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November 18, 2020

Dear Drs. Donovan and Lutz:

Thank you for your letter. As former president of the MTSU chapter of AAUP, I join you in continued devotion to shared governance on this campus.

I am sorry that you believe our effort to identify and assist faculty who may have been having difficulty converting their courses to remote delivery has undermined shared governance at MTSU. That was certainly not our intent nor, in my opinion, the result.

I agree that the development of the survey instrument was rushed. Our goal was to identify issues, and offer help, so that any necessary changes could be made while the semester was still underway. With that goal in mind, we simply did not have time to proceed at the deliberate pace with which we normally approach such things. Still, we did share a draft with the Faculty Senate, which seemed to be the most appropriate way to solicit expeditious feedback. We sent the final version to department chairs. How the Senate and chairs distributed the documents or developed their responses is beyond my purview. I believe our actions met the standard, specified in the AAUP's statement "Principles and Standards for the COVID-19 Pandemic," that faculty should "expect meaningful participation in the decision-making process" on issues that typically fall under shared governance. Therefore I do not agree that our handling of this matter compromised principles of shared governance.

You note that the survey "does not serve its stated purpose." I disagree. Students had the opportunity to identify courses in which they felt the delivery was problematic (and also had the chance to praise courses where they felt the delivery was good). Deans and chairs were notified of those responses, and chairs reached out to faculty who may have been having difficulties. That was the purpose of the survey. As is the case with student evaluations of teaching, we decided that faculty would receive results for their courses after the end of the semester so that students would feel comfortable giving honest feedback.

You note that the "design of the survey does not reflect accepted standards of pedagogical evaluation." That is because the survey was not designed as a formal evaluation tool but rather as a means to identify potential problems early so that they could be addressed in a timely manner. We have all been in this business long enough to know that student perceptions are not always accurate or fair. But ignoring them in an era with greatly heightened scrutiny of higher education seems both unwise and irresponsible.

I don't know what you mean when you write that the survey "supplants existing policy structures." The survey was an additional, temporary measure adopted to respond to circumstances caused by the pandemic.

The results of the survey are not being used for faculty evaluation, and the survey does not replace our student evaluations of teaching. If faculty members believe that the survey results are being used in their annual evaluations or in tenure and promotion deliberations, they should speak up, by notifying their dean or me and/or, in cases of tenure and promotion, using the rebuttal and appeals process.

That you believe the campus climate has been damaged is unfortunate. The administration recognizes and is grateful for the faculty's commitment to high quality teaching.

Finally, I welcome faculty input on any future surveys and your suggestions for improved communication and faculty participation in the process.

Sincerely,



Mark Byrnes
Provost