

Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting

UTRGV Faculty Senate

Date: Tuesday, February 11, 2025

Time: 3:00 pm – 5:01 pm

Location: Zoom Webinar

Senators Present: Abdurrahman Cagri Atesin, Marcus Farris, Cynthia Paccacerqua (FSEC), Erica Buchberger, Ulku Karabulut, Jack Ruelas, Monika Rabarison, Vejoya Viren , Mahmoud K. Quweider, Joseph Hovey, Cory Wimberly, Tamer Oraby, Mounir Ben Ghalia, Megan Keniry, Servando Hinojosa, Mataz Alcoutlabi, Marzieh Ayati, Jose Antonio Rodriguez, Alexandre Couture Gagnon, James Gleason, Folake Adelakun, Silvia Patricia Solis, Krista Jobson, Jung-IL Oh , Igor Ryabov, Mohamadhossen Noruzoliaee, Suad Ghaddar, Andrew Smith, Hooman Tabatabai-Mir, Margaret Rubi, Erwin Suazo, Edna Orozco, Wanrong Hou, Michelle Alvarado, George Atisa, George Padilla, Bruno Arthur, Ignacio Rodriguez, Liliana Galindo, Pauli Badenhorst (ILO Noushin Nouri), Donald J. Lyles, Veronica Castro, Christian Zuniga, Denise Longoria, Belinda Rivas, Norma Beardwood-Roper, Jose E Hernandez, Laurie Deleon, Joel Garza, Randall Monty, Laura Seligman, Fuat Firat, Brent Campney, Owen Temby, Sarah Williams-Blangero, Gladys Maestre, Pedro Martinez, Marcela Hebbard, Marisa Knox, Ruth Crutchfield, Christopher Gabler

Guests Present: Susan Hurley-Glowa, Sandra Morrow, Elena Venegas, Haiyan Zhou, Michael Persans, Michiyo Hirai, Tian Dong, Nan Xiao, Sandra Musanti, Grant Benham, Dernay Coley, Andreea Karadeli, Alex Stehn, Peter Cortez, Jonikka Charlton, Timothy Huber, Eloi Camprubi, Karin Lewis , AJ Baginski, Katarzyna Sepielak, Yong Zhou, John VanDeberg, Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, Alvaro Corral , David Lecusay Jr, Tobias Weinrich Weinrich, Criselda Garcia, Jorge Gonzalez, Katrina Roush, Michael Abebe, Sergey Grigorian, Dawid Wladyka, Alyssa Guadalupe Cavazos, Arlett Lomeli, Michael Whitacre, Eunice Lerma, Cristina Villalobos, Colin Charlton, Ney Alliey-Rodriguez, Kip Austin Hinton, Andres Amado, Katherine Christoffersen, Carla Angulo-Pasel, Jeff Ward, Guy Duke, Michael Lehker, Ramsés Ortín, Ala Qubbaj, Dongkyu Kim, Kristine Wirts, Nazaret Fresno, Luis Zayas, Vanessa Ceballos, Karen Adams, Robert Dearth, Cynthia Saavedra, Aziza Zemrani

Senators Absent: Ahmed Touhami, Cynthia Lopez Guerrero, Elizabeth Deven Hernandez, Ferenc Moldovanyi, Genaro Ramirez Correa, Jose Gutierrez, Juliann Garza Castillo, Maysam Pournik, Punit Ahluwalia, Salma Mahmood, Sonia Chapa, Haiyan Zhou

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 pm by Faculty Senate President, Dr. Chris Gabler. Dr. Silvia Solis, the Parliamentarian, provided the report from the Parliamentarian's office.

2. Secretary's Report

Dr. Owen Temby, Secretary, presented the minutes from the previous meeting held in January.

Motion to approve minutes: Norma Beardwood-Roper

Seconded by: Fuat Firat

Result: The minutes were approved unanimously at 3:02 pm.

3. **President's Report**

Dr. Chris Gabler, Faculty Senate President, presented his report from 3:05 pm to 3:25 pm. He used a slide show to guide the presentation, and the following items were discussed:

Faculty Senate Priorities (Unordered)

Dr. Gabler outlined several key priorities that the Senate is focusing on, with additional elaboration for each:

- **Workload Policy:** Dr. Gabler mentioned that discussions on workload policy are ongoing, with strong support from the Office of the Provost and the VPFA. The goal is to create clear and equitable expectations for faculty workload across departments.
- **Grievance Policy:** The Senate has continued efforts to refine and reform grievance policies, ensuring that faculty have access to fair and transparent procedures. Dr. Gabler highlighted recent progress, including updates to the Ombuds office and the establishment of a Faculty Peer Conflict Resolution Group (PARC), which aims to resolve disputes before they escalate.
- **Financial Exigency Policy:** Dr. Gabler emphasized the importance of faculty involvement in the decision-making process when facing potential budget cuts. The Senate has been drafting a policy related to financial exigency, which would ensure that faculty are consulted when faculty lines are considered for reduction.
- **Departmental Reorganization Policy:** Dr. Gabler provided an update on discussions related to departmental reorganizations. The Senate is advocating for processes that preserve faculty input and avoid negative impacts on teaching and research.
- **Removing Barriers to Research:** Efforts are underway to remove barriers to faculty research, particularly related to administrative processes. Dr. Gabler mentioned a partnership with the UT System Faculty Advisory Council (UT FAC) and collaboration with Joan Bienvenue, AVC for Research, to streamline research procedures and identify staffing needs.
- **Faculty Salary Issues:** A major focus of Dr. Gabler's report was on faculty salary issues, particularly salary compression and inversion. He noted that the Senate has been in continuous dialogue with President Bailey and Provost Zayas to address these concerns.
 - Dr. Gabler shared that salary raises and adjustments for compression and inversion are a priority for the Senate and have been included in the operating budget discussions for the upcoming fiscal year.
 - While waiting for a full market analysis, Dr. Gabler emphasized that salary adjustments would not be delayed. He reported that the benchmarks for faculty salaries were higher than previously thought, particularly for

Emerging Research Institutions. The final budget will be submitted to the UT System for approval in the summer.

Nominal Appointments for Displaced Chemistry Faculty

Dr. Gabler also elaborated on efforts to help displaced chemistry faculty. The initiative to offer nominal appointments in other departments is aimed at supporting faculty in applying for grants that require a chemistry department affiliation. This is part of a broader strategy to help faculty affected by departmental reorganizations.

Texas Legislative Bills on Higher Education

Dr. Gabler provided a summary of bills related to higher education that have been submitted to the Texas Senate, including a bill to eliminate tenure for new hires. He pointed out that while Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick has prioritized several bills, none of them yet address tenure, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), critical race theory, or the reform of faculty senates. Dr. Gabler noted that it's essential for faculty to remain engaged and informed about the progress of these bills.

4. President-Elect's Report

Dr. Sarah Williams-Blangero, President-Elect, provided her report at 3:25 pm, which centered on NIH grant policies and their impact on faculty research. Dr. Williams-Blangero explained that NIH indirect costs (IDC) have been reduced in recent years, which has affected research funding. She emphasized the importance of advocacy and awareness among faculty to mitigate the impact of these reductions on their work. She also discussed strategies for increasing support for underfunded research areas, particularly in the health and biomedical sciences, and outlined ways faculty can engage with the NIH to advocate for more funding and policy adjustments.

5. Guest Presentation by Provost Zayas

Provost Luis Zayas participated in a Q&A session starting at 3:27 pm. He discussed the ongoing faculty salary survey and outlined the general plan to raise faculty salaries. Dr. Zayas explained that UTRGV is conducting a market analysis to compare its salary structures with other UT System institutions. This will help ensure that faculty salaries remain competitive. He also noted that a portion of the operating budget would be allocated to address salary compression and inversion issues, with a commitment to making adjustments in the upcoming fiscal year.

Dr. Zayas introduced a new policy for post-tenure salary raises. He clarified that these raises would not be automatic but would be based on the results of post-tenure reviews. He also discussed a potential policy to return a portion of indirect costs (IDC) from grants to faculty as a one-time payment. This initiative is aimed at providing more financial support to faculty, especially in underfunded areas such as the College of Liberal Arts (CLA).

Faculty Questions and Comments:

- **Norma Beardwood-Roper** asked about salary increases for non-tenure track faculty and whether they would be included in the salary survey.

- **Fuat Firat** asked about the potential impact of political tensions on academic freedom at UTRGV and how the university could strengthen language on academic freedom in policies.
- **Andrew Smith** inquired about strengthening academic freedom language in the revisions to HOP ADM 06-503 and 06-504.
Dr. Zayas pointed out that the university must abide by UT System policies, which may limit how much the language can be changed, but assured faculty that academic freedom would be safeguarded within those parameters.
- **Kip Austin Hinton** asked if the NIH cuts would affect UTRGV and whether these policies would impact the university's funding. Dr. Gabler and Dr. Zayas responded with uncertainty regarding how this might play out.
- **Elena Venegas** asked if recently promoted faculty would receive a compression raise. Dr. Zayas confirmed that they would.

6. **Guest Presentation by Karen Adams, J.D. (UTRGV Chief Legal Officer)**

At 3:55 pm, Karen Adams, the UTRGV Chief Legal Officer, led a Q&A session regarding immigration enforcement on campus. Ms. Adams clarified the university's position on immigration enforcement, explaining that federal immigration agents are permitted to enter the campus, but they must have a court-issued judicial warrant to access non-public areas. She provided a series of guidelines for faculty to follow in the event that agents request access to classrooms or seek information. The primary advice was to contact campus police and refer all inquiries to the Office of Legal Counsel.

Faculty Questions and Comments:

- **Fuat Firat** asked whether it would be possible to compile contact information for officers involved in enforcement and share it with faculty. Dr. Gabler affirmed that this could be done.
- **Andrew Smith** asked about student protections in the event that immigration agents arrive on campus. Ms. Adams assured faculty that students should not answer FERPA-related questions, and emphasized the importance of students being aware of their rights under the 5th Amendment.
- **Randall Monty** asked about the availability of resources for students facing immigration-related issues. Ms. Adams indicated that the university is working on providing more resources and guidance to students in need.

Additional Issues Raised in the Chat:

- **Michelle Alvarado** raised concerns about misinformation circulating on campus regarding how to respond if law enforcement comes to campus. She suggested that the administration develop clear guidelines and share them with the university community.
- **Andrew Smith** asked if ICE can arrest people in public spaces without a warrant. Ms. Adams said that she was unsure.

- **Cynthia Paccacerqua** asked what steps could be taken if a student is in distress regarding their immigration status. She also asked if there were any plans for "know your rights" workshops on campus, similar to those held in 2017. Ms. Adams responded by noting that the university is considering developing a webpage with clear guidelines, and she encouraged faculty to refer students to appropriate resources.

7. **Discussion on HOP Revisions (ADM 06-503 and ADM 06-504)**

At 4:29 pm, Dr. Gabler opened the floor for comments and questions regarding the revisions to HOP ADM 06-503 (Tenure-Track Faculty Appointments, Evaluations, and Reappointments) and ADM 06-504 (Tenured Faculty Evaluations). Because the commenting on the HOP revisions to ADM 06-503 and ADM 504 (via Qualtrics survey) has not been complete, the reports were not made. Rather, Dr Gabler opened the floor for comments and questions about the revisions. The truncated deadline for feedback meant that discussions would continue after the meeting.

- **Krista Jobson** asked if the timeline for revisions to HOP items could be outlined in more detail. Dr. Gabler and Dr. Paccaderqua clarified the timeframe, emphasizing the urgency of feedback.
- **Andrew Smith** asked: What assurances do we have that our requests for revisions will be included in the final draft of the document given the truncated deadline and given that is the final opportunity. Cynthia Saavedra said that there is no guarantee. Cynthia Paccacerqua agreed and said that there has to be trust in the process.
- **Michelle Alvarado** asked a question about non-tenure track faculty. She asked about professional development opportunities for professional faculty who are not on the tenure track. She said that she is there to create a working group for professional faculty. She said that it would start as a faculty senate working group.

Motion to Hold Special Session on HOP Revisions (ADM 06-503 and ADM 06-504):

A motion was made by **Dr. Andrew Smith** to hold a special session of the Senate in March to review feedback before the final submission of revisions.

Motion by: Dr. Andrew Smith

Seconded by: Dr. Gabler

Result: The motion passed unanimously.

8. **Motion to Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:01 pm following a motion by Dr. Gabler and a second by Fuat Firat.