Special Session of the  
UTA Faculty Senate  
Wednesday, February 19, 1997

The Faculty Senate met in a Special Session on Wednesday, February 19, 1997 at 2:30 p.m. in the Conference Room, 4th floor Davis Hall. Chair Rod Hissong presided.

ATTENDANCE:

Present were President Witt, Provost Wright, Chair Hissong, Senators Amster, Boone, Bradshaw, Bright, Burquest, Cantwell, Chrzanowski, Crowder, Ihrhan, Devarajan, Dunn, Ellwood, Fairbanks, Gaupp, Harvey, Fry, Ingram, Matthys, McDowell, McKinney, Moore, Payne, Rodnitsky, Roemer, Rome, Rycraft, Walker, Wang, Watkins, Wilmore, Wright, Wyers, Yardley, and Young. Also present was T. Wilding from the Library.

The Special Session began with Senator Moore passing out Version 11 of the “Review of Faculty” - a version in which the lines were numbered for easier reference throughout the meeting. Senator Moore noted that were minor changes between Versions 10 and 11. He also discussed a Senate Bill and a House Bill related to Tenure Review.

It was motioned and seconded that the “Review of Tenure” report be brought to the floor for discussion. The motion passed. Senator Moore then asked for any preliminary questions about the report.

Senator Bradshaw asked Moore of the expectations of the committee concerning the status of the version presented at the meeting. He questioned whether they were expecting to obtain a final document at the closure of this meeting or were they simply wanting to obtain comments for future, additional revisions. Senator Moore said that this report needs to get to the regents as soon as possible, with their next meeting being held in May.

Senator Ellwood then asked if this report is being mandated by the Regents, and if so, what is their motivation. Chair Hissong replied that the motivation of the Regents is moot. If they said it, we do it. President Witt said that the Regents are dedicated to keeping this in place. Senator Rodnitzsky reiterated Ellwood’s point.
Senator Ellwood then asked what would happen if the current Senate bill in question passes and if the Faculty Senate passes the "Review of Faculty" report. He said evaluation processes are already in place. Should the Faculty Senate the, he asked, seek clarification and table voting on the report?

President Witt responded that while it is possible for the Legislative Bill to pass, we still need to have a document to be readily submitted to the Regents "on the spot". Therefore, he suggested, it would be in the best interest of the Faculty Senate to produce a document that it is comfortable with.

Senator Amster said she feels as if we are being railroaded and rushed into drawing up a document. We need more time, she said to discuss substantive issues. Senator Moore said that although he agreed, there is also a great possibility that both Legislative bills may fail, putting us in a negative predicament if we have not produced some type of document. He concluded by saying that it would be best to discuss substantive issues in the current meeting.

Discussion of Section I: Annual Review of All Faculty began with questions concerning the role of the department in the tenure review process. Committee Member Ellwood said that in drafting the report the committee tried to leave flexibility in for the sake of the department. Moore said that the committee tried to minimize the amount of review materials to be submitted.

The question of a 5-year review was then discussed at length. President Witt said that the Regents would not have accepted the previous version (Version 10) of this report because of the 3 year probationary period. Walker cited lines 56 and 57 -particularly the section which reads "....a committee of at least five members elected annually by the department's (or unit's) voting faculty..." He said that the 5 should be cut down to 3 and that a faculty member should be reviewed by a group, not within their own department. Moore then cited lines 51 thru 54 in which he said the option is left to the person if they want a department review committee or college review committee.

Senator Gaupp then asked if the review committee members are necessarily tenured. Senator Moore replied that they do not necessarily have to be tenured; instead, he said, the only stipulation cited by Austin is that they be peers. Senator Roemer noted that departments have the power to define who peers are.

On the subject of student evaluations, Senator Wright said her department objects to student surveys being required as part of the materials submitted for evaluation.
President Witt responded by saying that he has asked Provost Wright to appoint a committee to come up with a 4-to-5 question student evaluation. Dr. Witt says that student evaluations are a mandate of the Regents. Additional discussion was held concerning student evaluations with various questions being asked. Senator Rodnitzsky said that he is in favor of student evaluations. Senator Gaupp noted that perhaps a small number of questions may not necessarily be ideal; he said, instead, maybe this should be looked at statistically. Senator Chrzanowski inquired about the status of the student evaluation process being planned in San Antonio. Chair Hissong said that, to the best of his knowledge, the research is still in progress and no results have been finalized as of yet.

Senator Devajaran asked if the minimum requirements set by the individual departments have to be attached to the “Review of Faculty” before it is submitted to the Regents. Senator Moore said that they do not. Senator Ellwood then reiterated that minimum requirement criteria must be set at the department level.

The subject of a probationary period was again discussed. President Witt said that he did not believe the present document would be passed because of the probationary period noted in the document. Senator Moore then asked if he thought there were possibly a way of packaging probation in such a way that it would be agreeable to the Regents. President Witt said that it possibly could be done. Senator Dunn then asked President Witt why he felt the present wording regarding probation would not be accepted. President Witt responded that the reasoning is tied to the System’s belief that if things are going, the 5th year should not hold any surprises. The 5th-year probation status, Witt said, would seem to suggest that problems in performance have not been dealt with properly.

The discussion of the legal aspects of the tenure review issue began with Senator Chrzanowski inquiring as who protects the rights of the faculty, saying that he feels like that tenure automatically provided the faculty a contract with the University. President Witt responded by saying that while the UT System does view tenure as a form of contract, but only with the understanding that both parties are responsible for maintaining their part of the bargain. Senator Chrzanowski then said that he feels that his department - Biology - would require independent counsel should a legal matter concerning tenure review arise. President Witt said that while it may seem like a good a idea, it is more than likely that a jury of non-academics would not be very sympathetic regarding a tenure issue. Senator Cantwell said that the tenure review revisions may scare off new/prospective employees.

In light of the previous discussion concerning probation, Senator Roemer cited lines 124 thru 134, asking President Witt if, in his opinion, would these lines pertaining to
probation be the ones the Regency would consider “most objectionable”. President Witt said they would. Senator Young then asked if, according to the section in question, “good faith efforts” would be rejected, or would probation as a whole be rejected. President Witt responded that the probability issue would be rejected. Senator Young then asked if a one-year probationary period be accepted. President Witt said that, in his opinion, no form of mandatory probation would pass. Senator Moore then discussed the committee’s rationale for including probation.

Senator Wyers asked President Witt if there was a “template” that has been previously submitted that did not include a probationary period. President Witt said that both UT Austin and Pan AM have submitted such documents.

Senator Bright submitted wording for and motioned to amend lines 124 thru 125. The motion was seconded. Senator Dunn said that we do not serve ourselves well to take out the probationary period. Senator Walker then amended the Bright amendment.

It was motioned to table the Bright amendment and complete discussion of Walker’s previously motioned amendment.

Senator Walker then issued his motion in writing for reading to the Faculty Senate. The motion was seconded. Discussion was held and an Question called. A show-of-hands vote was held; motion passed 14 to 13.

It was then motioned to untable the Bright Amendment. The motion passed.

The Bright Amendment read; the motion passed.

Senator Gaupp suggested a word change on lines 23-25; he asked for assistance from Senator Walker with this. Senator Cantwell asked that his dissent regarding the removal/revisions of the probationary period be noted in the minutes. Senator Chrzanski motioned that in lines 61 through 63 and in lines 102 through 105 the phrase, “with or without counsel” be inserted. The motion passed.

Senator Bradshaw motioned that the phrase “taken as a whole” be stricken anywhere it appears in the document; the motion carried.

Senator Dunn motioned that line 10 of the Preamble be amended to read “Tenure is essential...” instead of “Tenure is valuable...”; motion carried.
Senator Bright then asked that, with the number of amendments made to the document during the meeting, if the Faculty Senate would consider postponing the vote. Senator Devarajan agreed, asking President Witt why are we rushing to complete this document. President Witt responded by saying that the Regents are made up of people who are used to completing tasks in shorter periods of time.

It was motioned that the vote to approve Version 11 of the "Review of Faculty" be postponed; the motion passed.

President Witt requested substantial input from faculty regarding upcoming budget development.

There was further discussion of the "Review of Faculty" document, particularly expressions of intense dislike to any change to the current tenure policy. It was motioned that a statement to this effect should be included in the "Review of Faculty". The motion carried.

The motion was made to table discussion of the "Review of Faculty" document until the next meeting. Motion passed.

Chair Hisson said that the Proposed Change of By-Laws, scheduled to be discussed during this session, will be discussed and voted upon at the next meeting.

It was motioned that the meeting be adjourned; the motion passed.