

Minutes of the UTRGV Faculty Senate Meeting
January 14, 2025
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. via Zoom Webinar

Senators Present: Megan Keniry, Marisa Palacios Knox, James Gleason, Jose Gutierrez, Christian Zuniga, Haiyan Zhou, Liliana Galindo, Abdurrahman Cagri Atesin, Christopher Gabler, Servando Hinojosa, Jung IL-Oh, Wanrong Hou, Silvia Patricia Solís, Vejoya Viren, Randall Monty, Norma Beardwood-Roper, Hooman Tabatabai-Mir, Denise A. Longoria, Bruno Arthur, Mohamadhossen Noruzoliaee, Maysam Pournik, Pedro Martinez, Marcela Hebbard, Igor Ryabov, Folake Adelakun, Monika Rabarison, George Atisa, Owen Temby, Mataz Alcoutlabi, Joel Garza, Andrew Smith, Sonia Chapa, George Padilla, Ferenc Moldovanyi, Edna Orozco, Cyndy Lopez Guerrero, Ignacio Rodriguez, Suad Ghaddar, Belinda Rivas, Cynthia Paccacerqua, Ulku Karabulut, Laura Seligman, Erica Buchberger, Sarah Blangero, Ruth Crutchfield, Salma Mahmood, Erwin Suazo, Brent Campney, Alexandre Couture Gagnon, Gladys Maestre

Guests Present: Robert Dearth, Cinthya Saavedra, Maggie Cronn, Alma Rodriguez, Maria Luisa Trinidad, Jonikka Charlton, Nitin Vishwakarma, Caleb Gonzalez, Dongkyu Kim, Giorgio Gotti, Roda Galang, Fidencio Mercado, Ney Alliey-Rodriguez, John VandeBerg, Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, Daniel Hunter-Holly, Monica Garcia-Ramirez, Vanessa Ceballos

Senators Absent: Ahmed Touhami, Cory Wimberly, Donald J. Lyles, Elizabeth Deven-Hernandez, Fuat Firat, Genaro Ramirez Correa, Jack Ruelas, Jose A Rodriguez, Jose E Hernandez, Joseph Hovey, Krista Jobson, Laurie Deleon, Lisa Longoria, Mahmoud Quweider, Marcus Farris, Margaret Rubi, Marzieh Ayati, Michelle Alvarado, Mounir Ben Ghalia, Noushin Nouri, Punit Ahluwalia, Tamer Oraby, Veronica Castro

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. by the Faculty Senate President, Dr. Chris Gabler. Dr. Silvia Solis, Parliamentarian, provided the Parliamentarian's report.

Approval of Minutes

Dr. Ruth Crutchfield, Interim Secretary, presented the minutes from the Faculty Senate meeting held on December 10, 2024.

Motion to approve the minutes: Andrew Smith

Seconded by: Senator Gutierrez

The minutes were approved unanimously at 3:06 p.m.

Reports

- **Past President's Report:** Dr. Cynthia Paccacerqua provided the Past President's report. She indicated that she had nothing to report at that time.
- **President's Report:** Dr. Chris Gabler presented updates on key faculty affairs. Key priorities discussed included:
 - **Workload Policy:** Dr. Gabler shared that revisions to the workload policy are in progress, with support from the Office of the Provost and VPFA. A HOP impact

statement for the workload policy will be shared soon, with a discussion planned for the February Faculty Senate meeting.

- **Grievance Policy:** Updates on the **Faculty Peer Conflict Resolution Group (PARC)** were presented. The committee will offer mediation for conflict resolution, collaborate with the Faculty Ombuds, provide an anonymous channel for faculty to report concerns, and offer support in case of a formal grievance. Membership will include 12-15 members, drawn from all faculty ranks, including non-tenure track. Members will undergo mandatory confidentiality training.
- **Financial Exigency Policy:** A draft policy, based on the UT Austin model, was presented. This policy ensures faculty involvement in the decision-making process when reductions in faculty lines are necessary due to financial exigency or academic reasons. The HOP impact statement for the policy was circulated, and discussions about the policy's language and its impact were held.
- **Departmental Reorganization Policy:** Progress was reported on relief efforts for faculty affected by departmental reorganization. These efforts include allowing faculty from the College of Sciences (COS) to serve on graduate committees in other departments and appointing faculty to mentor students across academic units.
- **President-Elect's Report:** Dr. Sarah Williams-Blangero presented the President-Elect's report. She shared that she has been working with the program assistant, Josie, to review and modify draft guidelines for election processes to committees, including eligibility to serve on Faculty Senate committees, academic standing committees, and institutional committees that require faculty representation. The aim is to align these processes with the Faculty Senate Constitution, bylaws, and the HOP policy on academic committees and councils.

Discussion of Faculty Senate Standing Committees

Dr. Gabler introduced proposed changes to the structure of Faculty Senate Standing Committees. The new structure consolidates several existing committees and introduces new ones. Faculty Senators will be expected to serve on one of the eight standing committees, each with 6-14 members.

New Standing Committees Overview

The revised standing committees are as follows:

1. **Council on Academic Freedom and Responsibility**

Chair: Chris Gabler

Charge: This committee will track Texas legislative changes impacting higher education, especially those relevant to the Subcommittee on Higher Education. It will be prepared to respond to challenges to academic freedom and 1st amendment issues. The committee will provide guidance on implementing SB 17 at UTRGV and advise the Faculty Senate on faculty-related policy concerns. The committee will also monitor discontinued programs that have caused a real loss of services to students or faculty.

2. **Education Policy Committee**

Chair: Marcela Hebbard

Charge: This committee will focus on proposals and legislative changes that affect educational policies. The committee will especially monitor SB 17, which affects available coursework, degree programs, student research, and student success. It will collaborate with the Technology-Enhanced Education Oversight Committee to address issues related to AI use in teaching and classrooms. Additionally, the committee will review potential developments in micro-credentialing and assess the UT System's plans on this front.

3. **Faculty Welfare Committee**

Chair: [TBD]

Charge: This committee will focus on the well-being of faculty members, with a particular emphasis on wellness and preventing burnout. New areas of concern include faculty family affairs, identifying unmet needs for family-related support, and exploring options to relieve stress related to family matters. The committee will also examine faculty benefits and resources to improve overall faculty welfare.

4. **Faculty Rules and Governance Committee**

Chair: [TBD]

Charge: This committee will be tasked with revising the Faculty Senate Constitution, specifically related to the election process for Senators and the selection of standing committee members. It will play a key role in leading and helping develop priority policies, including those concerning financial exigency, workload, grievance procedures, and departmental reorganization. This committee will also facilitate the formal adoption of these policies through the Faculty Senate.

5. **Research Policy Committee**

Chair: Laura Seligman

Charge: The Research Policy Committee will continue efforts to identify and eliminate barriers to faculty research. It will focus on infrastructure and personnel issues that hinder research and work to improve data collection efforts. Additionally, the committee will liaise with the Office for Research and Graduate Studies to ensure that faculty concerns are integrated into broader institutional research planning. The committee will continue to monitor and resolve research-related challenges faced by UTRGV faculty.

6. **Technology-Enhanced Education Oversight Committee**

Chair: [TBD]

Charge: This committee will oversee the rollout of the new online learning platform, Brightspace, and address any issues related to its integration. It will work closely with the Education Policy Committee and other relevant groups on the use of AI by students in teaching and learning environments. The committee will formulate policies on technology-enhanced education, ensuring that new initiatives align with UTRGV's mission and support faculty and student success in the digital learning environment.

7. **Faculty Salaries & Resources Committee**

Chair: Sarah Williams-Blangero

Charge: This committee will continue the work started last year to examine faculty salary disparities, focusing on addressing issues such as compression and inversion. It will query CUPA (College and University Professional Association) data, advocating for salary adjustments in line with broader market trends. The committee will seek to secure a market adjustment for faculty salaries, with the goal of ensuring that UTRGV remains competitive in attracting and retaining faculty talent.

8. **Peer Advising to Resolve Conflicts (PARC)**

Chair: [To be selected]

Charge: The new **PARC Committee** will provide mediation and conflict resolution services to faculty, offering support in resolving disputes. It will also work closely with the Faculty Ombuds to provide advice and facilitate communication between faculty members facing conflicts. The committee will offer an anonymous channel for faculty to seek assistance and will provide advice and procedural guidance if a formal grievance is filed. Membership will consist of 12-15 faculty members, representing all faculty ranks, including non-tenure track faculty. The committee will ensure confidentiality and undergo mandatory training to handle sensitive cases. The committee aims to foster an equitable and supportive environment for faculty conflict resolution.

Approval of PARC Committee

A motion was presented to approve the establishment of the **PARC Committee**. This committee will provide mediation, support, and advice on conflict resolution within the faculty.

Motion to approve PARC:

Andrew Smith moved to vote.

Seconded by: Senator Gutierrez

The motion passed with 34 votes in favor and 1 against. The committee was officially approved.

Financial Exigency Policy

Dr. Gabler presented the draft financial exigency policy again, and the accompanying Policy Impact Statement for discussion. The policy aims to ensure that faculty are meaningfully involved in the review process when decisions are made regarding program cuts or faculty reductions due to financial exigency.

Motion to approve the Policy Impact Statement for the Financial Exigency Policy:

Andrew Smith asked for clarification on the motion.

Suad Ghaddar inquired about the title of the policy.

After discussion, Dr. Gabler moved to submit the impact statement to the Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP) committee.

Motion to approve the motion to submit the Policy Impact Statement:

Moved by: Dr. Gabler

Seconded by: Cynthia Paccacerqua

The motion passed unanimously, with 40 votes in favor and none against.

New Business

- **Anti-plagiarism technology in Brightspace:** Brent Campney raised a question about the availability of anti-plagiarism tools in the new Brightspace platform. Andrew Smith and George Atisa responded.
- **International Overseas Committee (IOC):** Hooman Tabatabai-Mir asked about issues faculty face when trying to obtain IOC numbers for travel.
- **HR Director Search:** Laura Seligman inquired about the search for a new HR director and whether the Faculty Senate could advocate for an external search.

- **Faculty Travel Funds:** George Atisa raised concerns about the barriers faculty face in accessing travel funds, which were once available through Faculty Affairs. Cynthia Paccacerqua echoed these concerns.
- **DACA Impact:** Erwin Suazo inquired about the impact of DACA on UTRGV students.
- **Search Committees for Staff Positions:** Liliana Galindo raised concerns about faculty representation in search committees for high-level staff positions.
- **Faculty Affairs Policies:** Owen Temby inquired about the implementation of faculty affairs policies by department chairs, specifically regarding peer teaching observations and workload allocation.

Adjournment

Dr. Gabler moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:01 p.m.

Seconded by: Andrew Smith

The meeting was adjourned unanimously.