

Thoughts and Concerns on proposed Graduate Alliance Partnership with Southeastern and the High School Diploma Student Engagement Agreement

Additional discussion items from September 2, 2020 Faculty Senate Meeting

Background

The Faculty Senate met on Wednesday, September 2, 2020. On the agenda was a discussion concerning the High School Diploma Student Engagement Agreement which was proposed by Vice-President for Enrollment Management, Dr. Tim Boatmun. Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Teresa Golden requested that Faculty Senate review the Agreement and provide its thoughts and concerns. The following represents the thoughts and concerns (only edited for anonymity and to conform to the style of this document) shared by Senators and guests to Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Randy Clark based on that discussion:

1. There is no clear articulation between the vision President Newsom presented in his faculty meetings in August regarding increasing undergraduate enrollment and the Graduation Alliance proposal. I would like to have more information about the suite of strategies and approaches planned or in place to address recruitment and retention of undergraduate students. What percentages of new enrollment are projected for each strategy pursued? If GA is projected to bring us 50 online students in the fall of 2021, what do we expect the other approaches to yield?
2. How will we plan for and address growth due to GA recruitment and retention of undergraduate students? Will we plan for and pursue increases in the number of faculty lines or fail to plan and secure funds which would like result in a need to attract and hire more adjuncts or non-tenured positions? What is the break even or breaking point if GA gets 1/3 of the revenue? I ask this as I currently teach a huge online section for the M.Ed. program that is very challenging and with few options to address the issue now that we are in the middle of it (the AP conundrum).
3. I don't see the need to rush into this and it absolutely felt like a move made on very short notice of less than 3 weeks. Tim Boatmun, who I am consider to be a friend (I have no beef with him personally etc.), knows better than to try and push a contract through like that. Making a major contract move in the middle of dealing with pandemic etc. feels like the old days when admin would pre-decide issues like this then spring them on faculty with little notice or time to do our due diligence. Or when we were in financial crises etc. Tim also said this was his deadline etc., does that mean our new President has no idea Tim is making contractual decisions without him knowing about it? That should make all of us nervous.
4. I felt Dr. Fridley's 1-year moratorium timeframe was too long, but he was right about this being shoved on us with very little notice. Dr. Boatmun's presentation was rambling and not very coherent. He was trying to present his overall enrollment ideas, but FS was only there to discuss the GA plan today. I think that was part of the disconnect. By bringing up all those other issues and personal narratives, he only clouded the waters and hurt his case.

5. I don't think there is a need for this right now. Our enrollment is high and growing, so why push for such an effort now? If our enrollment was tanking, it would make more sense in terms of immediacy, but that isn't our situation.
6. All the reasons he gave today will still be applicable in recruiting for 2022. Right now, we are trying to survive the pandemic environment amid major changes on campus for the foreseeable future. Delaying this until 2020 is more prudent.
7. Embracing a for-profit start-up company isn't sound decision making on admin's part. We know for-profits are data mining our institution(s) and want to make profit off this deal, that is their purpose, but not ours.
8. Why are we going to this much effort to recruit students who failed at the high school level? Seems like a lot of effort to generate a relatively small number of students that are a gamble. It apparently takes a lot of support just to get their students through the American Academy. Our current students that have HS diplomas struggle mightily already, so why should we think these students will be more successful?
9. On GA's website, they focus a lot on maintaining student-athlete eligibility via their American Academy + "Dropout Recovery" plans. Just my opinion, but this feels predatory. For-profit online colleges preyed upon lower income students, non-traditional students, veterans, and others that they advanced through their schooling but left them in debt with empty online degrees. I already worry we have lowered academic standards for a while now, just to keep retention and graduation rates higher. The addition of online courses and the BSLAS program highlights my point. Those are designed for low achieving students to boost GPAs and get a degree, but what about post-graduation? I think we are supposed to care about that too.
10. We have a lot of irons in the fire already. I agree with others that stated we need to shore up the programs we already have with the increased enrollment and tuition that has provided.
11. My gut feeling is that with more state appropriation budget cuts in the next 2 years, which admin and faculty alike know are coming our way, admin is planning on trying to max out any enrollment possible in the next 2 years to gather tuition needed to keep our doors open. Bottom line: bumping up enrollment via GA would bolster enrollment in Gen Ed classes which are the biggest revenue generators for SE. I don't think GA really cares if students graduate or have post-graduation success as long as they get the cut of the tuition. I'm not trying to be cynical, but we have seen this model before.
12. I was similarly skeptical about Academic Partners, but at least they had a track record of dozens or universities they partnered with and we could see some real data. A for-profit start-up is going to provide optimistic data to try and get contracts with universities. Maybe their track record is good, maybe it is smoke and mirrors? I don't know because we haven't seen any real data. They are so new, why is it good for us to be a guinea pig?
13. If we really want to recruit students, why aren't we shoring up our recruiting office? Carolyn was right about one item for sure - our recruiting office is weak. I'm not bashing the individual employees, but they can't seem to gain traction with HS students in our area. I rarely see students from this county and surrounding counties in my

- classes. Maybe admin is just waving the white flag and hoping GA will recruit a lot of online students to show growth?
14. Lastly, how will these non-traditional students without college degrees pay for their tuition at SE? I don't want SE to be associated with any company that has a predatory lending/borrowing model.
  15. I am just starting to really research this program after having listened to many views in my department and our Faculty Senate meeting. So, my opinions may alter as I learn more about this. However, at this time, I am for anything that could help people better their lives and careers.
  16. I have always felt we need to reach out more to non-traditional students. I know what it is like not to have the support or opportunities when one is younger that leads to a college degree. I know the challenges as a single parent of working two jobs just to make ends meet... I know first-hand what it is like to wake up every morning (usually on very limited sleep) and hate the idea of the jobs before me, I know what it is like to just want to quit but you can't because your children have no one but you to depend on -- I know the struggles and frustrations of trying to make ends meet and no matter how hard you work, it never seems enough.
  17. I also know what it is like to have someone believe in you enough that even though you think you are too old, not smart enough, and have been out of school for too long, etc. that you gather the courage to do something you only dreamed about - achieving a college education. I now know what it is like to wake up in the morning and be excited to go to work -- to walk into a classroom, to know my adopted children do not have the financially-struggling mother my biological children had. If I am sick, I can afford to go to the doctor, and so on. My life is SO much better in so many ways thanks to my daughter who encouraged me and Southeastern. How could I not support a program that could do the same for others? We may have the opportunity to reach out and help people from all levels of society to have a happier, better, and more fulfilling life.
  18. I agree we need to know we have the faculty to meet the growing needs of students; I have had my concerns on how this would impact the CARES program, but growth is a good thing and if we join together to fight for the needs to accomplish growth rather than bickering about if we are ready to grow, we are going to be more successful.
  19. I also don't think we should worry as much about the "caliber of students" we might be bringing in; but rather the success an education from Southeastern can make in the life and careers of others. If working with the graduation alliance allows us to open a world of opportunities and possibilities for those who have been lost in the cracks, why wouldn't we want to? Maybe I am naive, but shouldn't that be our goal?
  20. **The "hurry up."** Shared governance takes time. In his presentation to academic departments, President Newsom said that he is committed to continuing the shared governance that we have worked for years to establish and build, but this (first) proposed *deal* coming from his administration is *not* evidence of that commitment. Shared governance is a *deliberative* process which – by its nature - takes time. Without adequate time for due diligence (i.e. research corporate practices of GA, verifying claims made by GA, conversation across departments), it is not possible to make an *informed* decision about whether this proposed deal is in our university's best interest. Without

deliberation, there is no shared governance. In the words of Dr. Joe Licata, former dean of EBS, "Never do business with someone in a hurry."

21. **Outsourcing.** We already have a recruitment department. One that is historically ineffective. Rather than hiring a for-profit marketing company, why not put our energy and resources into shoring up our own recruiting (i.e. hiring professional recruiters, or training the recruiters we have, and paying them a living wage)? Dr. Boatman claims that GA will provide "additional support." We have spent years building a system of support for students. If Dr. Boatman believes the support we provide students is inadequate, then why not strengthen what we have rather than outsourcing those university functions to a marketing company whose only interest in SE is profit?
22. **Inadequate faculty.** We do not have enough faculty to effectively and sustainably serve the students we already have. Despite Dr. Boatman's claim to the contrary, adequate faculty have *not* been hired to support our enrollment growth. New faculty have been hired, but largely in response to retirements and resignations, not enrollment growth. Historically there has been a poor response to hiring faculty - especially tenure-track faculty. There is no reason to believe that should there be increased enrollment from GA (or from any other causal agent) that adequate faculty would be hired. The administration's history in this regard is telling.
23. **Newsom's vision:** In his presentation to academic departments, President Newsom stated his vision for SE (at great length), which is an increased *on-campus* experience for students. GA, in no way, works toward that vision.
24. **Why?** Why this deal, why now? Newsom said in June, "From a revenue and budget standpoint, we are fortunate to be in a good position due to our sustained enrollment growth over the last three years." Of course, we cannot be complacent, or rest on our laurels; increasing enrollment is smart. The "hurry up" of this deal is unwarranted and unnecessary – and potentially detrimental to our university.
25. **One-year deal?** The promise of a one-year deal smacks of a bait-and switch tactic, designed as more of a selling point, rather than a legitimate trial run of GA. What *meaningful* data can be garnered in one year? At the end of one year, the administration could make that precise claim to support an extension of the contract.
26. As I mentioned aloud, I am concerned by the prospect of GA employees being granted access to Blackboard courses taught by SE faculty. I don't think that is okay. This concern could be alleviated were the contract clarified to indicate that GA would be provided information about course progress for GA students, without allowing access to Blackboard courses. I find the current contract unclear on this point, especially in Exhibit B on page 10.
27. As I mentioned in the chat, I agree with the importance of serving adult students desiring to continue their education. I do have concerns about whether SE currently has the capability (course offerings and faculty availability) to support increased enrollment in our Z-level courses. I do not want to admit students that we are not prepared to fully and appropriately serve. This concern could be alleviated by additional faculty hiring for the courses likely to be most needed by these students (I'm thinking especially of Z level

- English classes, as I know from my own department that we would need more sections of that. I would be curious to know if the same issue applies to Z level math courses).
28. This is a more global comment—while I appreciate the interventive advising model and data analytics GA plans to use to support the students they recruit, I would actually like those models to be adopted university-wide by SE. I would therefore like to clarify that I don't want to rely on GA long-term for this kind of student support—I think that we should aim to build those supports in-house and make them available to all of our students.
  29. I have an additional concern about the proposed contract with Graduation Alliance (GA), but since it was not a part of my comments in the Senate meeting, I did not include it on the document I sent to you yesterday. (It was my understanding that Senators were to put in writing what we had voiced during the meeting.)
  30. My concern is not about whether the contract is a good idea or not, my concern is about shared governance.
  31. Shared governance can be viewed as a negotiation -- a negotiation that is to be entered into in good faith. In my view, the GA negotiations were *not* entered into in good faith. This is what I find to be most troubling.
  32. First and foremost, the GA deal, was brought to faculty through a back door - a .pdf of the GA contract was sent to the department chairs, and a .pdf of the GA contract was sent to you, as Chair of the Faculty Senate.
  33. The administration *did not* contact you and request to meet with the Senate to discuss the GA contract. *You* contacted the administration (Tim Boatmun) to request that he meet with the Senate. A good faith negotiation involves the exchange of information, which the faculty did not receive *until pressed*. Until pressed, faculty had no background, nuances, details, or context. Details of the GA deal were not forthcoming, and I am not yet convinced that the faculty has received all the information they need to fully participate in a meaningful negotiation.
  34. Even in his opening comments, Dr. Boatmun was not forthcoming with information -- until he was pressed. It was only because of a direct question or concern from a Senator that we learned, for example, that the September signing date was a *target*, subject to adjusting. It was only when pressed that we learned that this deal was part of a "multi-pronged" approach to recruiting - without the courtesy of an explanation of the "prongs." (What Dr. Boatmun did - repeatedly - was to conflate the benefits of the proposed GA deal with improving an on-campus presence. The two are not related.) We also learned from direct questioning by Senators is that the language in the contract can be revised to address concerns - like GA's access to Bb.
  35. Had the Senate had all the information it needed - up front - then the discussion could have been a real, bona fide, good faith negotiation.
  36. There is no question that undergraduate enrollment needs attention. The question is the best way for undergraduate enrollment to receive the attention it needs -- and deserves. In my view, the best way is for faculty to be given the opportunity to participate in the discussion in good faith -- which has not happened with GA.
  37. I struggle with finding seats in online gen eds currently, so how will we accommodate a potential influx of new online students without first addressing the need for additional

faculty? Will the contract have a mandate of no caps on class enrollments similar to that of AP, which has resulted in ridiculously large classes, which ultimately can negatively impact class quality? Do we know that we can recruit faculty to fill those positions when some departments have struggled with filling positions due to low pay?

38. Would this contract open us up to more low performing students requiring remediation? I have transfer students who have completed Associate of Applied Science degrees and still require remediation. It seems that we do not want to actively recruit potentially low performing students straight out of high school.

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The above represents the unedited “thoughts and concerns” based on the discussion concerning the High School Diploma Student Engagement Agreement at the Wednesday, September 2, 2020 Faculty Senate Meeting.

The following represents to the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office Enrollment Management recommendations passed at the Wednesday, September 16, 2020 meeting of Faculty Senate. Faculty Senate Recommends that the University:

1. Prepare a detailed plan indicating potential costs, revenue, benefits to the University.
2. Indicate how the program can be assessed as to its effectiveness and success.
3. Detail how the academic coaches will receive the information about course participation without entering the actual Blackboard course.
4. Extend the contract signing date until the concerns are adequately addressed.

Prepared by Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Randy Clark