



January 2024

Dear Senators,

I hope you had a relaxing holiday, despite the uncomfortably freezing temperatures last week. Since our last meeting, the Faculty Senate leadership was involved with several important initiatives.

1. **Engagement at LSU**

As many of you are likely already aware, on Friday 5 January, LSU issued a broadcast email notifying the campus community of updates to the language surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Moving forward, LSU will focus on “engagement” rather than inclusion and the message includes a number of principles by which it will be realized.

Following this announcement, a number of faculty contacted me to express concern about the implications of this change for campus policies and the process by which the change was made given that there was little to no faculty input. I relayed these concerns to President Tate, who invited faculty representatives to meet with him to discuss the matter. Consequently, at the direction of the FSEC, on January 9, FS Vice President Daniel Tirone, FS Secretary Parampreet Singh, and I, met with the President.

It was a very productive meeting touching on a number of related topics. On the question of process, we collectively identified ways in which faculty can be more involved in decisions of this nature. Moving forward, there will be monthly meetings between the President and faculty leadership. We also agreed that there should be more frequent communication between the University leadership and the faculty on various matters, including those which may arise unexpectedly in the changing landscape of higher education.

Much of the discussion also centered on the substantive impacts of the new focus on engagement. The prior office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, now part of the renamed [Division of Engagement, Civil Rights & Title IX](#), remains open and is committed to “creating a vibrant and enriching university experience [...] ensuring that everyone has the chance to thrive and succeed.” President Tate was also clear that nothing in the new policy will impact faculty teaching, research, or efforts at providing a more welcoming environment for all prospective students and employees. He also reaffirmed his commitment, which he has stated previously on multiple occasions, to defend tenure and academic freedom against any and all challenges which may arise.

We understand that many questions still remain about what these changes will mean in practice. As a result, the FSEC voted to invite Todd Manuel to address the Faculty Senate on January 24. He will be joined by President Tate to clarify the new terminology involving “engagement” and what it means for faculty, students, programs, and the newly rebranded “Engagement, Civil Rights & Title IX Office.” A Q&A will follow this presentation.

We—on the FSEC—remain committed to fostering a campus community that is inclusive and open to everyone. We know that words matter and the message that the institution sends through its statements and policies greatly affect perceptions of many about whether they are welcome at LSU, particularly in light of the ongoing discussion surrounding these issues across the country. Let us, therefore, be clear that we will continue to support our faculty and staff in their efforts to effect these positive changes, as we know the administration will as well. We also trust in the administration’s stated commitment to academic freedom and are not aware of any directives to faculty which would constrain their teaching or research. However, should you encounter such a situation now or in the future, do not hesitate to contact me. As an institution of higher education, we cannot fulfill our collective mission if our pursuit of truth and knowledge is in any way infringed upon. Faculty leadership will vigorously oppose any efforts intended to curb these abilities.

2. Board of Supervisors Meeting

On December 8, VP Daniel Tirone and I travelled to LSU Health New Orleans, where I gave my report as chair of Council of Faculty Advisors. In my report, I summarized updates from our campuses around the state, as well as the importance of the new Parental Leave Policy at LSU—a tremendous resource for faculty’s wellbeing as well as recruitment and retention. We will continue to work with the administration to identify other ways of improving the welfare of faculty, especially concerning regular annual raises. (To that end, we have asked the Budget and Planning Committee to review the University’s budget and identify revenues that could serve as potential sources for faculty raises.)

Further, at the Board of Supervisors meeting, I also underscored the importance of the humanities in a comprehensive university like ours. I brought examples of recent studies on the significance of the humanities in nurturing critical thinking and the ability to engage in problem solving. I concluded my report by listing the recent research and achievements of our incredible faculty.

3. Students’ Attendance

In the past several months, the FSEC has received a considerable number of communications from faculty regarding students’ attendance. A troublingly high number of students are consistently missing class. To address this concern, last week I met with the undergraduate and graduate student leadership to discuss how we can identify factors impacting attendance. We each agreed that this is worthy of additional attention. We decided to jointly issue a survey that we hope will allow us to identify the issues surrounding this problem and how we can address it together. We are in the process of creating the survey and I will keep you apprised of its developments. Of course, if you have any suggestions, please let me know.

4. Proposed Revision to Laws Governing Retirement Plan Options

Last month, at its December 20 general meeting, the Staff Senate unanimously passed a resolution very similar to that passed by the Faculty Senate in the fall urging the Louisiana Legislature and LSU leadership to work towards the revision of the clause that prevents state employees from changing retirement plans once enrolled. This was the first-ever resolution jointly endorsed by both bodies.

I have been informed by the President’s office that the necessary notification has been submitted for public notice and that a retirement related bill is being drafted and a legislator has agreed to file it.

While the language is still being finalized, the intent of the bill is to allow employees enrolled in ORP to make a one-time switch to TRSL, though those who switch will not be granted any years of service already accrued and will start in TRSL as if they were new employees. I will keep you informed as the situation evolves.

5. College Policies

At our opening meeting of the academic year, I underscored the importance of college policy committees and their role in keeping policies up to date. Again, if you haven't done so already, I would advise you to familiarize yourself with your unit's policies, including its rules and bylaws. 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. If you have any questions about bylaws or shared governance at LSU, please reach out to me and we will be happy to discuss them with you.

We hope to continue strengthening faculty governance. Please continue keeping us informed about pressing matters and issues on campus. We are stronger together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Inessa Bazayev". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Inessa Bazayev
President, LSU Faculty Senate