



SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Pete P. Gallego, President

November 2, 2021

Dr. Kathy Stein, President
Faculty Assembly (Alpine Campus)
Sul Ross State University
Alpine, TX 79832

RE: Sul Ross State University's Curriculum Committee

Dear Dr. Stein:

I am in receipt of the resolution passed by the Alpine campus' Faculty Assembly on October 19, 2021, in which the Assembly expresses its disapproval of the University's Curriculum Committee and calls for its dissolution. As always, I appreciate communications from any faculty organization and take each such communication seriously.

In addition, I appreciate the Faculty Assembly's offer to appoint the members of the University's Curriculum Committee to the Faculty Assembly's Curriculum Council. As per the offer, these appointments to the Curriculum Council would allow the same individuals to continue their work, but do so as a faculty "council" rather than a university "committee." For reasons outlined below, I find this offer problematic.

While I am always willing to talk through or negotiate any item of concern to or disagreement with the faculty, I cannot in good conscience compromise in areas that potentially jeopardize the university's accreditation. Time is especially of the essence because much work remains to be done before the next accreditation visit.

The objection to the University Curriculum Committee comes rather late in the process. The appointment of the committee was not a surprise; it was a recommendation of the Academic Planning Committee (APC) on which the presidents of both faculty governance organizations and other members of the Faculty Assembly served. The APC's recommendations were adopted and forwarded to me last spring. From that time until now, I heard nothing from the Faculty Assembly on this issue.

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After the APC recommendations were released, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness consulted with members of the Faculty Assembly's curriculum committee and the presidents of each faculty governance organization in designing the University Curriculum Committee's structure. Still, there was no objection from the Assembly. The one communication I received from the Faculty Assembly dealt with an entirely separate issue.

The beauty and efficiency of the University Curriculum Committee stems from the expertise and collaboration of its members. The committee includes nine members of the faculty (instead of the five membership slots allotted by the Faculty Assembly to its curriculum council). It also includes the academic deans, the registrar, and the Assistant Vice-President for Institutional Effectiveness (to address any SACSCOC issues requiring substantive changes). It also includes faculty from the Rio Grande College, which is critical as we move toward the SACSCOC-required unified curriculum.

On the one hand, the Faculty Assembly now offers to appoint these same curriculum committee members to its curriculum council. On the other, the Assembly, at the behest of several of its own members, took the relatively harsh step of expelling several of these same individuals from its organization. In my many years of experience with Sul Ross campus in Alpine, I do not recall the Faculty Assembly singling out professional colleagues in such a manner.

The idea that the Assembly's curriculum council would now include the academic deans, who were among those previously expelled by the Faculty Assembly, seems incongruous with the Assembly's previous decision to expel these members from its organization. Further, the Faculty Assembly's jurisdiction does not extend to the Rio Grande College. Thus, the Assembly's offer to appoint all of the same members to the curriculum council does not apply to the Rio Grande College campuses in Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Uvalde.

You and I clearly agree that primary responsibility for curriculum lies in the faculty of this institution. As a practical matter, however, the deans of each respective college are charged with responsibility for the curriculum in each respective college. By expelling the deans from its organization, the Faculty Assembly has crippled the expertise, the experience, and the authority of its own curriculum council. In so doing, it has only reinforced the need for a committee that is inclusive of all members of the Academy and that is willing to work alongside the administration in the shared governance of this university. This is increasingly important as we move to a unified curriculum across all four campuses and the entire university.

Further, the University's Curriculum Committee is completely controlled by the faculty. Two-thirds of its membership is derived from the faculty's ranks. It reports directly to the Provost, who is the head of the Academy. The chair of the committee is a faculty member and the presidents of both faculty organizations serve on the committee. Policies can be amended as necessary to ensure that this remains the case in perpetuity. It is also significant to note that the curriculum committee's charge is greater and more complex than that of the curriculum council because it includes all dimensions of curriculum ranging from the THECB graduate program reviews to core curriculum assessment reviews.

The complaint by the Faculty Assembly is not timely. As I indicated initially, time is of the essence in ensuring that our university is in compliance with all SACSCOC requirements. Already, the University's Curriculum Committee is reviewing over 300 curriculum change forms submitted by faculty. It is not in the best interests of the University to suddenly reverse this process — especially when the process is working efficiently and well. This is particularly important in the time crunch we find ourselves in.

I am a strong proponent of shared governance and maintain an open-door policy for faculty, staff, and students. Please note that I stand ready to discuss any concern by individual faculty members or by the faculty governance organizations as a whole. I make every effort in good faith to reach consensus on matters relating to the shared governance of Sul Ross. However, I'd ask that the faculty raise those concerns in a timely fashion. It is very difficult to reverse decisions months after they have been made.

Lastly, I understand that there will never be unanimity of opinion on my decisions, including this one. However, even the guidance on shared governance offered by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recognizes different approaches. It states, "Joint effort in an academic institution will take a variety of forms appropriate to the kinds of situations encountered." (AAUP Policy Documents and Reports, 11th Edition, 2015, p. 118).

In conclusion, the University Curriculum Committee represents a "joint effort" by the administration and faculty to meet SACSCOC-mandated requirements in a timely manner and honors the principle of shared governance. For these reasons as well as others previously stated, the Curriculum Committee will not be dissolved.

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Again, I reiterate that my door is always open should you or any faculty member have any other questions or concerns. I look forward to working with the Faculty Assembly towards continued improvement of the quality of education of our students and the betterment of our university.

Respectfully,



Pete P. Gallego, President
Sul Ross State University
Sul Ross Class of 1982

PPG/bp

cc: Dr. Matt Moore, Executive Vice-President
Dr. Robert Muñoz, Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, Rio Grande College
Dr. Jeanne Qvarnstrom, Assistant Vice-President for Institutional Effectiveness
Dr. Chris Herrera, Chair, University Curriculum Committee
Dr. Patricia Nicosia, Assistant Provost and Dean, Rio Grande College
Dr. Laura Payne, Dean, College of Literature, Arts, and Social Sciences
Dr. Barbara Tucker, Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies
Dr. Bonnie Warnock, Dean, College of Agriculture, Life and Physical Sciences
Dr. Wesley Wynne, President, Faculty Senate, Rio Grande College

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