

University Faculty Meeting

March 14, 2025

Agenda:

1. Comments from President Chris Roellke
2. Comments from Provost Elizabeth Skomp
3. Comments from Faculty Senate Chair Steven Smallpage
4. Discussion and possible action on Spring Break Academic Calendar Driver (Steven Smallpage and Krista Franco)
5. Update from Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Task Force (Mary Ellen Oslick and Robert Askew)
6. Discussion of Faculty Governance Reform proposal (Steven Smallpage and Alan Green)

The meeting was called to order at 12:00pm by Provost Skomp.

Provost Skomp welcomed the faculty, outlined the agenda for the session, and then introduced President Chris Roellke.

Comments from President Chris Roellke

President Roellke opened the meeting by recognizing the complexity of the current higher education landscape, particularly in light of recent federal policy changes. He assured faculty that Stetson University is closely monitoring these developments and that he would provide a detailed video message to the community in the coming week. This message will cover key strategic priorities, including institutional sustainability, the federal higher education policy landscape, and its impact on Stetson. He also highlighted the promising curricular reforms being undertaken through the Hatter Ready initiative. President Roellke concluded by expressing his gratitude to the faculty for their continued commitment to advancing Stetson's educational mission.

Comments from Provost Elizabeth Skomp

Following President Roellke's remarks, Provost Skomp provided additional context on the challenges facing higher education institutions, particularly in response to recent executive orders and changes in federal funding. She shared that both she and President Roellke attended a conference on higher education law and policy at Stetson's College of Law, where discussions centered on the rapidly evolving legal and regulatory landscape. Notably, the conference saw an increase in new participants, reflecting the urgency of these issues within the higher education sector.

Provost Skomp emphasized that despite these external pressures, Stetson University remains steadfast in its mission, values, and commitments. She reassured faculty that the institution continues to navigate the complexities of federal grant funding with diligence, maintaining close communication with faculty principal investigators and collaborating with Washington, D.C.-based consultants McAllister & Quinn. She reaffirmed Stetson's unwavering commitment to academic freedom and free expression, citing a thought-provoking discussion she attended on the

topic featuring Fred Lawrence, CEO of Phi Beta Kappa, and David Rabban, a distinguished law professor from the University of Texas at Austin.

Turning to curricular updates, Provost Skomp mentioned that faculty should expect revised guidelines and FAQs related to the Hatter Ready initiative to be distributed by their deans. She expressed enthusiasm for the program's progress, noting that information about immersive experiences for the 2025-2026 academic year is taking shape. She also encouraged faculty to visit the Hatter Ready website, which features a new video showcasing student achievements. Lastly, she reminded faculty about the upcoming Hand Awards, which recognize excellence in research, creative activity, and community impact, with nominations due by March 24.

Comments from Faculty Senate Chair Steven Smallpage

Faculty Senate Chair Steven Smallpage provided an update on the Faculty Senate's ongoing initiatives. He acknowledged President Roellke's upcoming announcement and noted that the Senate and the Faculty Finance Committee would be actively engaged in subsequent discussions and planning. Smallpage highlighted the Senate's agenda for the remainder of the semester, which includes student evaluations of teaching (SETs) and faculty compensation. He strongly encouraged faculty participation in the University Faculty Compensation Committee's ongoing survey.

He also outlined additional upcoming initiatives, including the "Year 150 Project" and an academic infrastructure survey. Smallpage emphasized the importance of faculty involvement in upcoming conversations about compensation and finance and urged faculty to remain active participants in governance matters.

Discussion and possible action on Spring Break Academic Calendar Driver (Steven Smallpage and Krista Franco)

Faculty Senate Chair Steven Smallpage and Academic Affairs Committee Chair Krista Franco explained that potential modifications to the Spring Break academic calendar driver have been under review for some time, with extensive consultation across various university stakeholders, including students, staff, and academic leadership. Franco detailed the rationale behind the proposed change, which would shift Spring Break to the eighth week of the semester rather than the seventh. She noted that this adjustment aligns more closely with a well-paced academic schedule while maintaining consistency with the university's overall calendar structure.

While there had been considerations about aligning Stetson's Spring Break with Volusia County's school schedule, it was determined that the county's decision-making timeline did not allow for adequate planning. Smallpage added that consultations with the Staff Advisory Council and the Student Government Association indicated broad support for the change, with no major objections raised by either group. Some faculty members inquired about the reasoning behind selecting the eighth week rather than the ninth, citing comparisons to other institutions. Franco explained that the eighth week was determined to be the most appropriate midpoint in the semester based on Stetson's specific academic calendar constraints.

Concerns were raised about the timing of implementation, particularly by faculty in the School of Music, who noted that many of their performance schedules and travel arrangements were already planned well in advance. It was clarified that while faculty were voting on the driver itself, the implementation timeline would be a separate decision, made in consultation with academic leadership to avoid disruptions.

- Michael Eskenazi moved the question.
 - Voting Results: With 100 votes, the motion passed as follows:
 - 93 votes in favor
 - 7 votes opposed

Update from Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Task Force (Mary Ellen Oslick and Robert Askew)

Mary Ellen Oslick and Robert Askew provided an update from the SET Task Force, which is charged with reviewing and revising the university's student evaluation of teaching process. They outlined the task force's work to date, including a review of scholarly literature, past SET task force reports from 2012 and 2019, and an analysis of quantitative SET data from 2016-2019. Their findings indicated that the current SET instrument focuses almost exclusively on teaching effectiveness, with 15 similar questions, prompting the need for a more nuanced approach.

The task force plans to conduct faculty and student surveys to gather feedback on potential improvements. The faculty survey will be distributed through Academic Affairs Announcements, while students will receive a survey link via email. Additionally, efforts will be made to collect input from peer institutions. The task force encouraged faculty to participate in upcoming focus groups to discuss the future of SETs. Askew also noted that he has prepared detailed presentations analyzing SET data, which will be shared with the Faculty Senate. The task force expects to present final recommendations in Fall 2025.

Discussion of Faculty Governance Reform proposal (Steven Smallpage and Alan Green)

The final agenda item focused on proposed faculty governance reforms. Faculty Senate Parliamentarian Alan Green explained that the proposed changes encompass modifications to both the University Faculty Bylaws and the Faculty Senate Bylaws, with the goal of reducing redundancy, improving efficiency, and strengthening faculty representation in governance.

During the discussion, supporters highlighted the proposal's potential to consolidate faculty influence, simplify governance structures, and align Stetson's system with peer institutions. Critics, however, expressed concerns about potential unintended consequences, particularly regarding changes to committee structures, including the University Curriculum Committee (UCC). Some faculty members worried that reducing the size of the UCC might limit diverse representation and lead to oversights in curriculum development. Others raised concerns about the proposal's omnibus nature, suggesting that certain elements should be voted on separately.

Discussion included adding the registrar as a non-voting member of the UCC to help identify technical issues before curriculum changes are implemented. Due to time constraints, the

discussion was not concluded, and faculty were informed that a special follow-up meeting may be scheduled to continue deliberations and potentially vote on amendments.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:22 PM.