

UHD Faculty Council – Minutes (DRAFT)

Date: February 3rd, 2026

Location: A300 - Buffalo Bayou Room

Attendance: See final page for information on attendance at this meeting.

- **General Welcome:**

The meeting was called to order by the presiding officer, Dr. Paul Mandell, at 2:30 pm. Dr. Mandell stated that the annual meeting of the Texas Council of Faculty Senates will be held in San Antonio in February. He also stated that he and Mr. Fedell, who is currently serving a two-year term, will attend the meeting.

- **Approval of Minutes**

The December 2nd minutes were approved with all in favor (23 votes).

- **Policy Updates:**

Dr. Quander reported that from the Faculty Affairs perspective, several policies are progressing through various stages of development and review. The faculty dismissal policy (10.AO.6), previously approved under the former shared governance process, has undergone review by System Legal Counsel, which recommended revisions; pending one final legal review, it will be reissued for an additional open comment period. A new System Administrative Memorandum addressing international collaborations is also forthcoming. This policy requires each institution to establish a review process for formal and informal collaborations with designated “countries of concern,” which will be updated quarterly by the System’s export control officer. Proposed collaborations with such countries will undergo internal review and, when necessary, system-level approval. In addition, a faculty writing group has been convened to revise the Grievance policy, and updates to the Department Chair policy are forthcoming. A new policy on Nepotism is also being developed to address instructional conflicts of interest, particularly concerning immediate family members.

In response to question from a council member, Dr. Quander stated that Mayte Alvarez, Policy Manager and Compliance Coordinator, explained that policy updates are distributed to the campus community as they are received, with a goal of sending notifications on Fridays when possible, to avoid delaying the review process. Each policy undergoing revision is carefully edited and issued in both clean and redline versions. A campus-wide news post is sent to faculty, staff, and student employees, including links to a Smartsheet form for submitting comments during the designated review period. The comment window timeline is clearly communicated in each notice. After the comment period closes typically after about two weeks; stakeholders are given time to review and respond to feedback. Within approximately two to three weeks, a follow-up update is distributed summarizing the policies reviewed, providing access to submitted comments, and sharing stakeholder responses for transparency and continued engagement.

- **Core Curriculum Review Updates**

An update was provided by Provost Bordelon on the status of the core curriculum review, which is currently in Phase One of the process outlined in the President's memorandum. The review began with deans and department chairs conducting an initial evaluation, incorporating faculty input where applicable. General Counsel has also completed a review, and following an upcoming meeting to discuss their feedback, materials will be returned to deans and chairs for further consideration of courses identified for additional review. While some courses may ultimately be removed from the core—particularly those not offered since 2019—others may require clarification or revision before determination. As the review progresses, small working groups may be convened to address specific concerns. A refined course list will be presented to the University Curriculum Council for continued discussion before advancing to the System office for Phase Three and final analysis, with anticipated Board of Regents consideration in May 2026. Concurrently, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is undertaking a statewide review of the core curriculum, including potential changes to component areas and credit hours. Although their final decisions are not expected until later this year, any state-mandated revisions would likely be implemented no earlier than Fall 2027.

- **2025 Faculty Handbook Taskforce/Vote:**

A motion to approve the draft of the 2025 Faculty Handbook was made and duly seconded. The motion carried unanimously, with 23 votes in favor.

- **Faculty Ombuds Search Committee Update:**

The Faculty Ombudsperson Search Committee is currently active and will convene next week to continue its work. To date, three applications have been received and are under review. At the upcoming meeting, the committee will discuss the interview schedule and other key components of the search process.

- **Faculty Compensation Update:**

Dr. Quander reported that at a meeting that took place today, AVP Clerie presented a more comprehensive analysis of compensation data. The next step will be to share the findings and proposed plans with the deans and department chairs for their review and input. Following their evaluation, a presentation will be developed for the broader campus community to outline the proposed direction and next steps. Dr. Quander also noted that AVP Clerie recently met with department chairs to discuss adjunct pay, which is considered as a separate but related initiative.

- **Shared Governance Council Reports**

University Curriculum Council

The UCC reported that the volume of proposals has declined significantly, and they are no longer managing the high number previously under review. Most of the current proposals involve relatively minor revisions, such as updates to course names or adjustments to LOs. Their primary focus now is a comprehensive review of the standard syllabus template to determine whether it can be streamlined while ensuring that all required elements remain in place. This review will be a central agenda item at their meeting this Friday. Additionally, they would encourage units anticipating future curricular changes to begin the submission process as early as possible to avoid the heavy end-of-semester influx of proposals experienced in early December.

Faculty Affairs Council

The Faculty Affairs committee met twice in January and reported several key updates. The faculty awards review process is underway, with more than 40 applications received, and the committee is considering elevating and rebranding the Distinguished Faculty Award into the Distinguished Faculty Endowment Award, potentially accompanied by a separate fall recognition event, expanded privileges, and defined expectations for recipients as institutional ambassadors. In the area of professional development, CTLE is developing a tiered framework incorporating badges, micro-credentials, and certifications to support faculty documentation and evaluation. Regarding lecturer support, a university wide lecturer email list has been finalized, a needs assessment survey is in development, and revisions to the department chair policy are being considered to permit lecturer voting rights prior to Spring elections. The committee is also reviewing the Faculty Development Award program, noting that its \$108,000 annual budget has remained unchanged for five years; concerns about equity, travel reliance, and definitional clarity have led a subcommittee to analyze five years of data and explore alternative distribution models, with a proposed framework expected in March. Finally, work has begun on a comprehensive workload policy emphasizing service equity and transparency, including a proposed annual workload plan template, a sliding distribution across teaching, scholarship, and service, and the creation of a centralized webpage for service opportunities. Additional concerns discussed included parking lot security at the Washington lot and Zoom capacity in Room 606.

Dr. Mandell mentioned that an invitation has been extended to Dr. Dement to speak at the March meeting, focusing specifically on the deliberative dialogue component of ACUE.

Research & Innovation Council

Dr. Quander provided an update stating that the committee has met once since the break, with its primary focus for the spring semester on reviewing the ORCA proposal review program. A subgroup is examining two potential models: one in which the review process is managed at the college level, and another in which the university maintains a centralized process but incorporates greater structure at the department and college levels to ensure more consistent, discipline-based feedback. Once these models are refined, they will be shared broadly for faculty input, and suggestions can be submitted via a Faculty Council representative. Additionally, the ORCA Symposium is scheduled for Tuesday, February 24th, and will feature two key components: the first half will provide an opportunity for cross-departmental collaboration and planning for future projects, while the second half will showcase presentations of completed ORCA-funded work, which may also support future publications. Participation is open to all faculty, whether or not they have received ORCA grants.

Policy Advisory Council

The council met after the break. A significant portion of the work has focused on reviewing policies that require approval or further consideration. The system for policy review is revised to ensure it is efficient, timely, and focused on substantive edits rather than minor grammatical changes. They have established a clear process for prioritizing meaningful contributions and developed a structured schedule for policy review each semester, while remaining flexible to address policies that require expedited attention.

Academic Affairs Council

Since the last meeting on December 5th, Academic Affairs has continued to serve as a central hub for policy and faculty updates. Policy drafts are now accessible through the Doc Track workflow via a SharePoint link on the Faculty Council website, with 49 additional policies pending entry. A new policy dashboard provides streamlined access to current policy statuses, while expedited reviews continue for finance-related or minor editorial policies. The Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) is actively supporting professional development for adjuncts, including ORCA and faculty development grants distributed at the end of last semester. Regarding curricular updates, the AY27 catalog changes portal is now closed, with the AY28 portal opening in spring 2026. Faculty concerns about the ongoing core curriculum review, initiated by the Provost to ensure SB37 compliance, were acknowledged, with assurances that the focus remains on aligning course outcomes and descriptions. Enrollment updates for spring with the expectation that they will get close to target SCHs were mentioned. Additionally, the SACCOC initial off-site report showed minimal non-compliance, with only seven faculty credentials requiring further reviews. The next Academic Affairs meeting is scheduled for this Friday, February 6th.

- **New Business**

- **UHD Security:** Chief Clemente Rodriguez, the newly appointed Chief of Police at the University of Houston–Downtown and an alumna of the university, was introduced to the council and shared his background and priorities. A native Houstonian, Chief Rodriguez brings over 24 years of experience in law enforcement, including service as Chief of Police at Rice University, along with extensive experience in corrections, investigations, and probation. He highlighted his commitment to addressing current challenges, particularly staffing shortages, and emphasized the importance of hiring officers suited to the unique environment of higher education. Chief Rodriguez also discussed strategies to enhance campus safety, including the planned deployment of contract officers to increase visibility in parking lots and garages, leveraging technology such as the Safe Zone app, and developing educational programs to encourage proactive safety practices. She noted ongoing collaboration with local law enforcement, including the Houston Metro Police, to improve safety for students and the campus community, particularly around transit areas. He stated that his prioritizing building strong internal and external relationships and fostering a police department focused on collaboration, service, and creating a safe campus environment.
- **Wellness Events:** Ms. Cassidy Giles a Benefits and Compensation Specialist in HR, shared a range of upcoming wellness opportunities available to both staff and faculty. Key events include on-campus annual physicals through Catapult, the Rose Mammogram mobile bus, and “Tacos and Trainers,” which combines a free fitness class with a meal. Programs such as “Eat the Rainbow” focus on nutrition education, while a Social Security benefits webinar is scheduled for March. The ongoing Get Fit Texas campaign encourages physical activity through weekly tracking, drawings, and a March awards ceremony, with free gym access and fitness classes offered weekdays. Additional offerings include sustainable tote bag workshops during Earth Week and lunchtime mental health yoga sessions. Ms. Giles emphasized that these programs aim to foster a culture of wellness, reduce burnout, and encourage the university community to prioritize self-care, noting that leadership participation helps model healthy behaviors.

- **Other/ Announcements**

- Dr. Arpita Shroff provided an overview of the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program, a free tax preparation service primarily for individuals earning under \$69,000, though it also supports students, non-English speakers, and other eligible participants. Last year, faculty volunteers prepared approximately 400 tax returns, resulting in nearly \$500,000 in refunds, including \$82,000 in earned income credits, with volunteers contributing extensive hours. The program, now more streamlined, offers both in-person and virtual tax preparation, with sessions available five days a week at the MDC building or online via Zoom.
- Dr. Bhati, Associate VP for Institutional Effectiveness, provided an update on UHD's upcoming SACSCOC on-site visit, scheduled for March 2–5. She reported that preparations are progressing very well. Only five additional areas of inquiry remain from the compliance certification and focus reports. In preparation, a mock review will be conducted on February 10 with five reviewers from TAMU Victoria and Clear Lake, simulating sessions across different standards. Ongoing preparation sessions, both in-person and virtual, have been held for faculty, staff, and students to ensure readiness. She emphasized the importance of welcoming the visiting team with enthusiasm and a positive presence throughout the campus.
- In response to a question regarding the transition following President Blanchard's planned departure in May, Provost Bordelon noted that no specific details are available at this time regarding an interim president. The chancellor will appoint an interim leader, after which a national search for a permanent president will be initiated in accordance with SB37 guidelines. Updates will be shared with the campus community as information becomes available, and celebrations honoring Dr. Blanchard's contributions will be organized for campus participation.
- Mr. Hossein Shahrokhi provided updates on recent IT initiatives. The new UHD Gator mobile app was officially rolled out in January, offering features for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and prospective students, including access to assignments, tuition payments, class schedules, deadlines, dining, and parking information. The app has reached approximately 2,000 downloads, and faculty are encouraged to both explore it and promote it to students. Additionally, the IT strategic plan, referred to as the Technology Roadmap, is publicly accessible on the IT website, is regularly updated as a living document, and faculty are encouraged to familiarize themselves with it.

The meeting adjourned at 3:52 pm.

Attendance Information:

Faculty Council Member Name	Present	Absent
Mandell, Paul	X	
Shroff, Arpita	X	
Benavides, Maria	X	
Bowden, Gabriela	X	
Akins, Casey		X
Albrecht, Sarah	X	
Ali, Syed		X
Alvarez, Jose	X	
Dowie, Cheryl	X	
Elking, Issac		
Fedell, Luke	X	
Harris, Judith	X	
Henson, Billy	X	
Hoang, Toni	X	
Hu, Jingxin		X*
Hussein, Abdelnasser	X	
Johnson, Kenya	X	
Moore, Kyle	X	
Nakamura, Mitsue	X	
Pakhrin, Subash	X	
Pepper, Ryan		X
Perez, Daniel	X	
Petts, Ashleigh	X	
Rountree, John		X
Rufino, Katrina		X
Shoemaker, Katherine	X	
Sullivan, Nell	X	
Thomas, Jarvis	X	
Yilmaz, Emre	X	
Zhang, Chris	X	

***Excused absence**

Other Attendees
Deborah Bordelon
Judith Quander
Mayte Alvarez
Hossein Shahrokhi
Kassidy Giles
Clemente Rodriguez
Divya Bhati