

JSCC Faculty Council Meeting Minutes August 20th, 2021

The Faculty Council met Friday, August 20th at 10:00 a.m. in HS 111.

Present: Lauren Bryant, Liz Mayo, Bob Raines, Cindy Roberson, Kim Benson, Anna Esquivel, Justin Curtis, Mark Walls, Ben Lawrence, Scott Woods, Craig Metcalf, Jane David, Stacey Dunevant.

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Given the COVID pandemic's impact on school operations, Chair Mayo emphasized the upcoming semester was one of the most critical in JSCC's history. To be on top of key issues, she asked council members to communicate concerns to her.

II. Next Meeting

Friday, September 17th, 2021 at 10:00 in HS 111.

III. Approval of Minutes

A motion and second were offered to approve the April, 2021 Council minutes as presented. The motion carried.

IV. Announcements

1. To enable greater stability for now, Dr. Tom Pigg will serve as interim VPAA through July 1st of 2022. The VPAA search will reopen in the spring semester.
2. A Student Life Director, Dominic Jackson, has been hired. Dr. Esquivel shared that this position acts as a hub for student organizations. Mr. Jackson wants to work with faculty to help connect student life to the classroom.
3. Search committees worked hard this summer hire a professor in Art, Ms. Jenn Brown, from Blinn College in Bryan, Texas and a professor in Spanish from University of South Florida, Ms. Marisol Hernández-Soto.
4. Finalizing a date for a Welcome Back Bash vaccine drive was hard and remained TBA on the Council's 8-20-21 meeting date. Since then, the Welcome Back Bash and Covid vaccine drive were scheduled on separate dates with the latter being September 28th and 29th for the first dose and October 20th and 21st for the second.)

V. Reports from Committees

1. Faculty Evaluation

Much work was accomplished in the Spring, 2021 semester. Work will begin again this semester.

2. City of Jackson Bicentennial Committee

Lauren Bryant reported an October campus event is still in planning. The event would replace the old Bluegrass and Bagels event for community outreach.

3. Pandemic Response Team

Weekly notes are being sent via email to faculty immediately after the team meetings.

4. Faculty Sub-council

Dr. Esquivel summarized several TBR initiatives and information items from the Sub-Council's July 16th meeting:

- Community college enrollment has been flat overall.
- TBR's Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs search has ended with the selection of Dr. Jothany Blackwood.
- A new interactive website now archives strategic plans for TBR and for individual community colleges.
- There are work groups and online opportunities for High Impact Practices (HIP) which now include academic advising.
- Revisions of Early-College High and Dual Enrollment policies are in process from TBR; JSCC's Faculty Council can expect an email from Dr. Esquivel on this and should pass it along to constituents.
- TBR is seeking volunteers to work on a statewide committee revising and developing AP and CLEP standards.
- Little has been happening with TBR's General Education Core revision work, but it is still early in this process. Abby Lackey is the chair of the JSCC team for this work.
- TBR is reviewing programs of the TN E-Campus and some work has been completed on alert buttons. No faculty summer academy was offered.
- The TN Open Education Hub ([TN Open Education Hub](#)) has been launched. This resource is a portal for collaboratively developed OER Commons resources.
- TBR is hoping to develop and expand courses/programs that facilitate competency-based education options such as the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) initiative. For some time, TCATs have been using such academic credit for experience. Ben Lawrence added that TBR's interest is to enable a more seamless and direct pathway from high school to TCAT to community college and then to four-year university programs.
- For interested faculty, an opportunity exists to work on a THEC/TBR transfer and articulation committee. Some of the articulation pathway agreements have been breaking down, and this initiative would also strengthen the articulation from TCATs to community college and on to universities.
- TBR's General Counsel has advised that current issues raised by some of Tennessee's legislative members about teaching Critical Race Theory do not affect or apply to TBR institutions. TBR has received concerned calls from

parents of early-college and dual-enrollment students about the nature of some course content and whether Critical Race Theory would be presented to students.

Finally, Dr. Esquivel briefed the Council on Sub-council discussions about schools' masking requirements and precautions against COVID infections in July. She clarified Sub-council representatives' "great" concerns, universally, for the past week's TBR directive prohibiting colleges and TCATs from requiring and enforcing masks inside campus buildings.

VI. Old Business

1. Teaching Load Equivalency

Dr. Mayo noted the TLE analysis was ongoing. She reminded the Council that this study was, in part, to help determine appropriate class day and time scheduling. The issue of work equity was also raised in connection with TLE and it was noted that class sizes did not necessarily coincide with instructor workloads.

VII. New Business

1. Covid Protocols

Council representatives considered what some acknowledged as the gravest issue the Council has faced ever—the Tennessee Board of Regents' directive prohibiting mask mandates on TCAT and community college campuses.

Council members expressed shock and frustration that TBR had appeared to extend and apply to its institutions Governor Bill Lee's Executive Order No. 84, (8-16-21) which protected K-12 parents' or guardians' right to "opt [their children] out of any order or requirement . . . to wear a face covering at school . . ." Dr. Esquivel reviewed some of the frustrated reactions at sister institutions and among their Sub-Council representatives. She noted their concerns to be universally "great" and that among them there was "resounding" support for a letter of concern she had forwarded them from JSCC Professor Bob Raines' personally to TBR Chancellor Tydings and the Board of Regents. She stated that "lots of conversations" objecting to TBR's directive "were [currently] happening" across the system, referencing Columbia State, Nashville State, Pellissippi State, and Roane State Community Colleges.

Council members expressed astonishment that leadership throughout the system seemed "incapacitated and frozen" in responding to a requirement that clearly would endanger students and school employees, and their families. It was noted that faculty were uniquely free from political pressure in this matter and in the best position to act. So, the question of what the Council should do was posed and a motion offered.

MOTION: The following motion was made and seconded after much discussion. It passed the Council with a vote of 10 to 1.

The JSCC Faculty Council will draft and send a letter to Chancellor Tydings and the Board of Regents agreeing with and supporting Professor Bob Raines' personal letter of concern regarding TBR's prohibition of mask requirements on campuses. Additionally the letter of support shall reference [TBR Policy 7.03.00.00 on Infectious Disease \[Procedures \(II\)\(A\)\]](#) which gives individual colleges the responsibility and authority to "develop procedures and regulations concerning the outbreak of infectious, communicable, and/or life-threatening diseases"

In discussion, some Council members made numerous observations which included the following: **(1)** the Governor's Executive Order No. 84 was a dangerous political action; **(2)** given the low vaccination rate among our students and increasing COVID cases, TBR's directive extending the mask opt-out protection to TCAT and community college students would increase serious infections and disrupt or complicate school operations; **(3)** faculty bodies could take stands and act with more insulation and less vulnerability than individual administrators; **(4)** our students enrolled in classes assuming ground sections would be safe, masked environments, and this directive broke JSCC's assurances students had when they enrolled; **(5)** to be unsafe about this pandemic was an insulting betrayal to our nursing and other health care graduates presently fighting this pandemic at great risk; **(6)** that the Governor's order and--on its heels--TBR's directive comprised a "train wreck" happening before our eyes, **(7)** that as college educators we needed to model for our students and community ethical, courageous, and rational thought, and we needed to do so publicly; **(8)** that it was ironic instructors had independent authority to dismiss students for texting in class but could not do so for refusing to mask-up in a pandemic.

2. Budget Updates

- Dr. Mayo informed the Council that JSCC was currently operating \$567, 489.00 in the red. She explained that the school had been allowed to float this deficit for the 21-22 school year but would need to be even by the end of the year's budget cycle. If this imbalance is not corrected, JSCC will need to report to TBR on how it will be made up.
- As an independent analyst, The Huron Group has been retained to gather data and report on JSCC's efficiency and budgeting.
- JSCC just spent \$1,000,000.00 on the school's pay plan to bring employees up to proper levels. \$1,500,000.00 more is needed toward that end. According to Dr. Pimentel, JSCC will only hire critical positions until employees are at 100% of their salary plan mid-point. He understands the demoralizing problem of salary compression, as well.
- Dr. Mayo stated that Learning Support would be funded from a \$470,000.00 grant in the future and that next year a proposal would be submitted to THEC

requesting monies for a learning commons in the library. This commons would be tied to learning support services.

3. Quad Project

A study is being made to assess the functionality of space and landscaping in the JSCC quadrangle. The current blocks in the planted areas are collapsing and Preston Turner needs faculty input on use or design of this space. Email him ideas.

4. Organizational Chart & Off-Contract Faculty Work

These two agenda items were held for the September Faculty Council meeting, Friday September 17th at 10:00 a.m. in HS 111.

MOTION: A motion was made to adjourn at 12:18 p.m. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark E. Walls
Faculty Council Secretary

Dr. Liz Mayo
Faculty Council Chair

Appendix A—JSCC Faculty Council Letter of Support

Dear Chancellor Tydings and members of the Tennessee Board of Regents,

We are writing to you today as the Jackson State Community College Faculty Council. We support our colleague Dr. Bob Raines’s statement of concern regarding TBR’s decision to not allow mask mandates on its campuses.

As educators and professionals—many of us teaching in healthcare-related fields—we are distraught by this decision. Not only do we know masking works to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, but also we are working in a Covid hot spot. For reference, our college is situated just four miles from a regional hospital so overwhelmed with new Covid cases that they’ve had to open tents in the parking lot to treat the flood of incoming patients.

The best tool we have to keep students safe while they are on our campus is to require masking, and we know this is true because we trust the expertise of our colleagues in health fields and science disciplines and the public health experts in our community. We also know that this expertise has been of great importance to TBR as well. For example, [TBR Policy 7.03.00.00 on Infectious Disease](#) [Procedures (II)(A)] notes each college’s leadership will “develop procedures and regulations concerning the outbreak of infectious, communicable, and/or life-threatening diseases” and will include in this conversation “individuals with appropriate authority over essential functions of the College as well as *persons with relevant medical/health education/experience* in the process to develop procedures and/or regulations responsive to the outbreak of an infectious/communicable disease.”

We feel the consequences to our campus communities of disallowing mask mandates may be grave. Please reconsider your decision.

Thank you for receiving our concerns.

Respectfully,

JSCC Faculty Council

Appendix B—Professor Bob Raines’ Statement of Concern

Statement of Concern to Chancellor Tydings and The Tennessee Board of Regents

I am profoundly disappointed in the directive from the Tennessee Board of Regents, which states that we cannot require masking on our campus. This is counter to the recommendations issued by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

“CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.”

Infectious disease experts assert that mask wearing can prevent the spread of COVID 19 and reduce the risk of long-term serious health complications and death. This pandemic is raging in our community. There are tents on the grounds of our local hospital because they do not have adequate space to treat critically ill patients. In our area, the vaccination rate among 18-25-year-olds (our students) is estimated to be around 10% or less.

For the last 18 months, the JSCC faculty have responded to the challenges of the pandemic. We have creatively adapted our teaching strategies, embraced new technologies, and supported our students and our institutional leadership. This directive is demoralizing. The other public institutions of higher education in our area, The University of Memphis and The University of Tennessee at Martin (on the campus of JSCC), have masking requirements for their classrooms. Do our students, staff, and faculty not deserve the same concern, consideration, and protection?

One part of the mission and mandate of higher education is to promote critical thinking and rational decision-making. The message this directive communicates implicitly is that we do not think the risks associated with COVID 19 are as serious as the experts in this field tell us. We, in essence, are endorsing a dangerous and false narrative, and enabling a reckless, politically motivated posturing, which will put our students, staff, faculty, and community in jeopardy. In my opinion, this is morally indefensible.

I am requesting that you reconsider this directive and allow us to begin the Fall term in a safer, and more open, caring, dynamic environment.

It is only a mask.

Bob Raines, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology, Jackson State Community College
 Faculty Regent, Tennessee Board of Regents (2012-2013)
 Licensed Psychologist (1987-2021)
 JSCC Honors Program Coordinator (2006-2020)
 JSCC Outstanding Arts and Sciences Faculty Award (2008 and 2018)
 JSCC SOAR Nominee (2019)