

UHCL Faculty Assembly Meeting

November 2, 2017 Minutes

Dr. Brian Stephens called the meeting to order.

Dr. Stephens gave a big, 'Thank you!' to the current Faculty Senate Committee for all of their effort this year. This includes:

Mike McMullen, President Elect
Lisa Gossett, Past President
Denise McDonald, Senator-at-Large
Heather Kanenberg, Chair – Faculty Life Committee
Paul Withey, Chair – Budget & Facilities Committee
Elizabeth Beavers, Chair – Research & Teaching Committee
Amanda Johnston, Chair – Curriculum

Dr. Brian Stephens stated that, if anyone has concerns that they feel should be addressed, Senate would like to know about them to help voice them to the proper people.

Dr. Stephens introduced our new UHCL President, Dr. Ira K. Blake, and started the Q&A session off with six questions that have been asked by faculty as of late:

1. What is the status of the strategic planning initiative and the role of Faculty in that effort?

Dr. Blake: Would like faculty to understand that they are at the core of any initiative UHCL has. She encourages faculty to come forward to contribute so we can work collectively, moving forward. First and foremost, Dr. Blake would like everyone to know we're going to have a full-fledged strategic planning process beginning in spring and continuing through the fall cycle. We will have internal constituents (faculty, staff, admins, alumni, donors) and external representatives (educational leaders, chamber presidents, business organization presidents, political figures, and Johnson Space Center). We want our strategic plan to not only reach internally, but out into our community, as well. We need to be able to connect our students with employment and resources in the 'real world' around us. This is a rich part of UHCL's history and we need to leverage this legacy. Dr. Blake also reported that we are on schedule to launch the public phase of the UHCL campaign. She is requesting that faculty give her narrative about their programming and research so that she has something to promote to our wonderful donors. Prospective investors need to know why they should invest more in UHCL. She understands that we are doing things a tad 'backwards', meaning, we should have already had our strategic plan finished, however, we're going to do the best moving forward.

2. Please share your perspective on the budget cuts that we are facing the fiscal year '19 budget year. Specifically, can you speak to or provide reasoning for the cuts being distributed as 6% 'across the board' or the same for each area?

Dr. Blake: Reported that she is aware of the precipitous decline in enrollment a few years ago. We've recovered in headcount, however, in terms of tuition dollars (since we are tuition driven) we have lost money. We have lost international student headcount. Each one of these international students are monetarily worth 4.4 times more than a domestic student. We are still trying to catch up financially, despite having a growing headcount. Everywhere she has been, if there is an issue with the budget, there is a standard 6% cut. Dr. Blake recounts that, at her former institution, everyone was asked to give back part of their budget equally. However, there was a department that could not afford to give back on their

budget due to needing the money for their educational programming. Dr. Blake, being an administrator, realized that she is not providing educational experiences to students directly and was able to ‘tighten her belt’ a bit more to allow the department to keep the funding they needed. As UHCL faculty, you are at one of the most important spots you can be in to increase student retention. This will also help us regain our financial footing. We need to increase class sizes, as well... where it is reasonable. Dr. Blake explained that there are places where a larger class size is okay and a smaller class size is necessary. They are not the same everywhere in the organization, so we need to take a closer look at that and be willing to expand or minimize as the opportunity arises. She asks faculty to be thinking about how we can adjust those numbers to reduce expenses and still bring in the tuition. Something that is also VERY important is that we need to provide course offerings that allow students to graduate in four years. It is incredibly important for our reputation. Dr. Blake expanded to say that faculty MUST be brilliant at UHCL. The history of campus is that we were created to advance astronauts, scientists, educators, engineers, etc. We need to be looking at how to bring in more grant money, because that is who we are. From a pedagogy standpoint, we are doing amazing things and Dr. Blake has heard about them from alumni. So, let’s get more grant dollars coming in as another way to deal with our deficit. We need to identify programs and courses that are high demand from an occupational standpoint. We need to look at emerging fields within each of our fields and not only have a program for that field, but have connections for students to gain employment in these fields, once they are graduated. Given where we are, we are going to have to do some cuts. The question is how we are going to strategically do this. She is asking faculty to think about the short/long term and where cuts are reasonable. However, we can grow the campus because of the quality of the institution that faculty heavily contributes to.

3. Please share your initial thoughts on needed changes to the University staff and structure.

Dr. Blake: There is no question that Dr. Blake believes in functional roles, as opposed to structural roles, and we need to make adjustments. She has already made one, big administrative adjustment when it comes to roles since she has been here. In her opinion, if there are very few persons at the top, ideas can get lost. She wants to make sure vital ideas make it to the ears they are supposed to make it to in order to be heard. There are two areas in which we have no representation that we need to move forward. The first is, we don’t have anyone who is doing governmental and community relations. We cannot have a lobbyist, but we do need someone who understands what is happening at a legislative level. This person will need to have meeting with political reps and tap into the business community around us. This way, we can gain more clout when we put forward a legislative request. Things are complicated and there are things getting ready to happen around special initiatives, so we need a representative to help us tap into our community so that we can prevent elimination of these special programs and dollars. Also, she is getting a sense that the coordinating board is highly political, which is very unusual for her. She believes we need people prepping when we put forward a new program. We need advocates. Secondly, we need communications here. We need someone who is branding us, tagging us, and putting forward the essential elements that we need our community to know about us. She believes that one of the reasons we are losing enrollment is because we haven’t had enough strategic, 21st century marketing to drive enrollment. She knows that every higher education organization has communication challenges. We need to fight the tendency to ‘silo’ and work together to create foundational support to get our message out there. It’s easier said than done, but we can do it.

4. What is your position on shared governance and its function at the university, and how will you utilize this relationship as it relates to decisions on curricular and academic issues including partnerships with for-profit online degree companies?

Dr. Blake: Her position on shared governance is that she highly values expertise across the board. She loves that we have so many experts on all topics available to us in higher education. Shared governance is precisely about that. All of these different roles/expertise weighing in on issues that affect our university. What needs to be remembered is that there must be respect for the different expertise in the

spaces around these issues. When we say there will be a consensus decision in going about something, that means, if we succeed, we're all successful. If we fail, she (as the president) gets looked at. In her former roles, she has made suggestions to leaders on her campuses based on her experiences. Some were accepted and some were diplomatically declined. If her idea is turned down, she doesn't take it personally and goes to work figuring out how to get behind the plan that is chosen by leaders. She hopes that we all will share our expertise and 'go where our strengths are', however, if your idea does not 'win the day', please find a way to help support the method that is chosen so that we can all give it our best shot to succeed. Dr. Blake also discussed the purpose of our space allocation committee. She is disappointed that the purpose of the space allocation committee is not being followed and she will look into it. This committee should have a say in how space is utilized within the university. We also need to be clear on what roles our various committees play within our institution. We will continue to work on the best ways to get the top ideas considered as we all move forward.

5. Between 2013 and 2017, we hired many untenured faculty members, and we made promises to these new hires about research support, program development, and ultimately, the promise of tenure and have lost faculty positions. These new faculty are being told that there is no support for research, no release time for service, that course caps will increase, and that they are still expected to conduct research according to expectations and non-academic departments are hiring high-level employees. As a result, many new faculty have begun to look elsewhere for positions where they can find support for their work. How will you address the problems of retention and low morale created by this situation?

Dr. Blake: First of all, Dr. Blake doesn't think anyone made a promise that they didn't intend to keep. When she thinks about it, she believes that the drop in enrollment just pulled away that many funds from departments. Many universities do not provide support for faculty research. That is not the model she believes in. She believes in financially supporting faculty, however, we do not have funds. There are a number of things we can do to try to raise morale, though. We can encourage collaboration between tenured and tenure-track individuals. Deans, provosts, or other admins may be able to find some funds for individual researchers, depending on the project. This is a conversation that is worth having, so please have it. There are also experts among the faculty that can help each other edit, provide feedback, co-author, etc. for publications. If faculty are in need of a piece of equipment, please come see Dr. Blake, your dean, or the provost. We may be able to work with an external partner to get this equipment for you. We need to encourage one another by showing them and telling them this is a great place. Dr. Blake believes also that every new faculty member that comes in should have a mentor. New faculty need someone to orient them and help them support themselves in instruction, service, and research. It should also be determined across the board what the appropriate level of service is for faculty so that they can continue to help support one another. We will all work together to get through this deficit.

6. What is your perspective on the current university initiative that are underway to address low enrollment and your thoughts about the website and marketing/recruitment efforts to address this challenge being experienced by UHCL?

Dr. Blake: 'This is a very interesting question because I just asked for information yesterday on data from the last three years on enrollment and marketing. I am waiting on those numbers.' We've had several cohorts come through at this point. We know who they are, but we need to know what our graduation numbers will look like in the spring. 57% is the target graduation rate. We need to see how we are going to fair at this point. Are these students on track to graduate on time and, if not, is there something we can do to make sure they make it to their commencement on time? We want to meet our target, so we need to look at that now. In terms of marketing and recruitment, we have NOT done marketing. Keep in mind that we are in a gap in terms of our strategic plan. We've got a four-year expansion going on right now, there are buildings going up around us, we need to do a campaign, so we must do a strategic plan. Dr. Blake expressed that it is incredibly important for everyone to remain professional and respectful, even if you disagree with one another. We all need to look at each other and

see each other's humanity, and temper some of our frustration. Please try to allow yourself to see insight and exercise patience.

At this time, President Blake opened the floor for questions to UHCL faculty members.

1. Dr. Mike McMullen: Thank you for being willing to come and answer Faculty Senate's questions. On the issue of research support, I like the idea that you have a strategic plan and are developing an initiative. There is a perception among faculty that the research requirements have increased without a conversation about that. Over half of the faculty in HSH are un-tenured. They were hired as part of the downward expansion and have no funding for travel or research, however, the requirements are being set to compare to a research one university. What is a realistic expectation for research output, especially given the current budget situation?

Dr. Blake: This isn't the only institution where criteria for promotion and tenure 'crept up'. We do need to have the full-fledged conversation to set expectations. We also need to be careful not confuse resources with scholarly output. There is only one research institution in Houston and that University of Houston-Main. That doesn't mean we don't expect UHCL faculty to research, however, we need to think about ways in the meantime to help faculty understand that they are a member of their professional community and we need to find realistic ways for them to contribute to research. I'm sure we have some anxious colleagues in our midst if there is that much of a disproportionate number of un-tenured faculty within departments. Mike, please bring this question up again when we all meet at a later time.

2. Dr. Magdy Akladios: I'm the department chair for Physical and Applied Sciences. Students, staff, and faculty are having a hard time navigating through the website. Do you have any plans on improvement for the website soon?

Dr. Blake: This is fascinating. I have colleagues that send me emails to tell me how beautiful our website is. I always reply, 'Well, you're only going a couple of clicks in.' I can tell you that I am working on improving the accessibility of our site. I'll be talking with the provost about this again soon. We need to merge advertising our programs and degrees with typical guidelines for website navigation/creation. I admit, I'm still not doing this one well, but I will bring it up again and start working harder on it. We need to make sure students can get to meaningful and accurate information for UHCL.

3. Dr. Karen Alexander: I'm from the nursing program. Are you familiar with the new state bill allowing community colleges to open up nursing programs? If so, do you think it will affect UHCL?

Dr. Blake: Yes, when community colleges get a crack in the door, they will open it. They have some of the strongest representatives and grant writers. I believe there are plenty of students to go around for all of us, considering the demand in medical professions in our area. Community colleges do entry level education for these programs really well, but if we market leadership in careers, along with our competencies, no one will be able to touch us. This is particularly true due to our UHCL legacy. We do need an internal marketer, though, to do a good job for us. In terms of nursing, no one has anything on UHCL. We have three Ph.D. nurse educators. That is highest quality for theory and practice. We just need to market the caliber of our faculty and the way it connects with the professional needs of our students aggressively and in the right way.

4. Dr. Rekha Subramanian: I'm the department chair of Liberal Arts in HSH. My question relates to Karen's. I love what you said about being proud of our legacy. I've really valued our non-traditional, working students that we had when I came here. As we grow and outline the vision/mission for the university, will we be making sure these students feel welcome? Many have expressed concern that they

are feeling less welcome at UHCL due to the changing culture. Also, being a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), how will we make our Hispanic population of students feel welcome?

Dr. Blake: UHCL being an HSI, is amazing and isn't promoted enough. It will be, moving forward. I have connections that are involved with HSIs and will continue to receive feedback from them. I can understand how our non-traditional students would feel that they are being overlooked due to the emphasis placed on younger students over the past four years. We will find ways to make all of these students feel included as we create our new culture in the years to come. I encourage you and other faculty to find a voice on committee to drive this initiative as we go along.

5. Dr. Rebecca Huss-Keeler: A couple of years ago, we stopped doing the alumni magazine. I get alumni magazines from all three of the universities I attended. We used to have a really nice 'Egret' alumni magazine. When I asked about it, I was told we couldn't afford to print it anymore. This would be a good way to promote what is going on with our current students and alumni. This keeps us out in the community.

Dr. Blake: I've been discussing ways with Rhonda Thompson to find ways to engage alumni more effectively. Some kind of newsletter is absolutely necessary if we expect our 66,000 alumni to feel connected to us and continue to understand why endowment for UHCL is important. We will continue to talk about this.

6. Dr. Kathleen Garland: I'm in the Environmental Management program. From an environmental standpoint, could you talk a bit about facilities, the campus, and sustainability? How will we manage this?

Dr. Blake: There are many resources available for teaching, Hispanic-serving, study abroad. We currently have no green buildings. We have this mammoth building we are standing in right now. I haven't given these things much thought at this point. We will work on it. The Master Planning Committee will need to work on this. We need to make improvements when it comes to reducing our carbon footprint. There are basic things we can promote that can be part of our strategic plan (solar, energy storage, biochips, etc.) We need to find someone who can setup a program for renewables. There is no one researching it on campus. We have a research one institution we are connected with and we can possibly use this as a way to pull UH to UHCL to create a partnership in a meaningful way.

7. Dr. Caroline Crawford: Thank you for being here. I'm interested in your 'diversity of opinions and respecting each other' discussion. I'm curious about your stance on the implementation of collegiality of administration. I am concerned about negative reviews being extended for promotion and tenure due to differences of opinion.

Dr. Blake: I would have to look into what was being said that was not collegial within the first few years. We need to be careful at the way we look at it, because there are ways people speak that are passionate, and start to get 'close to the line'. It is important that we ask these people to take a break, sit down, or take a deep breath before continuing. We must always be respectful of one another during a conversation. We shouldn't be afraid to let our colleagues know if something is treading the line of being rude. Usually, they will admit that they do not mean to be rude, they are just feeling 'passionate' about this subject. We must call our colleagues on their behavior in a polite and respectful way at all times.

Dr. Lisa Gossett: I might be paranoid, but I heard Caroline asking another part of this question. The way I interpreted her question is that there may be someone evaluating you and saying, "You don't work well/play well with others," simply because you had a difference of opinion with them. You weren't rude, you just had a difference of opinion. I feel, if there is a possibility that

administration begin to evaluate people based on their personalities, I would be out of a job... but that might not be what Caroline meant.

Caroline: No, that's exactly what I meant. Thank you for the clarification, Lisa. I was trying to be subtle, my apologies.

Dr. Blake: That has not been part of my experience. That sounds strange and I would like to look into that and see why it would be brought up. Thank you for bringing it up.

8. Dr. Mike Findler: I'm program chair for Software and Engineering. My big pet peeve since I've been here is Blackboard. It is a 10-year-old version and is not easy to use from a faculty perspective. I hear they bought it ten years ago, instead of renting it yearly. There are things I cannot do. I have two sections of the same thing and changes do not carry to each section. Universities I've come from have updated versions that allow me to make changes to more than one section simultaneously.

Dr. Blake: I will talk to University Computing about it.

9. Dr. Christine Kovic: Thank you for coming. People are very passionate about our university. We do have strong views. We appreciate this opportunity to be able to speak up and express our views. I hope this will be the beginning of many conversations you have with faculty.

Dr. Blake: This is a valuable experience. This is an opportunity for me to receive different opinions and views from all faculty. I want everyone to feel that they have the right to express their opinions respectfully and professionally. This is the first of many talks with the faculty. You are central to the work that gets done here at UHCL. If we do not have a strong, working relationship, we will not be able to change the university and the world for the better. The greatest role, second to parenting, when it comes to shaping lives, is what we do. Yes, this will be the first of many. Keep in mind, you won't like what you hear from me sometimes, too, but we'll all keep in mind to be polite and continue communication.

After closing remarks, the meeting was adjourned.