

# UHD Faculty Senate

Minutes recorded by: Michael Cavanaugh  
Out of Cycle Zoom Meeting June 12, 2020 12:01 – 1:26 pm  
Online through Zoom

**Senate:** Michael Duncan, Ronald Beebe, Michael Cavanaugh, Franklin Allaire, Maria Benavides, Alexander Bielakowski, Dexter Cahoy, Kristen Capuozzo, Stephanie Coleman, Prakash Deo, Isaac Elking, Krista Gehring, Angela Goins, Susan Henney, Pamela Hurley, Tahereh Jafari, Timothy Klein, Cynthia Lloyd, Steve London, Jeffery Martz, Laura Mitchell, Mitsue Nakamura, Nathan Neale, Andrew Pavelich, Joseph Sample, Johanna Schmertz, Jace Valcore, Pat Williams, Julie Wilson.

**Absent:** Felicia Harris, Hsiao-Ming Wang, Ting Zhang.

**Guests:** Pat Ensor, Library Director; Rachael Hudspeth, Lecturer; Nina Barbieri, Assistant Professor; Rhonda Scherer, Staff Council President/Associate Director for Sports and Fitness; Caroline Smith, Staff Council Secretary/Assistant Director of the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning; Vanessa Rojas, Staff Council Communications Officer/CHSS Advisor.

**Call to order:** The Senate was called to order at 12:01 pm by Senate President Michael Duncan.

## Business

Dr. Duncan explained the reason behind the special meeting, including the FSEC and Staff Council Letter (June 5<sup>th</sup>) along with the administration response (see attached). Dr. Duncan explained that this meeting would have minimal minutes taken, and most of the discussion would occur in executive session.

The Senate went into executive session at 12:02 pm.

Discussion on the university opening over the summer occurred.

A motion to consider language in a resolution was made and seconded.

Discussion on the motion occurred.

A vote on the motion occurred and the resolution passed unanimously with one abstention.

Dr. Duncan indicated that he would invite both President Munoz and Provost Link to the next Senate meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

A motion was made to come out of executive session and the motion was seconded. Senate exited executive session at 1:25.

Dr. Benavides made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Dr. Bielakowski seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 1:26 pm.

**From:** Duncan, Michael <[duncanm@uhd.edu](mailto:duncanm@uhd.edu)>

**Sent:** Friday, June 5, 2020 2:12 PM

**To:** Muñoz, Juan S. <[uhdpresident@uhd.edu](mailto:uhdpresident@uhd.edu)>; Link, Eric <[linke@uhd.edu](mailto:linke@uhd.edu)>; Khoja, Faiza <[KhojaFai@uhd.edu](mailto:KhojaFai@uhd.edu)>; Bradley, David <[BradleyD@uhd.edu](mailto:BradleyD@uhd.edu)>; Montalbano, Ivonne <[Montalbanoi@uhd.edu](mailto:Montalbanoi@uhd.edu)>; Wolfe, Johanna <[wolfej@uhd.edu](mailto:wolfej@uhd.edu)>; Villanueva, Daniel <[villanuevad@uhd.edu](mailto:villanuevad@uhd.edu)>; Johnson, Jerry <[johnsonj@uhd.edu](mailto:johnsonj@uhd.edu)>; Moosally, Michelle <[moosallym@uhd.edu](mailto:moosallym@uhd.edu)>; Shahrokhi, Hossein <[ShahrokhiH@uhd.edu](mailto:ShahrokhiH@uhd.edu)>; Rychlec, Timothy <[rychlect@uhd.edu](mailto:rychlect@uhd.edu)>; Anderson, George <[AndersonG@uhd.edu](mailto:AndersonG@uhd.edu)>

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**Subject:** Concerns about Staff Returning to Campus - Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Staff Council Executive Committee

President Muñoz, Provost Link, and senior administrators:

The UHD Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Staff Council Executive Committee are concerned that the current phased plan for staff returning starting June 15 during the COVID-19 pandemic is lacking a clear rationale and is not adequately informed by sufficient and documented communication and negotiation between staff, managers, and ESO. Rather than fulfilling a mandated quota, only those staff whose work duties necessitate them being physically on campus should be required to return at any early date. All other staff should be given the option to return no later than August 17, one week before the fall semester begins.

Offsite duties should be the default in any plan to resume normal operations given the need to reduce density on campus for maximum safety. The ASA COVID working group has noted that “any return to campus for face-to-face classes must be dependent, *first and foremost*, on the ability to maintain the health and safety of faculty, staff, and students.” While the current UHD blueprint states that a goal for the fall semester is to “maintain a campus that is transactional through both limited on-site and remote methods (including advising, financial aid services, student success initiatives, health and wellness services, student activities, and so forth)” the June 15 return date, which currently requires a mandatory return for many staff, is far in advance of that goal; the UH-Main campus, for example, has started a return on June 8 for faculty and staff, but it is on a voluntary basis:

<https://uh.edu/president/communications/communicae/20200602-covid-19-phase2/>

No shortage of critical work at UHD exists and we are confident staff and faculty are currently fulfilling their work duties offsite. We realize there are some duties that cannot be done online, but we do not understand the rationale of the current plan of phased and forced return in thirds. No current budgetary exigency has been demonstrated to warrant any implicit or explicit risk to employment status for declining to return physically out of safety for themselves and others.

The safety of the entire UHD community – staff, faculty, and students – is paramount during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some compassionate disruption of the ideal academic experience is

preferable to unnecessary exposure to a rapidly spreading virus that has infected at least two million Americans, has no vaccine, and disproportionately kills seniors, those with pre-existing conditions, and minorities. All these groups are well represented in the UHD community, which is a group of united people, not just a physical location.

Respectfully,

UHD Faculty Senate Executive Committee & UHD Staff Council Executive Committee (copied)

Mike Duncan, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English  
President, Faculty Senate, 2019-2020  
University of Houston-Downtown



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10 June 2020

Dear Professor Duncan, the Senate, and the Staff Council:

On behalf of the UHD administration, I would like to extend my thanks for your letter of June 5, 2020. It is a thoughtful expression of a key question that has guided the planning and decisions that have been made to ensure the safety and operational viability of the university: what is the rationale for the gradual return to campus by staff over the summer?

The measured return of staff to campus in June and July, an approach being emulated across Texas higher education, allows units the opportunity to gradually prepare for the reopening of campus and a return of students—however modified that return may be—in August. For some units on campus, there is much to be done to prepare for the successful start of another academic year. The phased return of key staff to campus this summer will enable units to begin those critical preparations essential for student success and operational integrity.

In addition, providing this incremental reintroduction of staff to campus will allow the institution to provide continuity of employment for employees who are no longer eligible for Emergency Leave pay. There are some units on campus where the operational efficiency of a unit is compromised in a telecommuting arrangement—and, in some cases, where the work of the unit is simply impossible to perform from a distance.

Furthermore, it is essential that UHD begin the process of establishing a new and heightened culture of safety on campus that reflects our post-COVID-19 situation. We cannot build such a culture of enhanced COVID-19 precautions quickly: it requires the methodical and thoughtful return to campus by members of the UHD community. As each returning member of the UHD community—faculty, staff, and students—adopts best practices for health and safety, UHD will build that culture and socialize the campus community to these new campus-wide precautions and protocols.

Finally, the gradual return to campus by staff in June and July in a planned manner is an attempt to provide some reason and structure to a moment in time that is not particularly reasoned or structured. Through this methodical, gradual return to campus, the entire UHD community is working to build toward a successful fall semester at a time when circumstances pull in the direction of confusion and uncertainty.

Thank you again for your letter. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any additional questions or concerns. The Office of the Provost—and, indeed, the entire leadership team at UHD—is here to assist whenever it can.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Carl Link', with a stylized flourish.

Eric Carl Link, Provost