

# Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2025

## Senator Present:

Alan Brown(CCE), Gary Zarillo (OEMS), Patrick Converse(Psy), Jordan Poole (Aeronautics), Tolga Turgut(Aeronautics), Mehmet Kaya (BES), Tom Eskridge (EECS), David Wilder(BA), William Bowman(Library), Nakin Suksawang (MCE), Marcus Hohlmann (APSS), Yakov Berechenko-Kogan (MSE), Marshall Jones(Psy), Jessica Wildman(Psy), Robert Deacon (SAC), Pallav Ray(OEMS), Angel Otero (Business Online), Vipul Kishore(CCE), Joe Montelione (SAC), Wanfa Zhang (SAC), Csaba Palotai(APSS), William Arrasmith (MSE), Hamidreza Najafi(MCE), Anna Muenchrath (SAC), Robert Weaver (OEMS), Chiradeep Sen (MCE), Abram Walton (Business), Shawn Scott (Aeronautics),

## Proxies: None

**Senator Absent:** Georgio Anagnostopoulos (EECS), Sidhartha Bhattacharyya (EECS), Charles Bryant (Business), Madhur Tiwari (APSS), Shibo Liu(MSE), Donald Platt (APSS), Melissa Borgen (BES)

**Other attendees:** John Kiss, Kimberly Williams, Munevver Subasis, John Deaton, Ted Richardson, Rian Mehta, Nick Daher, Suzanne Kozaitis, Brooke Wheeler, Liana Kremer, Oyman Korhan, Suzanne Odom, Kaylee Erdos, Penny Vassar, Rudi Wehmshulte, Heidi Hatfield Edwards, Raymond Bonhomme, Jason Martin, Lisa Steelman, Gary Burns

Meeting called to order 3:30 PM

## John Kiss – Provost

President Nicklow is in Tallahassee working to get funds for the university.

## Question – DGRATS; elimination of that may not be good financially.

Dr. Kiss responded that he is waiting for a consultant's report regarding the modification or elimination of DGRATS. This will help him decide what to do with DGRATS and other research spending. He plans to offer a consistent seed program to assist faculty in obtaining grants. Dr. Kiss noted that we may be currently spending more than we are earning for research, and this is not good

## Question to Provost (Senator Turgut) – how will the Federal funding pause on grants affect Florida Tech?

Dr. Kiss does not yet know, as the situation is fluid. However, they are monitoring this closely and will inform the affected PIs.

## Question to provost (Senator Holman)– Is there a research council?

Dr. Kiss responded that it has been dormant but started again this year. The members are based on the Deans recommendations. The teaching council will also be returning soon.

**Florida Tech CFO – Kimberly Williams** report Q2 update – through December 31 operating expenses – Ms. Williams reported that we have a surplus right now (about \$5 million) but still have about 6 months left and most if not all of this money will be spent. She mentioned that we would like to have a \$1

million surplus at the end of the year. She suggested that the budget officers in each unit actively monitor and align expenditures with their allocated budgets for the year.

**Question** Senator Turgut asked whether the nearly \$10 million surplus from the last fiscal year was allocated to capital projects. Ms. Williams confirmed that it was.

**Question** A question was raised regarding salary increases, to which Ms. Williams responded that they are targeting a 3% increase for next year. However, she noted that this may change depending on enrollment and other factors. She then presented a three-year financial trend, highlighting that expenses this year, as of December 31, are consistent with spending levels from the previous two years.

**Question** Senator Hohlmann asked whether data on research expenditures could be provided. Ms. Williams responded that Dr. Rassoul would present that information next month. She also expressed her commitment to collaborating with everyone in the budget planning process and presented the extensive budget planning schedule for the next year.

**Question** Senator Weaver asked why department endowments and gifts are being swept each year. The CFO stated that she was unaware of this. Ms. Williams encouraged anyone with concerns to reach out to her for more information. She also noted that the budget is finalized by July 1 each year and, once set, remains fixed. While the budget in Workday is not directly accessible to faculty, department heads can provide a general overview each year. Senator Suksawang emphasized the need for greater faculty involvement in the budget process, noting that faculty currently have limited participation. Ms. Williams agreed.

Ms. Williams said that as we prepare the budget for next year, faculty and senators should talk to unit heads and the unit heads should request this when calls for next year's budget development process are made. Ms. Williams said budget transparency is key.

Senator Zarillo commented that our university endowment is relatively small, so we only take \$3-\$6 million each year from endowment and put toward budget. If our endowment was larger, we could use more towards budget each year and some of our financial concerns would be relieved. Ms. Williams said we are looking into a new investment firm to improve our endowment.

**Ad Hoc advisory committee on policy and compliance** – Dean John Deaton reported that a committee was formed last fall at Dr. Nicklow's request– 2 members from each college were nominated and meets 2 times per month.

The committee was charged with updating policies and submitting them to the president. The president would then present recommendations to the faculty senate. This committee made some recommendations about faculty contracts and appointment letters.

- Recommendation 1 – remove unnecessary language from faculty contracts. In particular, the conflict of interest statements could be separated from the contracts. The word "contract" may not be used in the future (a different descriptor -perhaps "appointment letter" might be used).
- Recommendation 2 – reduce the number and frequency of issued appointment letters – really only need one at key junctures in a faculty career.

Dean Deaton showed 3 appointment letters (tenure, non-tenure, tenure track) – the first paragraph of each letter differs from the others.

Senator Turgut questioned the necessity of the committee and its recommendations, given that contract issues were resolved last year. He also asked whether the committee and its recommendations might conflict with the faculty handbook. Additionally, he raised concerns about the committee's duration and charter term. Senator Turgut further noted inconsistencies and omissions in contract-related information compared to the faculty handbook. He suggested taking the necessary time to thoroughly address these issues. Senator Turgut's questions are attached to this meeting minutes.

Dr. Kiss suggested that Senator Turgut email these questions to Dean Deaton. Senator Wildman asked if Senator Turgut had a specific suggestion.

Dean Deaton said the conflict-of-interest form will be taken up at a later ad hoc committee meeting. He suggested the faculty senate review these letters in detail and send comments to him.

Senator Jones suggested that the language regarding a change to the university policy we had agreed upon last year was better language.

Senator Hohlmann commented that pre-tenure and tenure review information should be included in the letter.

#### **Approval of Minutes from January meeting –**

Senator Turgut motion to approve the minutes; Senator Brown second the motion – all approved

Senator Wilder was nominated and approved to be secretary for rest of semester – unanimous voted.

#### **Pres. Report**

- Senator Suksawang said units should hold elections for representation in coming months. March is the deadline.
- AFTC changes to by-laws in the faculty handbook were submitted to President Nicklow and he approved, but waiting to hear from Dr. Kiss.

**Academic Policies – Dr. Kishore** still working with Dr. Subasi on some policies – no additional report.

**Sen. Kaya – Admin Policies** – no report.

**Sen. Wildman – Excellence Awards** – nominations due Feb 7, 2025. We need a new chair for this committee in April.

**Sen. Brown – Scholarships** – He received a list of freshmen with high GPAs, which will be reviewed for scholarship nominations. Those interested in assisting Senator Brown are encouraged to reach out to him.

**Sen. Poole – Tech resources and infrastructure** - no report.

**Sen Jones – Welfare comm.** - no report

**Old Business** – The library faculty presented new promotion criteria guidelines, which were then put to a vote. Senator Jones moved to approve the guidelines, and the motion was seconded. The vote passed

unanimously with 22 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions, officially approving the new library promotion guidelines by the faculty senate.

**New Business** - Deaton presented earlier:

Senator Suksawang announced that a Faculty and Staff picnic will take place on February 28th, with an official announcement forthcoming.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:55 pm**

Next meeting – Tuesday March 4, 3:30-5:00 in Board of Trustees Conference Room

Respectfully submitted,  
Senator David Wilder

## Senator Turgut's Questions

### About the contract:

First, I would like to say thank you to all the members of this ad hoc committee. I respect and appreciate all the work and effort that has gone in preparing this document. My comments/concerns/questions will be two parts and never with the intention to negatively criticize the members of this ad hoc committee but mostly focus on the policy and process aspects. The first part is about the policy and process related and the second part is about the content of the document proposed.

1. Why there is this need (revision of the current faculty agreements) despite the issues on the contract were resolved last year after a major disagreement between the Administration and the Faculty Senate? The argument last year was that COI (conflict of interest) issues needed to be addressed and per the pressure related to the upcoming SACSCOC accreditation issues per the administration. As far as we know these were resolved already.
2. The scope of this AD Hoc committee and how it is formed is not exactly per shared governance and not in compliance with FH 1.6. Faculty Handbook Revision Procedure. The “ad hoc” committees are temporary and set for a specific reason and with a very clear task. This ad hoc committee appears to have a very broad charge/scope: *“The Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Policy and Compliance has been charged with bringing together faculty and administrators to evaluate, review, and propose updates to key university policies and processes”*. This clearly overlaps and contradicts with our faculty handbook and functions of the faculty senate. Moreover, there is lack of information on how long the committee will work.
3. The first task of this committee “evaluating the annual faculty appointment letter process” as mentioned should be revised as “evaluating the agreement for faculty appointment”. Calling it a “letter” lightens the importance and gravitas of this very important agreement.
4. Taking out **item 4** (general policies), and **item 5** (intellectual property) out of this critical document should be considered very carefully. As it reads now, it does not appear to be in the best interest of the university and especially the faculty. For example, **Item 4** of our current agreement is as follows:

*“The Faculty Member shall be subject to all faculty and human resources policies duly adopted and periodically revised by Florida Tech. The current policies can be found at <https://policy.fit.edu>. The policies and procedures are subject to change. Florida Tech agrees that no change in policy or procedure will deprive the Faculty Member of any monetary payment that has accrued under the previous policy or procedure”*.

However, in the proposed appointment letters, it is as follows:

*“Your appointment is subject to all terms and conditions of the Faculty Handbook as well as all policies, practices, and procedures of Florida Tech. The current policies can be found at <https://policy.fit.edu>. It is your responsibility to be aware of the Faculty*

*Handbook and Florida Tech policies. Florida Tech policies are subject to change without notice”.*

As it can be seen from the wordings this is a major shift from the current agreement.

5. The original COI section of the Faculty Handbook was tossed away from the faculty handbook last year without the consultation or approval of the Faculty Senate mysteriously. The disappeared section was FH 2.15.1 (Conflict of Interest). Last April a section of COI (Conflict of Interest) comprising of a Significant Financial Interest (SFI) and Conflict of Commitment (COC) was added and signed by the faculty along with their agreements. In fact, yesterday I was sent an email from the “Office of Sponsored Research” to sign it again.

I’m afraid what is trying to be done appears to lighten the importance of our contracts first via by by-passing the usual process as described by FH 1.6. Faculty Handbook Revision Procedure, gathering a committee comprising of members where the entire voice of the faculty may not be represented, then work on what is called an “appointment letter” by dividing it to different sections such as IP and COI (via annexes). I worry that this approach may not restore the faculty’s confidence which was negatively shaken last year.

Shared governance should not be in name only or as a lip service by our university administration but a true commitment to it by following our own policies and procedures as written. Therefore, I urge and kindly remind everyone to be cautious and not act in rush in such an important matter. After all we are not as pressed by time on this issue like last year as mentioned by the university administration so the due process per our policies should be followed.

Respectfully I yield the floor....