

**FACULTY SENATE MINUTES - DRAFT
SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY**

March 24, 2022
3:30 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.
Remote via Zoom

Called to Order

3:30 p.m.

Senators Present (27)

Samuel Adu-Prah (COSET), Mario Aschauer (CAM), Natalie Baker (CJ), María Botero (CHSS), Tim Brown (COE), Patrick Buzzini (CJ), Rhonda Callaway (CHSS), Mona Cockerham (COHS), Tamara Cook (COSET), Brandy Doleshal (COSET), Mandy Duan (COBA), Damon Hay (COSET), Nick Lantz (CHSS), Victoria Lantz (CAM), Junkun Ma (COSET), Sureni Mullegama (COM), Mary Petró (COE), Debbie Price (COE), Kevin Randall (COHS), Stephen Rapp (CHSS), Vlad Radoias (COBA), Karen Sherrill (COBA), Aneika Simmons (COBA), Zachary Valdes (NGL), Xiaobo Wang (CHSS), Anthony Watkins (CAM), Rebecca Wentworth (COE).

Senators Not Present (4)

Debbi Hatton (CAM), Geraldine Monjardez (CJ), Audrey Murfin (CHSS), Kyle Stutts (COSET)

Called to Order

3:30 p.m.

Special Guests: SHSU Online

Dr. Ruth Chisum, Assistant Vice President for Online Operations
Jacob Spradlin, Associate Director for Instructional Technology Support Services

Special Guests: Resolution on Academic Freedom and Tenure

Dr. Paul Eaton (via pre-recorded video), Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership
Dr. Kandi Tayebi, Professor, Department of English
Dr. Ben Mitchell-Yellin, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Philosophy
Dr. Diane Dowdey, Professor, Department of English
Dr. Jeff Gardner, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology
Dr. Tom Meagher, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology and Philosophy

Special Guests: SHSU Online

Appearing before Faculty Senate, Dr. Chisum and Jacob Spradlin made a presentation concerning the upcoming changes to Blackboard (Bb) and answered questions from the members of Faculty Senate. Their presentation focused on the upcoming update to Bb Ultra, an upgrade initiated by Bb that will introduce a new layout and technical architecture, including a mobile-compatible format and ADA compliance that meets the needs of neurodiverse users. The estimated time for this upgrade is the summer semester, however, initially, this upgrade will only change the landing page unless faculty request a complete upgrade to Bb Ultra. In the near future, Bb will move

entirely to Bb Ultra. Several mediums of communication, including announcements on the SHSU-online website, newsletters, and Bb pop-ups will be used to update faculty during this upgrade. Several training opportunities, including monthly webinars, have been (and will continue to be) deployed to support faculty and students in this upgrade. These different modes of communication will also include information regarding changes in “partner tools” (e.g., Turnitin, Pearson) found in Bb.

Special Guests: Resolution on Academic Freedom and Tenure

Following the Lieutenant Governor’s statements on academic freedom & tenure, several faculty reached out to Faculty Senate to express their concern. A group of faculty members from several colleges, including two from Faculty Senate, initiated a grassroots effort to draft a resolution in support of academic freedom and tenure. Dr. Paul Eaton (via pre-recorded video), Dr. Ben Mitchell-Yellin, and Dr. Kandi Tayebi addressed the members of Faculty Senate providing arguments for the need of this resolution. Senator Price moved the motion to accept the resolution and open it for discussion. After discussion, this motion was followed by a call for the question and the resolution passed. Please find a copy of the resolution attached to the minutes.

Announcements

1. Reminder of faculty preference survey.

Adjournment

5:08 p.m.

Resolution Defending Academic Freedom and Tenure

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS state legislative [proposals](#) are being [introduced](#) across the United States and [priorities for state legislation](#) are being communicated in the state of Texas that target academic discussions of particular theories, such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), and particular issues, such as racism in American history, in colleges and universities;

WHEREAS such priorities and proposals, including in the state of Texas, are being linked with threats to tenure in state colleges and universities, in particular for those who engage in teaching or research on particular theories, such as CRT;

WHEREAS SHSU's [Faculty Handbook](#) states, "Sam Houston State University is committed to academic freedom" in accordance with the Texas State University System (TSUS) Rules and Regulations;

WHEREAS the TSUS [Rules and Regulations](#) (§4.71) state that a "faculty member is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing the faculty member's subject" and may introduce "controversial material in the classroom" if "it has a clear relationship to the subject field";

WHEREAS SHSU's SACSCOC Reaffirmation Report states that "Sam Houston State University (SHSU) is committed to upholding the principle that adequate safeguards and protections must exist to ensure academic freedom" ([narrative to §6.4](#)) and that "SHSU places the primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty" ([narrative for §10.4](#));

WHEREAS Sam Houston State University (SHSU) Academic Policy Statement [900417](#) states, "Tenure is the most important decision a university makes with regard to its faculty, and the quality of tenure decisions over the years determines in large measure the quality of the university";

WHEREAS SHSU Academic Policy Statement [900417](#) states, "Tenure ensures academic freedom and protects faculty from inappropriate retribution";

WHEREAS legislative priorities and proposals that seek to interfere with the capacity of educators to explore a wide variety of topics based on educators' academic training, qualifications, and expertise and to dismantle the protections of tenure on the basis of educators' exercise of such capacities are antithetical to the above policy statements;

WHEREAS such legislative priorities and proposals are antithetical to Sam Houston State University's [Mission](#) to "Provide high quality education, scholarship and service to qualified students for the benefit of regional, state, national and international constituencies";

WHEREAS the Supreme Court of the United States has [affirmed](#) the "essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities" and the principle that "Teachers and students must

always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise, our civilization will stagnate and die”;

WHEREAS over [eighty institutions or faculty bodies](#) have adopted or endorsed the [Chicago Statement](#), or some substantially similar statement, in support of institutionally-supported “free and open discourse”;

WHEREAS over seventy organizations issued the [Joint Statement on Legislative Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism and American History](#) stating that “In higher education, under principles of academic freedom that have been widely endorsed, professors are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject. Educators, not politicians, should make decisions about teaching and learning”;

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that SHSU’s Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, for example CRT or gender essentialism, and will stand firm against encroachment on academic freedom and tenure.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that SHSU’s Faculty Senate calls upon President White and Provost Stephenson to affirm that they reject any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, for example CRT or gender essentialism, and will stand firm against encroachment on academic freedom and tenure.