

LSU Agriculture Faculty Council Meeting-Minutes
9:30 AM, Friday, May 10, 2024
Room 212, J. Efferson Hall



Call to Order at 9:35am

Attendance

In-person: *Kayanush Arayna, Sun Jo Chang, Carol Friedland, Becky Gautreaux, Kenneth Gravois, Kevin McCarter, Vinicius Moreira, Richie Roberts, Sara Shields, Raj Singh, Richard Vlosky, Evelyn Watts*

Online: *Cecilia Stevens, Bruce Garner, Brittney Newsome, Michael Mamp, Chaudia Hussender, Dennis Burns, Mark Schafer, Maddox Miller*

Absent: *Heather Kirk-Ballard, Kerry Heafner, Stephen Harrison, Chris Dunaway*

Invited Guests



Pictured left to right: Becky Gautreaux (Ag Faculty Council Secretary), Carol Friedland (Ag Faculty Council Vice Chair), Dr. William F. Tate IV (LSU President), Richard Vlosky (Ag Faculty Council Chair), Dr. Matt Lee (Vice President of Agriculture/ Dean, College of Agriculture). Photo taken by Frankie Gould (LSU AgCenter Associate Vice President and Professor/ Strategic Communications and Outreach Relations).

Dr. William F. Tate IV, LSU President

1. Strategic Plan Update: the board approved statewide framework. This is a way to communicate what we value. Raising money and helping us understand what we should say yes or no to. We are identifying opportunities to leverage assets to be a better university. This is what the strategic plan has done. Research expenditure data

has increased steadily over the past three years. We have increased access to federal grants and industrial partnerships. We have increased the culture of excellent teaching, research, and extension. We will have seven new board members and a new chair next year. We will inform the board on individual plans moving forward next semester. We will work on state framework and individual goals so that we have uniformity but also have specificity.

2. Agriculture's Role in the Pentagon of Priorities: Agriculture is in every priority of the Pentagon. First and foremost, the AgCenter is a part of cancer prevention teachings, precision ag in the digital age, and coastal preservation. The AgCenter is applying for a piece of the \$16 million in National Science grant for research and energy.
3. Stakeholder question – is there a plan to effectively have all LSU System campuses aligned under **One LSU**? As an example, generating unified departmental reports is difficult with multiple reporting systems in place (e.g. LSU A&M and AgCenter); some reports must be hand tallied which is a waste of time. As we think about AAU membership and the need for accurate and detailed reporting, is there a plan to make systems unified and easily navigable?

One LSU is the old framework. There will be a way to capture academic analytics. We will track expenditures, citations, honors, number of PhDs, number of postdocs, production, and industrial partnerships. Will be able to track at the unit level. Trying to make tracking as transparent as possible. We also want to track students related to employment – where graduates end up. Legislators are looking into whether students stay after graduation or if they leave Louisiana for higher paying jobs. The end game is that you want to invest in people going to college.

Metrics will be consistent and methods for data collection will be consistent. Keena Arbuthnot oversees analytics and is organizing it for peer review. We can do comparisons across units. Even some of it is per capita to measure how we're doing at scale. AAU has a separate evaluation. We must use the same metrics as AAU. There is not an application procedure – they are just evaluating and collecting data. There is a number you need to reach. 700 million in the system. 500 million in the Baton Rouge 3 (A&M, AgCenter, Pennington). Our slope is tracking the right way. We are very appreciative of the AgCenter and College of Ag and everything happening here. Dr. Matt Lee keeps the President and cabinet up to date often.

The way we're organized must change. To work with someone else seems too complicated. There are unnecessary boundaries around intellectual activities. We need to tear down the walls. Faculty in all the departments don't know each other. They are doing the same thing. How do we figure out how to create a repository? What do we need internally to understand that other people are methodologically and conceptually working on the same thing, so that you can go out and get big grants collaboratively. This isn't just a problem in Baton Rouge, but across the state. We need to tell Dr. Tate what the impediments are to connecting our work and let's knock the doors down. What needs to happen to make that kind of activity seamless, straightforward, and easy. We need to figure it out. **Over next year, we are going to try to clean up all the issues. Dr. Tate needs all the feedback to clean up all of these issues in the next 6 months. He asked for Faculty Council to round up all of this feedback.**

Dr. Matt Lee, Vice President of Agriculture/Dean, College of Agriculture

1. Legislative update: The budget will not increase nor decrease. Important legislation includes a bill by Turner to give us a way to implement bonding framework to separate new construction and deferred maintenance (\$40 million). 4H day at the capitol happened yesterday and was a huge success.
2. Messaging strategy update: We are not letting up pressure in talking to key legislators to see if we can have an increase in one-time funds. Continue to push out messaging on social media as communications sends it out. FFA (Future Farmers of America) day at the capitol is next week. Graduation is soon. We are graduating 330 students next week, which is 10% more than last year. Zachary Bronser is a Tiger12 student. Zach Cryer is a STAMPS Scholar who is admitted to nutrition but was on a pre-med trajectory. The goal is to attract all state 4-H officers to LSU. The College of AG Facebook page has been recognizing graduates who are Louisiana students that came to LSU and planned to work in Louisiana.
3. Stakeholder Questions/Issues

1. Are there any discussions on how the increased assistantship awards for PhD students are going to be handled? LSU covered the first year. Are we on our own now?

PhD assistantship has increased. A 12-month will make \$30,667 each year. The AgCenter will cover the cost this year.

2. There has been recent discussion surrounding the raising of minimum/starting salaries for AgCenter employees. Is there a plan to also raise the salary structure for existing employees with several years of experience?

Ashley Gautreaux will have more details on the new salary structure. We are raising starting salary for agents which is the feasible approach now.

To retain employees, we have started organizational onboarding for new agents. We have standardized job descriptions. We are trying to establish a good foundation for organizational support. We need to be better about giving our agents the tools to be successful, as well as acknowledging their accomplishments. Tara Smith has a plan in place for this. We're trying to set up an AgCenter tailgate at the mini farm for the fall football season to increase camaraderie. Exit interviews are conducted by Tara. We do have a grievance procedure which starts with the immediate supervisor, and then their supervisor, and then HR's door is always open.

Last year we received appropriation from the legislature for 12 new agent positions which have all been hired. In terms of the structure of what extension service is

looking like, Associate VP and Director of Extension is Tara Smith. Melissa Cater is a Regional Director as well as part-time Associate Director. Program leaders will shift a little bit. Tara has effectively been serving as ANR program leader.

Toby Lepley has publicly announced that he is retiring. That will be restructured as Associate Director of Youth Development. This position will not be a tenured track.

Gina Eubanks serving as effectively Associate Director of NCH until she decides to make a change. Once that happens, that position will no longer be a tenured tract position. Dr. Lepley's position will be a national search. The FOODii Director is also a national search.

Administrative work takes different characteristics that most people are not trained in. We have recognized that, and HR has developed the Management Development Institute (MDI) and Executive Leadership Institute which will focus on planning and guiding people through management.

3. My department chair asked if I would bring these up at the next Faculty Council meeting. These problems involve:
 - i. Increase in the complexity / tediousness / time required to make changes to feedback for students while going through the grading process and adding / modifying feedback based on student performance.
 - ii. Increase in the time required to regrade assessments made with the "Quiz" Moodle resource.
 - iii. Dismissal by Moodle admin of my concerns about these issues as not being problematic.

Each of these is problematic in and of itself, but their combined effect I believe will have a big negative impact on teaching and the ability to get grades and feedback back to students in a timely manner when using Moodle. My classes are all relatively small, but this could have a huge negative impact on EXST 2201, which routinely has between 800-1000 students per semester.

I also would like to elicit feedback from other Faculty Council members on their perception of the quality of service and help they and their departments are getting from LSU ITS and related technical support staff. I have had three specific instances in the past several weeks where I received answers that we diametrically opposed to the actual truth of the matter, and I am getting increasingly concerned about the quality of help I myself am getting from these support staff.

Ashley Gautreaux, Assistant Vice President; Department, Human Resource Management

There will be a Promotion and Tenure meeting on May 29th. More than 30 people have signed up for this meeting. Anyone interested in promotion and tenure within the next two years can attend. We are planning to record the meeting. This will be the hybrid meeting and the link will be shared with the faculty.

1. Policy updates
PS42 has a new appendix. It is now formalized and required. We have started working on a checklist for the unit heads to use. Please send us back any feedback.
2. FLSA information sent from Ashley Gautreaux and Matt Lee to all AgCenter faculty members. Please attend the meeting for answers to the questions. This change includes 50 people including postdoc, research associates, and extension associates. They will now be converted to an hourly rate. We will have to enter their time worked and off in Workday. Supervisors will have to approve their time in Workday. The work week is from Saturday to Friday. We need to manage their schedules to avoid overtime. This will be earned through comp time.

The AgCenter [FLSA Overview Meetings](#) information is found below. Use the link to register for the meeting you want to participate in.

FLSA Changes Overview for **Supervisors & Managers**

- Thursday, May 16 at 1 pm via Teams or in 212 Efferson
- [REGISTER HERE](#)

FLSA Changes Overview for **Employees**

- Friday, May 17 at 1 pm via Teams or in 212 Efferson
- [REGISTER HERE](#)

The meetings will be recorded for those who may not be able to participate in the live event. If you have any questions, please email hrmhelp@agcenter.lsu.edu for guidance.

Matt Lee

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) is the federal law that sets standards for employee pay. It is administered by the US Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division through the promulgation of regulations. On April 23, new regulations governing overtime exemptions were issued and they take effect on July 1, 2024. Our Human Resource Management (HRM) staff are working diligently on the timely implementation of these changes.

The major change in the updated regulations is a **new salary threshold** for determining overtime exemptions. Effective **July 1, 2024**, that threshold increases from \$35,568 per year to **\$43,888 per year**. Employees paid below the threshold will be non-exempt and eligible for overtime

compensation at the 1.5 per hour rate. Overtime hours may be compensated as accumulated time or cash.

This change does not impact the exemption for positions with the primary duty of educating, which encompasses extension agents as well as traditional teaching roles such as instructor and professor. Employees in those positions will remain salaried.

Those employees who will no longer be exempt from overtime as of July 1 must:

- Be converted to an hourly pay rate,
- Move to the biweekly wage payroll,
- Enter their time worked and time off in Workday, and
- Have their managers approve the Workday entries promptly to ensure payroll processing can occur.

We are aware that this may result in employees with the same job title being classified differently. One may be hourly and another salaried. When an employee in a professional level position meets the salary threshold, they will be converted to the salary pay basis.

HRM will be in touch with the affected employees and their supervisors in the coming weeks. We will also host informational meetings in May via Teams to provide an overview and answer questions. Details of those meetings will be communicated from HRM shortly.

There is currently a second adjustment to the salary threshold scheduled for January 1, 2025. More information on that implementation will be shared in late 2024. If you have any questions, please email hrmhelp@agcenter.lsu.edu for guidance.

Dr. Mike Salassi, Exec. Assoc. Vice President & Director LAES Administration

- We have several positions that have been filled and or starting on June 1st including an entomologist, cotton corn and sorghum specialist, researcher at Dean Lee, agronomist, and someone in precision ag. Faculty or reminder to join various types of multi state research groups the website to go to is NIMMS (nimms.org). All of the multi-state groups are located where they are. You were encouraged to join Louisiana State University AES with doctor Salassi's name and e-mail address. Doctor Salassi will receive an e-mail to approve any new members. If you have tried to join in previous years and didn't get approval, please go rejoin. Last fiscal year we were awarded \$11 million for equipment. All the money has been committed and most has been spent.
- We have 12 faculty going through the grants Academy. We received a notice about Board of Regents funding. This amount is \$940,000 to be spread over 8 proposals when 24 were submitted. The overwhelming majority of the faculty do an outstanding job, but some faculty let their hatch projects aspire. Do not wait until it expires to write a new one. Start five to six months ahead. Overlapping is acceptable.

- For the NIFA equipment grants, please have all your information and papers ready to submit if you are chosen given, we can only pick two to move forward. Check with IT first before purchasing any equipment or writing a proposal for any equipment. Doing this will prevent a delay in project submitting, selection, and funding.
- Congress now has community projects – like what used to be called earmarks. Put in one request through Letlow’s office. There is \$5 million for Precision Ag. NRCS is going to funnel the money. We were only approved for \$1 million.
- The AgCenter is collaborating with Horizon Ag where Horizon will put breeder at Rice Research Station. This is an example of how we can enhance research productivity. Partnership with private industry is one of the ways to do that.
- \$160 FUEL grant – they made the announcement public in January. The general focus is on how to transfer Louisiana to alternative energies. Our angle in that would be in the biofuels area. The impression was that by the end of the day, they would have some areas to submit to. They are going to fund grants. Initial round of relatively small grants. Will keep us up to date on that. They will identify areas they want to fund. Will make sure faculty get access to RFP.
- We were audited on several different things. OSP was audited – this is a post-award situation. If a faculty member gets a grant and it has a subaward, it says the sub-awardee must make quarterly reports – ask for quarterly reports from subawardees. This doesn’t need a formal word document that is a formal report. If you are talking constantly with your sub-awardee, this can type an email that you type and ask if this is correct. They can reply that yes, it is correct. As a result, we had to implement a system to ping PIs to make sure they are doing that.
- Upcoming field days include: 5/10 Wildlife Field Day Winnsboro

Dr. Tara Smith, Exec. Assoc. Vice President & Director LCES

Stakeholder Questions/Issues (For Dr. Smith and Dr. Lee):

These are some questions and comments I’ve put together from feedback I’ve received from agents and on-campus faculty members for administration to address. I left much of the wording the same so as to capture the true essence of the input I was provided. Please note that the scope of questions is extremely broad due to what faculty members and staff deemed important to them.

1. What is the current retention rate for Extension agents? And are intentional efforts being made to increase retention?

Generalized follow up comments are as follows:

- a. There are discussions in the field about the high [perceived] turnover of agents who have been here less than 5 years.

- b. Several recent departures have opted for early retirement because of issues within the AgCenter, thus taking their time and talents elsewhere. Additionally, some agents are opting to leave a few years shy of their early retirement date, many for the same reasons.
 - c. Some [if not many] of these agents have earned their master's degree while employed with the AgCenter. Now, the AgCenter is out those funds and the departing employee enjoys the [financial] benefit of a more advanced degree.
2. Are "exit" interviews still being conducted for departing agents? And if so, is anyone in administration actually looking at the documentation and taking it to heart to see where improvements can be made?
 3. Who can agents visit with when they have frustrations in the field? Making another broad generalization here, but agents who feel they can't go to their PC or Regional Director are apt to look elsewhere. Is this a case where the Ag. Faculty members need to bring these issues forward, protecting the anonymity of the agents?
 4. With visits to other states to view their Extension model, are there plans to change the AgCenter model? We've added several upper administrative positions (now we have LAES/LCES Directors – AND – Program Leaders), but the number of agents in the field is still so low that agents are being overworked and many express frustrations of being underappreciated.
 - a. As an addendum, there is concern among some of the agents that administrators covering multiple duties decreases their effectiveness as they are also spread thin.
 5. Is the Extension Summit being held in conjunction with Annual Conference or in lieu of? Agents are commenting that clarification has not been made.

The Extension Summit is in lieu of. As of now, Annual Conference and Extension Summit will rotate years, with only one occurring during the year.

6. Last year or the year before, there was talk of the AgCenter hiring a substantial number of new agents in new positions. What happened with that initiative? Have all of those positions been filled? If so, we are still woefully understaffed in the regions.
8. How is administration addressing the lack of qualified leaders in director and department chair roles? This is in addition to having several positions within the AgCenter that are interim and cover several regions and responsibilities? How feasible is it to have Regional Directors covering multiple research stations (Gentry) and serving as assistant to LCES Director (Cater)?
9. One person stated, "Given the critical role that leadership plays in setting the strategic direction, ensuring the quality of education and extension outreach, and fostering a supportive and dynamic learning environment and service to our clientele, I am keen to understand both the College's and the AgCenter's strategy in addressing these challenges."

10. Could you shed light on the measures being taken to *attract, develop, and retain* high-caliber leaders in our institution? Furthermore, what steps are being implemented to move towards more permanent appointments and reduce the necessity for administrators to juggle multiple roles, thereby ensuring a focused and effective leadership framework?
11. In light of the recent announcement of Dr. Lepley's upcoming retirement, will his replacement be on board prior to his departure? And, will the position vacancy announcement list the position as tenure track or non-tenure?
12. The concern is that we have several qualified internal personnel that are not currently in tenure track positions who would do well in that role. If shifting to a tenure requirement, there is concern on who might ultimately end up in that role. There's an opportunity to boost morale with the right candidate.

Old Business

1. Carol Friedland motion to accept the minutes from the April 19, 2024, LSU AFC meeting. Becky Gautreaux seconded the motion.
2. Service unit faculty satisfaction survey will be part of the overall employee satisfaction survey. The survey will be conducted in Fall 2024.

New Business

1. LSU Faculty Senate Election-College of Agriculture. One open position to be filled:

| | | | |
|------------|---|-------------|------|
| Lisa Fultz | School of Plant, Environmental, and Soil Sciences | Agriculture | 2024 |
|------------|---|-------------|------|

Rich Vlosky (LSU AFC Chair) and Carol Friedland (LSU AFC Vice-Chair) will manage election process June/July 2024.

Please join us in congratulating our director Dr. Carol Friedland for winning an AgExcellence award from the LSU AgCenter! Dr. Friedland was recognized for receiving a grant over \$1 million.



2024 Meeting Dates

January 19
February 16
March 22
April 19
May 10

June 14
July 19
August 16
September 13
October 18

November 15
December 13 (Current
and New Members)

Adjourn

Ken Gravois motioned to adjourn the meeting. Evelyn Watts seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm.