Commission for Women  
February Meeting Minutes  
2/4/2021  


1. Call to order

Catherine Luther welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at Noon.

2. Approval of December meeting minutes

The December minutes were unanimously approved by the voting members upon motion duly made and seconded.

3. Announcements

Joan Heminway reported that the amended and restated bylaws approved by the commission at its December meeting were sent to the Chancellor for approval. While we were working to amend our bylaws other changes were taking place that require additional changes to the bylaws. Specifically, at the end of the 2020-21 academic year, a staff member from the Division of Diversity and Engagement (DDE) will take on the role currently played by the commission’s graduate research assistant. As a result, the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Engagement requested that change also be reflected in the bylaws before approval. Joan and Catherine will amend the bylaws to reflect this change and bring the revised version of the bylaws, as further amended, to the commission for approval at the March meeting.

Joan also noted and explained the recently announced second call for nominees from the state branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) for the 2021 AAUW National Conference for College Women Student Leaders. Due to the conference being held virtually this year, the AAUW determined to offer additional scholarships to undergraduate women to attend the conference. As a result, we resolicited campus nominations.
After we sent the call for additional nominations, however, a representative of the AAUW of Tennessee contacted us to let us know that because we already had nominated two scholarship winners in the fall, we would not be eligible to submit additional nominations. After expressing some disappointment, Joan was encouraged to contact representatives of the local Knoxville AAUW branch to ask if that branch might consider nominating students from the UT campus. Joan made that contact, and leaders of the local branch agreed to review our additional applicants from UTK and consider forwarding them to the state AAUW chapter. The Knoxville branch was wowed by our additional nominees, and two of our additional nominees were forwarded to the Tennessee AAUW for scholarship consideration. Any UTK undergraduate applicants who do not receive scholarships will be contacted to urge attendance and suggest funding opportunities to support their attendance at the conference. Several commissioners suggested looking into student travel funds for virtual events and possible funding through the Clay and Debbie Jones Center for Leadership and Service.

4. Brief Remarks from Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement Tyvi Small & Provost John Zomchick

Vice Chancellor Small opened by recognizing this month as Black History Month.

Following up on Joan’s report on the commission’s bylaw changes, he noted that the DDE will still employ Graduate Research Assistants, but that the assigned staff member will transition to work with the Chancellor’s commissions and council at the end of the academic year. He thanked members of the commission for their partnership and work on diversity, equity and inclusion on campus. He communicated the importance of sponsoring women to attend the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Leadership Institute and, in general, supporting female leaders on campus. He expressed pride that this year, DDE was able to sponsor four women for attendance at the HERS Leadership Institute.

He further reminded commissioners that Diversity Action Plans (DAPs) have been submitted by each academic and administrative unit on campus. In reviewing the DAPs (as well as in its other work), the DDE looks at how to make an impact on our culture and climate institutionally. All of the plans will be made available on the DDE website. The availability of the DAPs to all encourages transparency and accountability. Execution of the plans will be incorporated into the performance reviews of unit leadership.

The campus climate survey is now scheduled to be released in spring 2022 in order to allow for time to create necessary instruments to analyze the data and adjust the related
contract to provide that the university does not own the resulting data. External ownership of the data will help protect the confidentiality of the information obtained and best ensure that the data cannot be identified to a specific respondent.

The University is working on renaming two residences halls, one to be named for Rita Sanders Geier and the other for Theotis Robinson. The task force evaluating the building names on campus found that Blount Hall is named for Barbara Blount, first female student at UTK. There is a plan to create markers to highlight the trail she blazed on campus.

A diversity, equity, and inclusion metric has been added to employee performance reviews. A webinar has been scheduled to educate the campus on how to evaluate individuals using this metric. The “previous salary” question has been removed from job applications across the UT systems. Women and historically underrepresented minorities are generally underpaid; a question about previous compensation may contribute to further salary inequities.

The campus has formed a partnership with The Bottom and Centro Hispano. The DDE is working closely with the Provost’s office (including the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs) to increase faculty diversity.

The DDE also has funded an academic diversity initiative, which identifies a diversity and inclusion point person in each academic college.

Provost John Zomchick began his remarks by discussing the spring semester. He praised the faculty and staff for contributing to outstanding spring enrollment numbers. The campus enrollment is 5% above the enrollment for spring 2020. He attributed the increase, at a difficult time, to the care and compassion displayed by our faculty. He indicated that the increase is good for our budget as well. He mentioned Governor Lee’s upcoming state-of-the-state address. During this address, the governor typically announces the budget for the next fiscal year. The Provost’s office has been working with the Chancellor to raise the starting salary of non-tenure track faculty and identify ways to help graduate students on tuition fee-waivers afford the mandatory fees.

The campus is heading into a new budgeting model, responsibility center management, meaning money flows directly to the revenue generating units -- those that produce student credit hours. Units then manage their own expenses. This process has been underway for about a year-and-a-half but was interrupted by the pandemic. The process has been restarted with the idea to enter into the new model fall 2022.
The strategic visioning process started about a year ago and also was interrupted temporarily by the pandemic. The process was restarted in August 2020. The Chancellor is looking to introduce the strategic visioning document to the campus advisory board later in the month. She plans to convene five committees, one for each of the five goals.

Paid parental leave is coming to The University of Tennessee. It is not an absolute policy, but the target is to implement parental leave effective as of July 1, 2021. Under the policy, full-time employees that have been working at the university for one year will be guaranteed six weeks of paid parental leave. The leave will not count against accrued sick pay or accrued annual leave. The policy needs approval beyond the campus and university because university employees are state employees.

Vice Provost Diane Kelly has been leading efforts to diversify the faculty. The university as a whole has been under a hiring freeze out of an abundance of caution. We are still under a freeze, but colleges have been encouraged to launch targeted searches in which diverse, qualified faculty can be hired. It is important for us to educate our faculty to make sure there are not policies or implicit biases that keep underrepresented groups out of current search processes.

5. Q&A session

a. Bonnie Ownley asked Vice Chancellor Small if his office had resources to educate new faculty about the Geier agreement. She noted that the Geier settlement and consent decree is important to the desegregation of higher education in the United States. As new faculty come to the University, they are not familiar with this important legal action and its outcome.

i. Vice Chancellor Small stated that the DDE website will link to information about the Geier litigation and the resulting funding for desegregation. He noted that the history of desegregation in higher education may already be available. He will reach out to Alisha in archives to follow up on this.

ii. Bonnie then noted that one of the buildings being torn down on the Agriculture campus is Ellington Plant Sciences, and Buford Ellington (for whom the building was named) was governor at the time the Geier litigation commenced. It might be nice to have some evidence of the Geier settlement on the agriculture campus. Vice Chancellor Small offered that UTIA buildings were included in the review conducted by the naming task force.
b. Abby Sherman asked what the university was doing to advance and retain staff members, since staff members typically leave their positions after five years.
   
   i. Diane Kelly noted that enrollment for the UTK leadership program for faculty and staff would soon begin. The criteria for enrollment were reviewed to increase eligibility. This is an effort to cultivate leaders within the campus and prepare them for leadership positions.

   ii. Mary Lucal added that certain programs designed by campus human resources and DDE, including both UConncT and the University of Tennessee Inclusive Leadership Academy, are aimed at new or emerging leaders. The programs are not specifically designed to move employees out of their current positions. However, a lot of employees advance after completing one of the leadership programs. The university’s recent compensation project moves the campus to a market-based pay system that allows people to move within their pay range. Human Resources will be updating over ten career paths as a result of the market-based pay system.

   iii. Vice Chancellor Small stated it is important for us to encourage leadership and learning in and for all employees. The leadership council, which is new, completed an administrative leadership retreat. This was conducted to help people in leadership positions understand the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

   iv. Joan asked if any of our leadership programs help staff to map out, under someone’s guidance, paths to advancement here at UTK. Mary stated that Human Resources is doing some of this but that they prefer to teach employees “to fish” rather than giving them fish (i.e., having a central administrative office creating a path for employee advancement).

c. Megan Haselschwerdt asked both the Provost and the Vice Chancellor how they envision responding to the long term effects of COVID-19 on faculty research productivity--in particular, the research productivity of women and primary care takers.

   i. Provost Zomchick stated that he and Diane Kelly have had discussions about this. A policy has not been created yet. One suggestion was for faculty to write an impact statement for their annual performance reviews. He indicated the need, in the interim, to address cases as they come up. He
offered that his office is open to suggestions by those impacted on the appropriate response from the campus administration and the university.

ii. Megan stated one concern of a “pause year” is the delay in salary increases over time. Some universities have implemented a retroactive raise for individuals that choose to stop the clock on promotion and tenure so that they would not be harmed financially by the decision over the long term. She asked if this is something that the campus and university could look into.

iii. The Provost responded that this was the first he had heard of something like this and that it could be looked into as an option. He continued by indicating we need to reexamine the criteria for tenure and promotion.

iv. Megan added that with the pandemic and urgency to address diversity, equity, and inclusion work, there are service burdens that create issues with the pathway from associate professor to full professor status.

v. The Provost stated the need to reexamine the criteria for advancement in the period between associate professor and full professor. The criteria are often set at the departmental level and it varies by department. There are certain productive activities and efforts that are underappreciated or do not count at all in the advancement from associate professor to full professor. He indicated that this is something that needs to be looked at closely by our institution.

vi. Vice Chancellor Small added that the Research Development Academy was created to support historically underrepresented faculty. This is a partnership between DDE and the Office of Research & Engagement. It was designed to help these faculty members move from assistant professor to associate professor. We know that women and people of color generally study topics that relate to marginalization and diversity, equity, and inclusion, and their research of this kind may sometimes not be valued by the academy. There are grant offerings available on the DDE’s website to support faculty in this type of research. Also, the DDE’s Faculty Advisory Board has been considering invisible labor as an element of faculty service requirements and how those efforts may not be accounted for in the tenure process.

d. Joy Panigaburtra-Roberts asked the Provost and Vice Chancellor what they envision for the Commission for Women to focus on.

i. Vice Chancellor Small stated that people do not always know what the commissions and council are doing. The commissions and council exist for the members to share their lived experiences, and the concerns of the commissioners are filtered up to the campus administration. The members
of the Commission for Women need to make sure the campus leadership does not create a system that inherently disadvantages women. Many of the systems we have in place now do not reflect important groups now represented on the campus. Ultimately, he stated that it is important to know the top three or four action items supported by the commission in order to work together and maintain a true partnership.

ii. Provost Zomchick echoed Vice Chancellor Small. He noted specifically that we want to focus on retaining women on the campus and that, in order to do that, he needs to hear from the commission.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 1:02 p.m.