



August 27, 2024

Dear Senators,

I hope you have had enjoyable and productive summers and are ready for the beginning of a new academic year. I am pleased to welcome those of you who are joining us for the first time to the Senate, and welcome back those of you who were Senators last year. I anticipate that it will be an interesting year and look forward to working with each of you. Below please find a summary of notable developments since the end of the spring semester.

### **1. Faculty and Staff Raises**

As announced by President Tate in a broadcast email on July 10<sup>th</sup>, a 3% merit raise pool was provided for eligible faculty and staff for this coming year. These raises became effective on August 15<sup>th</sup> for academic-year employees and will be reflected in September paychecks. One aspect of these raises which I would like to highlight is that these are not funds which were appropriated by the legislature for the purpose. Rather, the raises are being provided from LSU's self-generated funds and involve reallocations within the operating budget. This is a break from how raises have previously been provided and I appreciate that the administration did what I believe was right in prioritizing faculty and staff but not easy given the tradeoffs involved.

### **2. The FY 2026 Budgeting Process**

As you are likely already aware there is a tremendous degree of uncertainty about the state budget after this year given the potential sunset in 2025 of the 0.45% state sales tax and a 2% sales tax on business utilities, among other factors. There is reporting that the Board of Regents has been tasked with planning for a possible \$250 million in cuts to state support for higher education should these taxes be allowed to expire.\* As part of this process LSU is obligated to prepare a budget for submission to the Board of Regents that incorporates this possible decline of approximately 20% in state funding.

Obviously cuts on this scale would be tremendously damaging to the university and there will no doubt be much public discussion between the various bodies involved in the budgeting process between now and the next legislative session. One point that has been emphasized to me in discussions with members of the administration is that while LSU is required to produce a budget that reflects this possibility, it is by no means guaranteed that it will eventually become the budget that is put into effect. There is a lot that can happen between now and next June which could substantially alter the state's fiscal status and it is impossible to predict how the situation will turn out. While it is not our role to advise the elected representatives in the legislature on specific policies or taxes to implement, it is important that every possible effort be made to avoid reductions in state support to LSU and the other institutions of higher education. We simply are not in a position to sustain further cuts without significant declines in performance. Furthermore, given that LSU

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\* [Ashley White, "Louisiana college leaders sound alarm over possible \\$250 million budget cut next year", \*The Advocate\*, June 14, 2024.](#)

returns nearly \$13.85 in economic benefits to Louisiana for every dollar of state funding we are one of the best investments the legislature can make.<sup>†</sup>

### **3. ORP/TRSL Letters**

Earlier this month the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana (TRSL) began sending letters to eligible Optional Retirement Plan (ORP) participants notifying them of their one-time option to elect back into TRSL's defined benefit plan as a result of recent changes to state law. For most participants the window to make this choice will close on June 30, 2025. Given the novelty of this situation and the significance of the decision Human Resource Management (HRM) will be making resources available to faculty and staff so they may better educate themselves on their options as they contemplate whether this change is best for them. Part of these efforts will include Town Hall meetings with representatives from HRM and TRSL, and faculty and staff on September 4 and 5. Details and registration links, along with other useful information, are included in the HRM broadcast email that went out Monday, August 26 at 8:30am. Please encourage your colleagues to whom this may apply to follow communications from HRM for further information and let them know that their time to make this election is limited.

### **4. Student Advocacy & Accountability**

Following recent changes in state law affecting how universities conduct student disciplinary processes, including increases in the burden of proof for certain transgressions, and successful implementation of an informal resolution process for behavioral misconduct the last two years Student Advocacy & Accountability (SAA) contacted the Faculty Senate Executive Committee earlier this summer to inquire about expanding this program to also include allegations of academic misconduct. After a series of intensive discussions conducted over the course of nearly two months it was jointly decided that SAA would conduct a one-year pilot of the proposal and create a joint SAA-faculty panel to review which cases were appropriate for informal resolution, whether the goals of the change were being realized, and make recommendations for its continuation and/or possible opportunities for its improvement. Furthermore, the Faculty Senate will have the opportunity to review the report and recommendations of the committee and hold a vote in the spring semester on whether it is recommended that the program be continued.

SAA emphasized that the principal change in allowing informal resolution is that students found responsible for a violation would not receive notation on their transcript. There will be no changes to the academic penalties which SAA may levy as a result of finding a student responsible, such as a zero on an assignment or assignment of a failing grade for a course. Additionally, students are only eligible for informal resolution one time, and SAA may escalate to another form of resolution if they determine that circumstances warrant a more formal process. If you or a colleague are interested in serving on the joint SAA-faculty committee tasked with overseeing this process please let us know by emailing [facultysenate@lsu.edu](mailto:facultysenate@lsu.edu).

### **5. Changes to Special Meals**

Due to changes in state policy special meals may no longer be provided for brief, routine meetings using university funds. I recommend that you contact your unit head or other responsible individual for further guidance on how to implement this change.

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<sup>†</sup> LSU Media Center, "LSU Sets Record \$6.1 Billion Economic Impact on the State", March 13, 2023, <https://www.lsu.edu/mediacenter/news/2023/03/13scholarship-first-on-tour-economic-impact.php>.

## **6. Remote Learning Plan**

The Office of Academic Affairs, in consultation with other stakeholders, has developed a remote learning plan to be implemented when conditions make holding in-person classes impossible. Please contact your unit head to obtain a copy of the most up-to-date version. The plan provides faculty a great deal of latitude to develop alternatives which work for your course, but it does ask that you think about how you will approach this situation and communicate it to students in advance. As you contemplate the alternatives for remote instruction please also make sure that your instructional plan is accessible for students requiring special accommodations.

## **7. Senate Committees**

There was a very positive response to the broadcast email distributed on Monday of last week asking for volunteers for our Senate committees. I thank everyone who responded for their willingness to serve. We do still have a number of positions to fill so if you are able and willing to join a Senate committee, or know of a colleague who may wish to do so, please reach out and let us know.

You are the Senate's greatest resource and I thank you for your willingness to represent your colleagues in the shared governance of LSU A&M. Please continue keeping us informed about pressing matters and issues on campus and I ask that you also make sure that your colleagues are made aware of important developments communicated through the Senate. We are stronger when we together to represent the world class faculty of our university.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. C. Tirone', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel C. Tirone  
President, LSU Faculty Senate