

Position Statement for Faculty Senate President – 2021-2022

Louis J. Gross

Chancellor's Professor and Alvin and Sally Beaman Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics
Director, The Institute for Environmental Modeling

Past Experience in Senate and University Affairs (Selected):

Faculty Senator (1989-1992, 2001-2004, 2015-2018); Senate President-Elect (2005-2006); Senate President (2006-2007); Senate Past-President (2007-2008); Senate Budget Committee (1989-1994, 2001-2006, Chair for 2002-2004, 2015-2021, Chair for 2015-2018); Senate Committee on Teaching Evaluations (1991-1993); Senate Executive Committee (2002-2004, 2005-2008, 2015-2018); UTK Residency Classification Committee (1987-1990); UTK Classroom Upgrade Committee (2000-2005); UTK Campus Recycling Committee (2002-2003); UTK Program Review and Redirection Task Force (2003-2004); UT System Federal Financial Compliance Task Force (2003-2008); Commission for Blacks, Commission for Women, LGTB Commission (2006-2007); UTK Advisory Board, elected Faculty member (2019-2020).

It was not my intention to again serve as Senate President. Under current circumstances though, I expect that my experience from my 42 years at UTK is appropriate to provide leadership in addressing the variety of challenges facing the faculty over the next year. Some of the major challenges I note are: (i) the return to on-campus activities which should be handled so as to preserve the safety of all concerned, acknowledging the potential for impacts to be particularly of concern to certain demographic groups; (ii) the launch of the Budget Allocation Model which has at its core a disaggregated approach to funding that is out of step with the ongoing efforts at thoughtful higher education institutions to acknowledge the growing importance of integrated cross-disciplinary endeavors to address complex societal issues; (iii) the development of the Oak Ridge Institute which is the only major new research and education initiative impacting UTK faculty announced by the System over the past several years, has been far from transparent in its planning to date and requires diverse faculty involvement to meet its potential.

Below are a few similar points to those I raised in my statement when I was a candidate for Senate President-Elect in 2005. I encourage Senators to consider the points below in deciding how to vote.

1. I am not good at keeping my opinion to myself. You can expect that I will continue to be outspoken on matters on which some faculty will disagree. If elected, I will solicit opinions on contentious matters, but some of my opinions may be taken as being those of the faculty as a whole, when that may not be accurate.
2. The Senate President is often called upon by the media to comment on matters related to University affairs. I believe that honesty is the best policy in these remarks, independent of the implications.
3. For much of my time as a faculty member I have been critical of the role of Athletics here and have noted the extensive costs for Athletics covered by the University even when they claimed to

be “self-sufficient”. I continue to be concerned that there has been little attention to cost containment in an entity that in the five years from 2014 to 2019 had the largest increase in income (34%) by far of any unit at UTK. Despite promises of Athletics to increase their reserve funds significantly since the Department was given a total reprieve by former Chancellor Cheek from their commitment of financial contributions to the overall fiscal health of UTK, they have failed to do so, even prior to the huge losses they sustained due to COVID.

4. UTK has been poorly served by the tremendous turnover in administrators here. Over the past dozen years, we’ve had six Chancellors, four Provosts and ten Vice Chancellors for Research. It is the faculty and long-term staff who have maintained institutional knowledge. I intend to use that knowledge to inform the current campus leadership about the past while we proceed according to the principles of shared governance in collaborating to develop plans for the future.