

ALTERNATIVE SENATE AGENDA

Submitted to:

UTRGV Faculty Senate Executive
Committee
and
UTRGV Council of Chairs

Submitted by:

UTRGV Department of Political Science

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1. Background

On April 2, 2021, at its regular monthly department meeting, the Department of Political Science, with all members voting unanimously, approved the following resolution:

“The Department of Political Science resolves to withdraw all participation in the UTRGV Faculty Senate as it is ineffective, non-responsive to faculty concerns, and structured as a self-perpetuating oligarchy. Henceforth, the statements and actions of the Faculty Senate should not be construed as representing the faculty of the Department of Political Science on any matter whatsoever.”

The Senate President, Officers, and Executive Committee were notified of the Department’s vote on April 5, 2021 and further informed that “the Department of Political Science immediately recalls our Faculty Senate representatives, with their assent, so we request that these positions be shown as vacant on the UTRGV Faculty Senate website.”

In response, the Senate President requested a “more concrete dialogue” with the Department of Political Science and, consequently, the Department announces its “Alternative Senate Agenda” as a basis for this dialogue, although we intend to pursue this agenda on an independent basis. As requested, however, we offer our observations on how to improve the organization, structure, and culture of the Faculty Senate.

2. Substantive Issues

2.1 MARKET RATE SALARY ADJUSTMENTS & MERIT PAY

Faculty compensation should ALWAYS be the top priority of the Faculty Senate. It should be a topic of discussion at every Senate meeting, and it should be the top item for discussion in all meetings between the Senate Executive Committee, UTRGV President Guy Bailey, and UTRGV Provost Janna Arney.

In particular, the Department of Political Science calls for:

- **Immediate implementation of the Huron Report** (2016), which would establish salary parity between UTRGV faculty salaries at the “market rate” for comparable faculty at peer institutions. Market rate adjustments were a commitment made to UTRGV faculty when the institution released “The Huron Report” (2016).¹
- In fact, the amount of money UTRGV spends on faculty salaries has declined from \$78.4 million in FY 2016 to \$75.3 million in FY 2021. Cumulative inflation from 2015 to 2021 was 10.97%, which means that the real dollar amount spent by UTRGV on faculty salaries has declined by 15% overall since the institution was founded in Fall 2015 (see Table 1).
- Faculty salaries as a percent of UTRGV’s total operating revenues has declined from 35.12% in FY 2016 to 24.34% in FY 2020 (see Table 1). This raises the question of why UTRGV is spending less of its operating revenues on faculty salaries each year.

Table 1

UTRGV Faculty Salaries	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Faculty Salaries	\$ 78,380,706	\$ 80,297,757	\$ 82,630,389	\$ 69,795,854	\$ 70,749,057	\$ 75,339,281
Departmental Operating Expenses	\$ 9,833,591	\$ 12,328,669	\$ 9,107,906	\$ 9,230,411	\$ 9,455,554	\$ 10,539,793
Faculty Salaries as % of Total Operating Revenues	35.12%	32.32%	33.30%	26.69%	24.34%	Not Available

Source: UTRGV “Annual Financial Statements” and “Operating Budgets” from FY 2016 through FY 2020 are available at this site: <https://www.utrgv.edu/en-us/required-links/reports-to-state/index.htm>.

- If faculty salaries had been merely **level funded** as a percent of total operating revenues (35.12%), UTRGV would have spent \$102,084,775 on faculty salaries as compared to the \$70,749,057 it spent in FY 2020. This reduction in the percent of UTRGV operating revenues spent on faculty salaries (-\$31,335,718) would have been sufficient to implement market rate adjustments, regular merit pay increases, and UTRGV could still have hired additional tenure-track faculty.

¹ Huron Consulting Group, *University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Faculty Market Compensation Study*, September 13, 2016 (on file at Department of Political Science).

- UTRGV faculty have been told repeatedly that salary increases are dependent on student enrollments. **Student enrollments at UTRGV have increased** from 28,584 in Fall 2015 to 32,615 in Fall 2020² or 14.1% over the last five years. Faculty salaries have not risen by 14.1%, but instead have actually declined by 15% in real (inflation adjusted) dollars.
- **Merit Pay raises of no less than 3%** (inflation + 1%) should be awarded annually, on a regular basis, and without exception. As it stands, faculty have received a significant pay cut in real dollars since Fall 2015 as inflation erodes the purchasing power of faculty salaries.³
- **Merit pay should be based on merit** as determined by department evaluation standards and not diverted into longevity pay or inversion or compression adjustments, which is a separate pay equity issue.
- **Lecturers** have Master’s degrees and with increasing frequency they have earned Ph.D.s. There is no acceptable rationale for why a Lecturer I with a Ph.D. should be paid less than an Assistant Professor as both categories of faculty have comparable, if differently structured, workloads.

The Department of Political Science proposes a policy of strategic bargaining and negotiations supported by tactics involving off-campus publicity and on-campus activism to achieve faculty demands for salary equity. The Senate Executive Committee should initiate a vigorous campaign to significantly increase faculty salaries through market rate adjustments and regular merit pay awards.

The Department of Political Science has a long list of proposed tactics it is willing to share with the Faculty Senate.

2.2 TENURE TRACK FACULTY RATIO

The UTRGV Administration has embarked on a staffing program designed to make UTRGV “the Walmart of Higher Education.” The Administration’s faculty hiring decisions are in direct conflict with its stated aspiration to become an emerging research institution. UTRGV cannot achieve this status when it increasingly relies on part-time adjunct faculty and full-time non-tenure track lecturers, who are not expected to do research.

- UTRGV must increase the ratio of tenured and tenure-track faculty to no less than 75% of total faculty by headcount.

² See, <https://my.utrgv.edu/group/myutrgv/enrollment-reports> available for Fall 2015 to Spring 2021.

³ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/inflation-picks-up-in-march-with-core-prices-rising-0-4-11619787035>

2.3 RESEARCH & TRAVEL SUPPORT

The UTRGV Administration claims that it wants to position UTRGV as an emerging research institution, but then does not provide the necessary financial support to faculty to achieve this goal.

- UTRGV must allocate significantly more institutional money toward research support, including individual professional development and research accounts (\$5,000 to \$10,000 annually) for all tenured and tenure-track faculty to support conference travel, publication subventions, the acquisition of software and data, field research, and other research activities. This type of university-funded research and travel account is common at research universities.

2.4 OFFICE SPACE & ACADEMIC FACILITIES

The UTRGV Administration spends millions of dollars per year leasing non-academic facilities from banks, real estate developers, and medical corporations and, thereby, it effectively uses student tuition and fees to subsidize the profits of local business elites.

- UTRGV must **redeploy the institution's capital expenditures toward building additional faculty office space**, graduate student cubicles, and student classrooms (especially large lecture halls and seminar/meeting rooms).

2.5 ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION & AUTHORITY

When established in Fall 2015, President Guy Bailey promised to move the institution toward a decentralized system of responsibility centered management and budgeting (RCMB). Instead, UTRGV has moved in the opposite direction to create a hyper-centralized and opaque system of management and budgeting over the last 5 years. This hyper-centralization results in endless bottlenecks and logjams that make the university less efficient, more costly, more bureaucratic, and less responsive to opportunities.

- Decision-making, budget and spending approvals, and hiring authority should be **decentralized to the department and college levels**. This is another broken promise and President Guy Baily should not be allowed to walk away from that promise.

3. Senate Organization & Culture

3.1 THE FAILURE TO REPRESENT

There are two competing concepts of representation prevalent within the Faculty Senate and neither of these deficient practices represent the interests of rank-and-file faculty or their departments.

On the one hand, some members of the Senate seem to believe they are repositories of some ancient wisdom inherited from the legacy institutions and, therefore, they purport to be Guardians or Legislators of a higher good called “The General Faculty”⁴ These Senators demand deference to the Senate Executive Committee’s authoritarian deployment of this this ill-defined and meaningless abstraction. There is no such thing as “The General Faculty,” because the faculty is organized as departments, programs, colleges, and disciplines.

Consequently, the Department of Political Science rejects this concept of representation:

- The Political Science Department rejects the assertion that the Faculty Senate is a “legislative body,”⁵ when in fact departments are the only sovereign forms of faculty *self-governance* on a university campus. The Senate does not “legislate” for departments but is instead supposed to represent faculty interests *as defined by faculty* through their departments.
- The Department of Political Science also rejects the idea that a small self-perpetuating oligarchy possesses any special wisdom that would lead us to look to them as Guardians of some higher good inherited from the legacy institutions.

On the other hand, many members of the Faculty Senate seem not to see themselves as representatives of their departments but view holding Senate office as an opportunity to grind personal axes, pursue petty personal agendas, and exercise long-held pet peeves about tangential matters that are irrelevant to the day-to-day working conditions of rank-and-file faculty. The agenda and the decisions of the Faculty Senate should not revolve around individual personalities and their personal grievances.

Finally, however, there is a third attitude prevalent within the Faculty Senate and we believe it is the majority sentiment among Faculty Senators. This is the attitude of *resigned withdrawal*. While no other department has collectively voted to withdraw from the Faculty Senate, as did the Political Science Department, a majority of Faculty Senators routinely fail to show up for meetings, which results in failures to make a quorum. To the Department of Political Science, this resigned

⁴ For example, email from Cynthia Paccacerqua, Faculty Senate President to The General Faculty,” April 12, 2021. C.f. Plato, *The Republic* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co. 1950). The concept of “The General Faculty” and “general faculty interest” is an ideological construct deployed to legitimate the substitution of individual Senators’ personal opinions for the collective judgment of their departments.

⁵ See, for example, <https://www.utrgv.edu/facultysenate/>.

withdrawal from the Senate by a majority of its members indicates that most Senators do not consider attending Senate meetings a worthwhile investment of their time:

- **It is our hope that these members, and their departments, will join with the Department of Political Science to create a new Alternative Senate that is representative of all UTRGV faculty and action-oriented in solving problems brought to the Senate by the faculty.**⁶

In place of the dysfunctional ethos that pervades the current Senate, the Department of Political Science proposes that:

- **Faculty Senators must represent the departments, schools, and programs that elect them** and, therefore, Senators should consult regularly with their departments and colleges for guidance and direction. The Senate’s decision-making process should result in concrete policy positions – not abstract statements of moral principle or declarations of personal grievance– and these policy positions should be the outcome of compromise and negotiation between departmental representatives (bottom-up representation) facilitated by the Senate leadership.
- The Department of Political Science rejects the idea that a faculty can secure shared governance by talking about it – much less by begging the Administration for it; faculty win shared governance by doing it. *Shared governance is an action and not a conversation.*

3.2 THE NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL SENATE

The Faculty Senate has become a ‘spectacle of amateurs’. The Department of Political Science could offer a long list of examples to support our claim, but we will focus on two examples:

The Department of Political Science is tired of seeing two-page ‘reports’, ‘memos’, and moralizing declarations from the Faculty Senate that revolve around the subjective opinions and moral posturing of a few ‘old guard’ faculty members who are still distressed by, and opposed to, the transition to UTRGV:

- A professional representative body should be capable of producing **well-researched background reports** to support its positions. These reports should facilitate the development of a well-informed and professional Senate that understands the issues put to it by faculty and is knowledgeable of current best practices in higher education and emerging trends in higher education across the country and the world.

Meetings of the Faculty Senate regularly devolve into unfocused and disorderly sessions that do not generate any substantive conclusions, concrete decisions, or action outcomes. The meetings are often

⁶ The Department of Political Science proposes that we write a new and more democratic Faculty Senate Constitution and put this Alternative Constitution to a vote of all full-time faculty.

dominated by one or two bloviating Senators, who waste everyone's time with their personal grievances and odd utterances.

Instead, the Department of Political Science proposes that:

- Senate meetings should be conducted in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order*, which limit the length of time an individual can speak, the number of times they can speak, and require that members speak to a formal motion.
- In accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order*, disorderly members should be expelled from the meeting and after repeated offenses permanently banned from the Senate by the Senate President.

3.3 END THE CULTURE OF PROCESS

The Faculty Senate is obsessively focused on 'process' to the exclusion of addressing substantive issues (see Part 2 above) and solving practical problems brought to it by the faculty. It is time to quit talking about 'shared governance' and time to do it. The Department of Political Science could cite numerous examples of this pathology, but we will cite just one: budget transparency.

- It is not necessary to secure budget transparency from the UTRGV Administration to press forward with the faculty's salary and other financial demands. The demand for transparency has become a diversionary substitute for raising the faculty's substantive demands for market rate adjustments, merit pay increases, office space, travel funding, and research funding.
- The demand for transparency is a red herring, because the university's budget documents are online at the UTRGV website and on file with the State of Texas (<https://www.utrgv.edu/en-us/required-links/reports-to-state/index.htm>). If the Senate wants transparency, all that is required is for Senators to do the necessary research and read the posted budget documents and annual financial reports.

3.4 END THE CULTURE OF FEAR

The Department of Political Science agrees that there is a 'culture of fear' at UTRGV. However, we do not believe that the culture of fear originates with the UTRGV Administration but is instead a psychological attribute of the Faculty Senate. Change yourselves, show some courage, and you will abolish the culture of fear.

3.5 END THE LEGACY CULTURE

It has been six years since the founding of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The Department of Political Science does not subscribe to the false idea that UT Brownsville and UT Pan American were the pinnacles of some lost golden age. UT Brownsville and UT Pan American no longer exist except in the memories of a few faculty, so it is time to move forward as a new and

emerging research university. We must change the faculty culture and that change comes from within the faculty and not from the administration.

4 Eight Proposals to Reform the Senate

The Department of Political Science proposes amendments to the existing Senate Constitution, or the writing of an entirely new constitution, to ensure democratic representation, an end to oligarchy, and a Senate leadership that is accountable directly to the faculty and departments:

1. The Senate President should be directly elected by all full-time faculty members at UTRGV, rather than selected by the Senate. There should be competitive elections, which require candidates to campaign for faculty support by offering a transparent platform or agenda, and that allows faculty to hold Presidents accountable to these platforms in subsequent elections.
2. The members of the Senate Executive Committee should consist of college representatives directly elected by all full-time faculty members in that college. There should be competitive elections, which require candidates to campaign for faculty support by offering a transparent platform or agenda, and that allows faculty to hold their Senators accountable to these platforms in subsequent elections.
3. The Senate constitutional provision that limits Senate membership to faculty with more than 3-years prior experience on the faculty of UTRGV should be abolished. Departments frequently hire senior faculty with prior experience at other institutions of higher education with the expectation that they will immediately assume a leadership role. The infusion of their experience into the Senate will help break the inbred parochial culture that prevails in the Senate.
4. All Senators must be elected by a vote of department faculty in contrast to the practice of many departments where chairs appoint Faculty Senators.
5. The terms of Senators should be reduced from 3 to 2 years and no Senator should be allowed to hold office for more than 8 years total over the course of their career at UTRGV. The term limit should be retroactive to all currently sitting Senators, effective June 1, 2015.
6. No person with more than a 20% administrative appointment (e.g., Associate Deans, Faculty Fellows, Chairs, etc.) should be allowed to sit in the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate should represent faculty and not conflicted administrative interests. There are too many members of the Senate who are dependent on the Administration for their titles, stipends, and other privileges and this renders them incapable of evaluating faculty interests apart from their desire to retain their administrative sinecures.
7. The Senate Constitution should explicitly allow Senators to introduce agenda items directly from the floor, in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order*, rather than the current practice which gives the Executive Committee exclusive and oligarchical control of the Senate agenda. All Senate agendas should include a line for "New Business" to ensure that Senators

are given an opportunity to introduce new agenda items directly from the floor (<https://www.utrgv.edu/facultysenate/documents/index.htm>).

8. The Faculty Senate President and Executive Committee should be required to maintain regular communication with rank-and-file faculty members and their departments through college town halls, visits to department meetings at least once per year, timely posting of the minutes of Senate meetings, and 48-hour advance posting of Senate meeting agendas.