



August 2023

Dear Senators,

Welcome to the Faculty Senate! You are here because your colleagues have elected you to represent them in the important work the Faculty Senate does on campus. If you are a returning Senator, I hope that you will continue your active participation in shared governance and work with me to address your faculty's concerns. I also hope that you will help our new Senators with your guidance and expertise on how to improve their units and strengthen the University.

Since our last meeting in April, the Faculty Senate leadership was involved with several important initiatives:

1. Faculty Senate ad hoc IT Committee

The FS ad hoc IT Committee formed in April began its task of reviewing new policies and standards proposed by LSU's ITS and providing faculty perspective on these issues. The committee continued well into the summer term and resumed meeting last week to continue their review of the policies they had not yet addressed.

2. AI at LSU

This summer, I was asked to be part of Academic Affairs' AI Working Group to address AI concerns especially regarding teaching. The committee was made up of both administrators and faculty, who offered insightful perspectives on this ever-changing landscape of artificial intelligence and the way it effects our teaching and our students' learning. On August 2, I sent a broadcast email with a wealth of resources that was put together by this committee that may be useful to you as we embark on the Fall semester. Interim Vice President for Student Affairs Brandon Common, with the assistance of Jonathan Sanders, Director of Student Advocacy and Accountability, will be making a presentation at today's meeting on the student accountability process at their office and more specifically, suspected plagiarism involving AI.

The potential impact of AI goes beyond the classroom, of course, and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) has reached out to Academic Affairs to request that we convene a joint faculty and administration committee to address issues surrounding this technology relating to teaching, research, and the business processes of the university. Academic Affairs has expressed their shared interest in such a committee, and we are currently in the process of finalizing the details of how the committee will be constructed. I will provide you with more details once they are available.

3. SACSCOC Reaccreditation & Faculty Handbook

I have been part of a year-long self-study for LSU's reaccreditation by SACSCOC. I have invited Senior Vice Provost Jane Cassidy to present on this process and what to expect this coming year.

As part of the reaccreditation effort the FSEC revised the Faculty Handbook to update information that had become out of date since the last revision over a decade ago. Though our efforts were limited to those revisions necessary to satisfy reaccreditation requirements due to time constraints, we also discussed possible improvements that could be incorporated into future revisions that we hope to make when the opportunity arises.

4. Tiger Trails and Resolution 23–04

I am pleased to be able to provide positive updates on two issues previously brought to attention of the FSEC. First, following the recent publication of the story on the cancellation of the Garden District route in *The Reveille* the Faculty Senate was contacted by a number of concerned faculty, staff, and students who had relied on the service. I reached out to Director of Parking and Transportation Services Brian Favela who graciously took my call and was professional in explaining the rationale behind the decision and steps that were being taken to address the needs of the displaced riders. I was very pleased when I saw that Director Favela was also sensitive to the needs of the community as expressed to him in our call and communications from others on campus when he reinstated the Garden District route on a limited basis through the end of the Fall semester. This was an excellent example of collaboration across campus, and I believe that the initiative Parking and Transportation Services is taking to form an advisory committee of various campus stakeholder groups, including the Faculty and Staff Senate Presidents, to provide feedback on future policies, is another positive step.

Second, a group of sponsors including faculty, department chairs, and Faculty Senators from HSS introduced a resolution in our April meeting addressing the below-market pay for instructors in that college and requesting that additional funds be provided to improve their salaries. This resolution was committed by the Senate to the FSEC so that we might work with the sponsors towards a successful outcome. As part of our efforts, we discovered that the HSS Faculty Senate had already done excellent work in preparing a report on the woeful instructor salaries and Dean Blanchard had in response provided for instructor raises in the 2022–23 academic year. We were also very pleasantly surprised when we brought the resolution up for discussion with Provost Haggerty and were informed that the matter had already been addressed, with hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional funds being provided to the college for the express purpose of improving instructor salaries for the upcoming year. We are deeply grateful the efforts of all those involved, including Provost Haggerty, Dean Blanchard, the HSS Faculty Senate, and the sponsors of the resolution for working together on this important issue.

5. College Policy Committees

College policy committees can play a significant role in the management of their units and the welfare of their faculty, staff, and students. The Faculty Handbook advises that “The faculties of most individual colleges and schools have policy committees or senates to help carry out faculty responsibilities in establishing and reviewing educational policy. These bodies serve the additional functions of advising University administrators of faculty opinion on nonacademic matters and of aiding the Faculty Senate elections committee” (6). I would advise you to familiarize yourself with your unit’s policy committee, including its rules and bylaws, and now may also be an opportune time to review these policies to ensure that you are in compliance with them and to undertake updates as necessary.

6. A Time of Crisis and Opportunity

Recently, several well-publicized cases in institutions of higher education across the country, including Texas, Florida, and West Virginia have demonstrated that the crisis in academia continues unabated. The FSEC remains concerned about the overall deterioration in adherence to academic freedom and tenure protections nationally along with the overall decline in the standing of faculty.

As with many crises, however, this one also presents an opportunity. Building on the momentum established by President Tate's "Scholarship First" agenda, we have a chance to position LSU as a leader regionally, nationally, and internationally by working against prevailing trends. There are two elements to this strategy that we see as critical.

First, we must address longstanding issues with faculty compensation and welfare, including stagnant salaries which contribute to salary inversion, compression, and other structural inequities. Improvements are also necessary in areas such as retirement, policies affecting families, and others which impact faculty wellbeing. According to the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) *Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2022–23*, minor increases in nominal wages the preceding three years have been more than offset by significant bouts of inflation leading to multiple years of declining real wages, including a 5% single year decrease which was the largest in their sample since it began in 1972 (1). Overall, salaries for full-time faculty in the Fall of 2022 were 4.2% lower in real terms (on average) than the equivalent figure in the Fall of 2008, which was the middle of the Great Recession (4).

These numbers are shocking, but we know them all too well. Infrequent raises over the last decade, coupled with increasing cost of living, including significant increases in the cost of insurance in our state, mean that our faculty are falling behind simply by standing still. The deep uncertainty over the future state of Louisiana's budget means that we cannot rely on state appropriations to fund these initiatives. Instead, we hope to partner with the administration to identify means by which we can implement predictable and meaningful annual raises along with a plan to invest in programs meant to address the residual cost of long periods of underinvestment in our faculty over the near to medium term. Faculty must be a priority in each and every budget.

Second, to reach the national standing we believe within our capabilities it is important that we undertake the steps necessary to remove the AAUP censures which serve as a blemish on our reputation. LSU is one of only a handful of institutions of higher education to suffer the ignominy of multiple censures and it hurts our standing in our profession, making it hard to compete for the very best faculty in the national and international pools in which we conduct our searches. Removing these censures, the remnants of prior maladministration by previous university leaders, would not only improve our standing but reflect the new reality of LSU and demonstrate our commitment to pursuing academic excellence.

Senate leadership has already taken preliminary steps in this direction. VP Tirone and Secretary Singh traveled to Vermont to attend the Summer Institute of the AAUP to learn more about academic best practices and policies. Additionally, we have been in contact with members of the AAUP's Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance which controls the censure process to understand what is necessary to have them removed. We believe that the requirements are achievable and once again hope to work with the administration to remove this stain which drags down the standing of our institution and harms our competitiveness.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon us—the faculty, administrators, staff and students of LSU—to continue to place our educational mission of LSU back at the forefront of the public’s perception. The current environment demands that we remind all audiences near and far that the true purpose of LSU occurs in our classrooms and laboratories, our libraries and our performance halls. It is in these spaces that we train future generations to think critically, to be inquisitive, to embrace new ideas, and to work collaboratively to advance innovation, creativity, as well as advance the economy within and outside the boundaries of our state. None of these things would be possible without the knowledge we produce daily, for we cannot put scholarship first without also putting scholars first.

I look forward to working collaboratively with you to continue building our Senate into a formidable body that advocates for faculty, enhances shared governance, and allows LSU to achieve the immense potential made possible by its extraordinary faculty, students, and staff.

It is an honor to serve you another term. I look forward to working with you and continue strengthening faculty governance. We are always stronger together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Inessa Bazayev". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "I" and a long, sweeping underline.

Inessa Bazayev
President, LSU Faculty Senate