

Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting

UTRGV Faculty Senate

Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Time: 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Location: Zoom Webinar

Senators Present: Silvia Patricia Solís, Alexandre Couture Gagnon, Edna Orozco, Denise Longoria, Folake Adelakun, Suad Ghaddar, Christopher Gabler, Maysam Pournik, Mahmoud Quweider, Marisa Knox, Norma Beardwood-Roper, Elizabeth Deven-Hernandez, Vejoya Viren, Marcus Farris, Mounir Ben Ghalia, Randall Monty, Monika Rabarison, Pedro Martinez, Ferenc Moldovanyi, Igor Ryabov, Laura Seligman, Abdurrahman Cagri Atesin, Michelle Alvarado, Ignacio Rodriguez, Owen Temby, Christian Zuniga, Servando Hinojosa, Brent Campney, Joseph D. Hovey, , Belinda Rivas, Pauli Badenhorst, Haiyan Zhou, Hooman Tabatabai-Mir, Gladys Maestre, Fuat Firat, Ruth Crutchfield, Mataz Alcoutlabi, Punit Ahluwalia, Liliana Galindo, Marzieh Ayati, George Atisa, George Padilla, Donald J. Lyles, Cory Wimberly, Julie Garza Castillo, Bruno Arthur, Andrew Smith, Ulku Karabulut, Jung IL-Oh, Genaro Ramirez Correa, Jose Gutierrez, Erica Buchberger, Krista Jobson, Tamer Oraby, James Gleason, Sarah Williams-Blangero, Megan Keniry, Mohamadhossen Noruzoliaee, Cynthia Paccacerqua (Past President)

Guests Present: Roda Galang, Jeff Ward, Arlett Lomeli , Katarzyna Sepielak, Joy Esquierdo, Colin Charlton, Canan Tanir, Michael Lehker, Mario Gil, Dawid Wladyka, Jonikka Charlton, Jim Kruse, Edward Kruse, Paul Sale, James Jupp, Fidencio 'Fito' Mercado, Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, JohnVandeberg, Chun Xu, Cristina Villalobos, Cynthia Jones, Luis Zayas, Veronica Gonzales, Vanessa Ceballos, Maggie Cronn, Robert Dearth, (17066270685)

Senators Absent: Ahmed Touhami, Erwin Suazo, Jack Ruelas, Cynthia Lopez Guerrero, Joel Garza, Jose A Rodriguez, Jose E Hernandez, Marcela Hebbard, Margaret Rubi, Salma Mahmood, Wanrong Hou, Sonia Chapa, Veronica Castro, Noushin Nouri (FDL), Laurie Deleon

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM.

II. Parliamentarian's Report

Dr. Silvia Solis delivered the Parliamentarian's report.

III. Secretary's Report

Dr. Owen Temby delivered the Secretary's report. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

IV. President's Report

Dr. Christopher Gabler began his presidential report at 3:04 PM, presenting a PowerPoint overview of current Faculty Senate priorities and legislative concerns. The report included the following updates:

- **Faculty Salaries:** There were no significant changes since the previous meeting. The Faculty Senate is awaiting updated budget proposals from the administration, expected soon, which will indicate whether salary compression and inversion concerns will be addressed.
- **Faculty Workload Policy:** No new developments were reported.
- **Grievance Policy:** The Faculty Senate voted to create a standing committee on peer advising to resolve conflicts (PARC Committee). A full charter draft has been shared with the Executive Committee and will be circulated to the full Senate prior to a vote at the next meeting.
- **Departmental Reorganization:** Dr. Gabler reported a lack of recent meetings with the provost's office and indicated concern over recent reorganizations in the College of Liberal Arts, particularly affecting Political Science, Public Affairs, and Sociology. Efforts are underway to assess the impact of these changes and determine appropriate responses.
- **Faculty Research Barriers:** Dr. Gabler met with UT System leadership to discuss persistent barriers to research, including lack of administrative support and infrastructure. He connected these barriers to broader funding challenges arising from recent state and federal restrictions on diversity-related grants, noting their impact on indirect cost (IDC) revenues and overall institutional research support.
- **HOP Policies on Faculty Evaluation (ADM 6-503 & 6-504):** Dr. Gabler reviewed the Faculty Senate's recent efforts to respond to proposed revisions, including campus-wide feedback, Senate deliberation, and an emergency poll to approve 18 language changes. All proposed edits were approved with majority support.
- **Financial Exigency Policy:** Dr. Gabler discussed progress on the exigency policy revision. Incorporating input from the March special session, the revised draft is now ready for further Senate discussion and potential vote. He stressed the growing urgency of the policy given worsening economic indicators.
- **Legislative Update – Senate Bill 37:** The president highlighted concerns about SB 37, which consolidates institutional control under governing boards and weakens faculty governance, including Senate powers and shared governance norms. Additional provisions establish a statewide Office of Excellence in Higher Education to investigate curriculum and ideology in public institutions.

- **Federal Executive Orders:** Dr. Gabler referenced updated resources from the American Council on Education regarding recent federal executive actions affecting higher education.
- **Committee Reports Reminder:** Standing committees were reminded to submit year-end reports to the Senate by April 29, including a summary of accomplishments and presenters for the final May 6 meeting. The final meeting will take place in person in Brownsville, with an optional Zoom link and a reception at Dr. Gabler's home to follow.

V. President-Elect's Report

Dr. Sarah Williams-Blangero, Faculty Senate President-Elect, stated that she had no updates to report at this time.

VI. Questions and Discussion

Following the President-Elect's brief statement, Dr. Gabler invited questions from the floor.

- **Norma Beardwood-Roper** asked to revisit a slide from Dr. Gabler's earlier presentation that included legislative resources (e.g., capitol.texas.gov). Dr. Gabler responded that all slides from his presentation would be uploaded to the Faculty Senate website, where they will be accessible with active links for reference. He also mentioned that, as of that day, Senate Bill 37 appeared to have been approved by committee and was progressing through the legislative process.
- **Liliana Galindo** inquired about the deadline for committee reports. Dr. Gabler clarified that reports are due by **April 29**, ahead of the Executive Committee meeting. This will allow time to prepare for the May 6 meeting, where the reports will be presented.

VII. Guest Presentation on the 89th Texas Legislative Session

Presenter: Veronica Gonzales, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Community Relations

Time: 3:25 – 3:35 p.m.

Ms. Gonzales provided an overview of the current status of higher education legislation in the 89th Texas Legislative Session, with a focus on Senate Bill 37 (SB 37) and its implications for governance, curriculum oversight, and faculty senates. Key points included:

- **Status Update:** SB 37 has been substituted and approved by the Senate Committee on Education (K–16). It is expected to be scheduled for a vote on the Senate floor imminently.
- **Curriculum Oversight:** The committee substitute requires the Board of Regents to review curriculum at least every five years, ensuring content is free of critical race theory

(CRT) materials and aligned with legislative expectations. Advisory committees may be formed to assist with this task.

- **Governance and Reporting:** The Board of Regents will gain authority to overturn institutional decisions and must submit annual reports to state leadership on faculty, curriculum, and administrative matters.
- **Faculty Councils and Senates:** Councils will be advisory only, limited to 60 members (two per college/school—one elected and one appointed), and must comply with transparency and open meeting requirements. Current councils must transition to this new model by October 1, 2025.
- **Administrative Appointments and Grievances:** Presidents must approve leadership hires, and faculty may not have final authority over hiring decisions or grievance outcomes.
- **Course Review and Ombudsman Office:** Institutions must conduct periodic reviews of minors and certificates. A new ombudsman office under the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will oversee compliance and handle complaints.

She also addressed other legislation, including:

- Proposed bills affecting in-state tuition eligibility for undocumented students (none have yet received a hearing).
- SB 1741, focused on protecting trade secrets and proprietary information from foreign actors (passed the Senate).
- A proposed \$3 billion fund for dementia research (DeepRIT) with potential benefit to UTRGV faculty in neuroscience and Alzheimer's research.
- Other pending bills relating to nursing, allied health, and nutrition education.

A full legislative update will be distributed to Senators via email but not posted publicly at this stage.

VIII. Q&A with Veronica Gonzales

Time: 3:35 – 3:45 p.m.

- **Dr. Pauli Badenhorst** asked about House Bill 2548, which proposes a ban on teaching topics related to DEI, gender, and race. Ms. Gonzales reported that HB 2548 has not advanced to a committee hearing and is moving slowly. If heard, it may face significant scrutiny regarding its scope and implications for programs such as Mexican American and African American studies.

- **Dr. Gabler** raised follow-up questions about the bill's implications for curriculum committees and faculty input. Ms. Gonzales responded that while SB 37 centralizes authority with the Board of Regents, advisory roles and feedback mechanisms may remain via advisory committees. She emphasized that the interpretation and implementation of some provisions remain unclear.
- **Dr. Fuat Firat** had a question, but due to time constraints and Ms. Gonzales needing to leave by 4:00 p.m., Dr. Gabler deferred his question to the new business portion of the meeting, noting that follow-up with Ms. Gonzales could occur later.

Ms. Gonzales concluded her remarks by promising to send a copy of her legislative update and the Department of Education's "Dear Colleague" FAQs to Dr. Gabler for distribution.

IX. Guest Presentation on HOP Revisions to ADM 06-503 and 06-504

Presenters:

- Dr. Robert Dearth, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
 - Maggie Cronn, Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
- Time:** 3:45 – 3:55 p.m.

Dr. Dearth and Ms. Cronn presented an overview of the next steps in the HOP revision process following the Faculty Senate's feedback on ADM 06-503 and ADM 06-504. Dr. Dearth explained that:

- The Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs has compiled all Faculty Senate feedback, including proposed revisions and voting results.
- These documents will be reviewed by the Provost's Office. If any proposed edits are not accepted, a justification will be included in a comment field.
- The full annotated document—including Senate comments and OVPFA responses—will then be submitted to the **HOP Policy Committee** for further consideration.
- The Senate Executive Committee will also receive the same version of the document, ensuring transparency throughout the process.
- The HOP Policy Committee has authority to resolve discrepancies between stakeholder recommendations and determine final policy language. They may also request additional information.
- Once the committee finalizes a draft, it will undergo **legal review** for compliance with UT System rules and legal standards (within 30 days).
- If legal suggests changes, those will be routed back to the HOP Committee.

- After legal clearance, the policy will be submitted to the **University President** for final approval. If this process concludes smoothly, the revised policies could be in place by **September 1, 2025**.

Ms. Cronn added that the HOP policy governing this process is ADM 01-101 (“Policy on Policies”), and shared the link in the chat for senators to review and circulate among their departments.

Q&A

- **Dr. Andrew Smith** asked how soon the Senate would know if its proposed amendments were accepted. Dr. Dearth responded that the goal is to complete the review and transmit the draft to the HOP Policy Committee within two weeks, at which point the Senate will receive the updated document for review.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Gabler thanked Dr. Dearth and Ms. Cronn for their presentation and reiterated that the Executive Committee and the full Senate will be kept informed throughout the process. Dr. Gabler, who serves on the HOP Committee, will report back as the policy advances.

X. Guest Presentation on the Office of Advocacy and Violence Prevention (OAVP)

Presenter: Dr. Cynthia Jones, Professor of Philosophy and Director of OAVP

Time: 3:55 – 4:15 p.m.

Dr. Cynthia Jones provided an overview of the mission, services, and resources offered by the Office of Advocacy and Violence Prevention (OAVP) at UTRGV. She emphasized that the office supports students, faculty, and staff affected by a broad range of experiences, including violence, trauma, and crisis.

Key points included:

- **Scope of Services:** The OAVP provides advocacy, crisis response, trauma-informed counseling (for students), supportive measures, and educational programming. The office also supports students accused of violence, and connects university members with community resources when needed.
- **Confidentiality:** OAVP is one of three units on campus (along with the Counseling Center and Student Health Services) designated as confidential under Senate Bill 212, and thus not required to report identifying information to the university. All other employees are considered “responsible employees” and must report incidents disclosed to them.

- **Supportive Measures:** In alignment with Title IX requirements, the office facilitates supportive academic and campus accommodations for survivors of violence. Faculty may receive Title IX notifications resulting from this process, though specific details are not disclosed unless necessary.
- **Reporting Guidance:** Faculty are encouraged to consult with OAVP if unsure about their reporting obligations. Dr. Jones shared a faculty-oriented guide to Senate Bill 212 requirements, which is posted on the OAVP website.
- **Campus Presence:** OAVP maintains offices in both Edinburg (HR Building, 3rd Floor) and Brownsville (North Office Building near the College of Education Counseling Clinic), and can deploy staff across campuses within the hour.
- **Programming:** In addition to advocacy, the office runs the “Did I Get That Right?” peer educator program, coordinates the student toiletry pantry in partnership with student organizations, and promotes prevention through educational campaigns.

Q&A Highlights:

- **Training Oversight:** Dr. Laura Seligman noted that a university training program mistakenly listed OAVP as located in her lab. Dr. Jones acknowledged the error and committed to correcting it.
- **Confidentiality Training for Committees:** Dr. Gabler inquired whether OAVP could provide training for members of the Senate’s new grievance resolution committee (PARC). Dr. Jones confirmed her willingness to assist.
- **Reporting to Police vs. Title IX:** In response to Dr. Andrew Smith’s question, Dr. Jones clarified that students are not required to report incidents through campus channels and may instead work with local law enforcement. Reporting to Title IX and police are separate processes, with differing definitions and standards of evidence.

XI. Discussion: Proposed Financial Exigency Policy

Presenter: Dr. Christopher Gabler

Time: 4:15 – 4:35 p.m.

Dr. Gabler provided an update on the Faculty Senate’s proposed policy concerning financial exigency and the reduction of faculty positions for academic reasons. The proposal follows a model based on UT Austin’s standalone policy and related Regents’ Rules.

Background:

- The **impact statement** for the proposed policy had already been approved by the Faculty Senate and submitted to the HOP Committee.

- The discussion focused on refining the **policy language**, particularly following feedback from the special session held on March 25.
- Two key revisions had been made in the most recent draft:
 1. **Minimum notice period** for affected faculty.
 2. **Faculty capacity to review the declaration of financial exigency.**

Key Points of Discussion:

Minimum Notice Period:

- The draft proposes that **faculty whose positions are eliminated due to financial exigency or academic reasons be given at least six months' notice** or until the end of the next long semester—whichever is longer.
- Dr. Gabler noted that **UT System and Regents' Rules currently impose no minimum** notice period, making this a protective addition.
- Dr. Andrew Smith and Dr. Genaro Ramirez Correa voiced concern that **six months is insufficient**, especially given the **annual nature of academic hiring cycles**.
 - A one-year notice was advocated as more appropriate for academic job searches and career transitions.
- Suggestions were made to:
 - Establish **one year as the norm or expectation**, with the understanding that dire budgetary conditions might necessitate shorter timeframes.
 - Include **flexibility based on the severity of financial conditions**, possibly via language reviewed by legal counsel.
- Dr. Cynthia Paccacerqua emphasized the need to consider **how ideological and political pressures might intersect with economic justifications** to eliminate certain programs or faculty positions, particularly in areas like feminism or ethnic studies. She encouraged the Senate to develop mechanisms to safeguard against such threats.
- Dr. Gabler acknowledged these concerns and noted that the proposed policy **already applies to both financial exigency and program reductions for academic reasons**, and represents an important first step in building institutional safeguards.

Outcome:

- Due to time constraints, the **Senate did not vote** on the proposed policy.

- Dr. Gabler committed to incorporating the suggestions into a revised draft, particularly the proposed shift toward a **12-month notice as a norm** and the **inclusion of language acknowledging the broader political context**.
- The final vote will be scheduled for the May 2025 Senate meeting unless an earlier **online vote** is called by the Executive Committee.

XII. New Business

Time: 4:35 – 5:00 p.m.

Dr. Fuat Firat raised several items under new business and expressed concern that critical faculty issues are not receiving sufficient attention or follow-up by the Senate. He referenced a message sent earlier in the day to the Faculty Senate, Dr. Gabler, and Past President Dr. Paccacerqua, outlining four areas of concern:

1. **A faculty statement to the Provost** regarding growing faculty dissatisfaction with recent administrative actions.
2. **Advocacy and support for foreign and Dreamer students**, given recent changes in legislation and policy enforcement.
3. **Faculty concerns regarding Quality Matters certification** as a requirement for teaching online courses, which many feel is burdensome and of limited utility.
4. **A call for Faculty Senate action in response to broader ideological and political attacks on higher education**, particularly those impacting curriculum, academic freedom, and program viability.

Dr. Firat emphasized that such issues should not be relegated to the end of meetings under “New Business,” where time constraints often prevent meaningful discussion. He formally **moved that these four issues be included on the main agenda** of the May meeting, not as new business.

Dr. Andrew Smith seconded the motion.

Discussion followed, with support from several Senators:

- **Dr. Cynthia Paccacerqua** noted the value of framing responses as “educational forums” to avoid political labeling and emphasized the broader threat posed by ideological attacks on certain fields of study.
- **Dr. George Atisa** supported the motion, emphasizing the need for strategic protection of academic programs and institutional leadership to push back against political overreach.
- **Dr. Laura Seligman** reported that the Research Subcommittee had prepared a written statement outlining broader faculty concerns, which she would share with the Executive Committee for inclusion in the May agenda.

- **Dr. Haiyan Zhou** supported the motion and suggested deferring in-depth discussions to the next meeting to allow for adequate time.

The motion was clarified as a formal request for the **Faculty Senate Executive Committee to consider adding the four items to the May 2025 meeting agenda**. This clarification was accepted as a friendly amendment, and the motion passed with **overwhelming support (36 in favor, 1 opposed)**.

Dr. Gabler confirmed that although the May meeting will already include end-of-year committee reports and officer elections, the Executive Committee would carefully consider incorporating these additional agenda items. He also noted that the Senate remains active over the summer and retains the ability to conduct votes electronically if necessary.

XIII. Adjournment

Time: 5:00 p.m.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.