Elimination of Distinguished Professor Rank at Texas A&M University

According to SAP: 01.01.01.M0.01 Development and Approval of Texas A&M University Rules and Standard Administrative Procedures, section 2.3, “The Dean of Faculties, in collaboration with the Faculty Senate, coordinates the development, review, and routing for approval of all faculty rules and SAPs.” The Faculty Senate Constitution further states that policies and procedures dealing with the promotion and evaluation of academic personnel shall be reviewed by the Faculty Senate before being submitted to the president. Therefore, I (Antonio Cepeda-Benito, Dean of Faculties) would like the faculty senate to review, and hopefully concur, with my sending forward a request to eliminate Rule: 12.99.99.M4 Distinguished Professor Rank and the Executive Committee of Distinguished Professors.

The status of distinguished professor has existed at Texas A&M University (“University”) since the early 1980s. It was an honor bestowed on scholars at the University in recognition of their immense impact on their given field, and also to ask these scholars to aid the University in progressing as a ‘top tier’ university. In 1997 the status of the title changed to officially recognize it as a faculty rank. This was done with low consensus and without adequate resolution with respect to the criteria and process of naming new distinguished professors. It also left some issues unresolved concerning the privileges that accompanied the title before 1997. These unresolved issues have resulted in ongoing discussions, and occasionally debates, about what we are doing as a University with this rank. The discourse typically focused on whether the title of Distinguished Professor should be an honorary ‘award’ or a faculty ‘rank.’ This question also has motivated many discussions concerning how selective we should be and what processes should be followed for the selection of Distinguished Professors each year.

In the past two semesters, this debate about the identity and purpose of the distinguished professors has been carried out through many meetings between and within administrators and distinguished professors. They have finally reached a consensus, which is to eliminate the rank of distinguished professor and award instead the title of “University Distinguished Professor” as an honor.

Basis: Since the title of distinguished professor is a focus on the unique contribution an individual has made to the scholarly or creative area of work that has redirected the work in that field, and it does not intend to review the contributions in teaching and service, this title is an honor not a rank. The title should be something that the individual is authorized to use forever after the honor is bestowed upon him or her. Financially, the award will be a fixed amount given for a finite length of time. The common title for new award winners would be:

NAME
University Distinguished Professor
Professor of “department’s name”
Texas A&M University

Actions:

2. Eliminate separate Guidelines for Distinguished Professor promotions by Dean of Faculties.
3. Identify criteria to govern the selection of University Distinguished Professors (similar to what it is already in place and governed by the DPs with concurrence by the appropriate administrators).
4. Each person receiving the award will receive an annual bursary of $5,000 for five years, as well as one month of summer salary per year for any two of the first three years after receiving the honor. The number of nominations may vary extensively in a given year, but the number of awards will not exceed five awards in a year (this is similar to what already happens but it is finite).