for Research and Collaboration, described the work of the Institute, including assistance with grant proposal writing and reporting, as well as the creation of interdisciplinary Centers for research on campus. She mentioned upcoming professional development: 1) Sept. 19, 12:30 p.m., Coxwell Room—a panel discussion of successful grant writers, moderated by Dr. Francia; 2) Sept. 24, 2:00 p.m., Gold Room—mock proposal training. (Contact Allison Newton, anewton@jsu.edu, to sign up to attend.)

Referring to a handout she provided on General Education Competencies 2008-2013, Dr. Simmons pointed out the 8 competencies (p. 1) all JSU students are expected to exhibit. These competencies, correlated to the university’s mission statement, are important for transfer students as well as freshmen, and they are measured in a variety of ways (CBASE, CLA, EPP for online students, NSSE, GSS). She focused on Competency #5—“Apply critical thinking and reasoning skills,” reporting a downward trend in this category among seniors, as measured by the CBASE (see p. 11). The CLA, however shows better results, but JSU is still below the national average in critical thinking. As a result, JSU is focusing on improving critical thinking and reasoning through the upcoming Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to be submitted to SACS.

A question was raised as to why statistics on the CBASE show a downward trend while ACT scores are on the upswing. Dr. Simmons responded that the CBASE is given to seniors, while ACT scores are for freshmen, so there may be a time lag before we may see a corresponding increase in CBASE scores.

(4) Gena Christopher, QEP co-chair (Instructor of English), handed out information on “fast forward,” the theme for the QEP plan, soon to be submitted to SACS. She said that the QEP is a work in process; a draft will be posted online, hopefully October 1. At that point, the QEP committee will be soliciting campus-wide feedback. They want to hear suggestions and concerns from faculty, to ensure the development of a QEP that faculty will respect and will be excited about. By the end of fall semester, the QEP committee hopes to have finalized the document, so that it can be publicized in early spring and faculty and students can familiarize themselves with the QEP prior to the arrival of the SACS on-site review.
The QEP theme is using 21st-century tools to promote critical thinking. Students and faculty will be trained to be more learning-centered; the integration of technology, including a one-to-one iPad initiative, will be key. The QEP should impact JSU well beyond the 5 years covered in the plan. Stickers and bumper stickers are now available to help spread the word; soon there will be T-shirts and rubber bracelets to distribute among students.

III. Approval of Minutes from the May 2013 Meeting

May minutes were not available from the prior Secretary.

IV. Old Business

David Dempsey inquired about the status of the Recommendation on Good Academic Standing (to increase requirements to 2.0 cumulative GPA at all times) proposed by the Admissions and Scholarship Committee and approved by the Senate in May 2011. Dr. Gardner said that she did not believe a final copy of the recommendation was ever received from the committee and, thus, was never brought before the University Council. Dr. Dempsey provided a copy and also will send an electronic copy.

V. New Business

- Dr. Gardner presented the Recommendation for Waiver of the General Tuition Fee for Faculty and Staff which recommends exempting faculty and staff. A motion to approve the recommendation was made and seconded, and it was unanimously passed.

- Dr. Gardner pointed out the committee responsibilities outlined in the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws (see handouts) and asked that every Senator sign up for one of the committees, so that work can begin. Each committee will (electronically, if necessary) elect a committee chair to serve on the Executive Committee.

- New Senators introduced themselves.

- A Senator asked what decision was made on the proposed 2014-15 academic calendar. Dr. Gardner reported “Calendar 2” was chosen for Fall and “Calendar 1” for Spring. Dr. Dempsey asked about the promised faculty representation on the calendar committee; Dr. Gardner will remind the registrar to include a Senate representative next year.

VI. Announcements: There were no announcements.

VII. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:41 p.m.