

UHD Faculty Council – Minutes

Date: November 4th, 2025

Location: A300 - Buffalo Bayou Room

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

- General Welcome and Introductions:**

The meeting was called to order by the presiding officer, Dr. Paul Mandell at 2:30 pm . This was followed by a welcome message from Dr. Mandell and by introductions from all Faculty Council members present. Dr. Mandell reminded everyone that the agenda is published in the Faculty Council website a week prior to the meeting, as mandated by Texas state law.

- Approval of Minutes**

Two minor corrections were made to the minutes. A motion to approve the revised minutes was put forward by Dr. Sullivan and seconded by Dr. Zhang. The minutes were approved with 22 votes in favor and one abstention.

- Robert's Rules of Order**

Dr. Arpita Shroff provided a brief introduction and overview of Robert's Rules of Order.

- Policy Updates:**

Dr. Judith Quander provided an overview of the Policy Flowchart, outlining the process by which university policies are developed, reviewed, and approved. She noted that Policy PS 03A.12 has completed its first round of public comment and that a revised draft is currently being prepared based on the feedback received. Dr. Quander also discussed updates on policies PS 10.A.05 and PS 10.A.21. The latter is being revised to expand its scope from addressing only lecturers to including both lecturers and clinical faculty. Policy PS10.A.05 aims to establish consistent evaluation criteria for faculty across departments, an initiative that began about three years ago during Faculty Senate discussions on post-tenure review. Those discussions revealed significant inconsistencies in faculty evaluation standards, with similar work being assessed differently across departments. To address this issue, a representative faculty group reviewed existing departmental criteria to identify shared elements and establish baseline expectations, particularly defining what it means to "meet expectations." Early drafts incorporated detailed expectations drawn from departmental policies, and language from the Campus Presence policy was later added to strengthen enforceability. Dr. Quander noted that the policy is currently in a public comment period, though only four comments had been received as of the meeting. She encouraged greater participation, emphasizing that the comments will be shared to reflect collective faculty sentiment. She also called for feedback on Policy PS 10.A.21, particularly regarding the new requirement for departments to create explicit promotion criteria for clinical faculty.

Questions arose about potential conflicts between the foundational criteria for faculty evaluation and PS 10.A.05. Dr. Quander clarified that the goal is not to remove departmental autonomy but to set consistent baseline expectations in teaching and professionalism. Some faculty cautioned that rigid minimum standards could unfairly penalize individuals for factors beyond their control, such as technology issues or administrative delays. Dr. Quander acknowledged these concerns and agreed to revisit the policy language.

- **DocTract:**

Christian Purdy presented on the recent developments in the University of Houston-Downtown's (UHD) policy review and management process, highlighting the institution's ongoing transition from a fragmented, partly paper-based system to a more organized and transparent digital framework. Over the past two and a half years, UHD has introduced new tools to modernize policy management, including the Policy Review Dashboard and DocTract, a centralized document management and workflow platform. These innovations are designed to streamline the drafting, revising, approving, and retiring of university policies while improving transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders.

The Policy Review Dashboard, currently in its final testing phase, will soon be available to all UHD employees, including faculty, staff, and student workers. This tool enables users to view live data from the policy team, providing real-time visibility into ongoing policy reviews. It connects directly to DocTract, giving users without editing licenses access to current information about policies in progress. Complementing these systems, a new Policy and Compliance SharePoint page, scheduled for launch by December 1, will serve as a central hub for policy resources, updates, and training materials. To ensure smooth implementation, Mr. Purdy's team, including new member Mayte Alvarez, has developed comprehensive training materials to assist faculty and staff in navigating the new systems. Mr. Purdy encouraged faculty and staff to remain actively engaged in the policy review process. He emphasized that feedback is welcome at any time through the dedicated email channels (policy@uhd.edu and compliance@uhd.edu).

- **2025 Faculty Handbook Taskforce:**

Dr. Ryan Pepper provided an update on the review of the Faculty Handbook, stating that the review is ongoing, but the taskforce still needs more time to complete it.

- **Faculty Ombuds Search Committee Update:**

Dr. Ashleigh Petts delivered a report on behalf of the committee, summarizing their October 28th meeting. During the session, the committee finalized the job description for the Faculty Ombudsperson position, made necessary revisions, and discussed the selection and hiring process. Dr. Petts emphasized the significance of the Ombudsperson role in supporting faculty well-being and encouraged broad faculty participation once the candidates are announced.

She also reviewed the hiring timeline, noting that the job application will be distributed to all faculty members on November 20th, with applications accepted until January 10th. Between February 9th and 20th, shortlisted candidates will give town hall-style presentations to the university community, allowing faculty to engage with them and submit feedback via Qualtrics surveys. The committee aims to extend a job offer by March, with the selected Ombudsperson officially beginning in summer 2026. To ensure a smooth transition, the new appointee will meet with the outgoing Ombudsperson in the spring prior to starting the role.

Dr. Petts reminded faculty of the Ombudsperson's purpose and responsibilities. The Ombudsperson provides guidance on academic rights, responsibilities, and workplace concerns, while also informally mediating disputes between faculty and administration. To be eligible, candidates must be tenured faculty at the University of Houston–Downtown (UHD) for at least ten years, in good standing, and possess extensive experience in university policy, leadership, and shared governance.

- **Shared Governance Council Reports**

University Curriculum Council

Dr. Billy Henson provided an update on the council's recent work. He noted that the UCC has met twice so far this semester and emphasized upcoming deadlines for curriculum changes. Departments intending to propose updates for inclusion in the 2026–2027 academic catalog must submit their materials to the UCC by December 1st. Dr. Henson also reminded faculty that starting with the winter mini-term, all instructors are required to use **Simple Syllabus** for submitting and managing their course syllabi.

He went on to explain that the council's main focus this semester has been the review of a substantial number of proposals from the College of Business, which is undergoing a major overhaul of its MBA and BBA programs. This comprehensive revision process has generated over 70 separate proposals related to course and program modifications. Although the UCC has also received proposals from other colleges, Dr. Henson noted that the majority of the council's efforts this term have been devoted to evaluating and processing the extensive changes within the business programs.

Faculty Affairs Council

Dr. Katherine Shoemaker stated that council has met twice since the last faculty council meeting and has primarily focused on establishing its priorities for the academic year. The key initiatives include overseeing the Faculty Awards, the Tenure Academy, and the Faculty Development Awards, along with ongoing efforts to develop a workload policy and to enhance support for lecturers, associate professors, and the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE).

For the Faculty Awards, a committee has been formed that includes three members from the Faculty Affairs Council, past award recipients, a representative from the Research and Innovation Council, and department chair–nominated members from departments not yet represented. The Faculty Development Awards are currently underway, with most of last year's reviewers returning to serve again. In the spring, the council plans to revisit and refine the application process, template, and review rubric.

The Tenure Academy is actively running and progressing well. However, initiatives related to lecturer and associate professor support and the workload policy are still in the planning phase and will likely move forward later this semester or in the spring.

Research & Innovation Council

Dr. Katrina Rufino stated that the council has identified four main areas of focus and is forming subgroups to advance work in each. The first focus is on internal grants and the review

process, with efforts centered on improving feedback and evaluation for ORCAs and assessing potential updates to the TRIP program. The second area emphasizes supporting and highlighting researchers, aiming to better showcase research at UHD and provide stronger support for faculty pursuing external funding or developing their research agendas. The third focus, technology and innovation, seeks to strengthen collaboration with community partners and help faculty advance projects that could lead to new technologies. The fourth area, expanding research, looks at ways to integrate scholarship into broader aspects of faculty work and increase campuswide understanding of how research contributes to UHD and the larger academic community. In addition, the council is reviewing IRB, policies and procedures to identify opportunities for streamlining and improvement. A seminar on Goal G: the Impactful Knowledge Criterion will be held on Friday, November 7, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Fondren Commons, inviting campus-wide dialogue on advancing UHD's strategic direction in impactful research and knowledge creation.

Policy Advisory Council

Dr. John Rountree stated that The Policy Advisory Council held its first meeting two weeks ago, during which Provost Bordelon provided an overview of the council's purpose. The council's role is primarily to facilitate expedited policy reviews, particularly for policies requiring only minor updates—such as correcting broken links, updating names or titles, and making other small housekeeping changes. While the council can also provide broader advice and feedback on policy matters, its main function is to ensure that these minor revisions move efficiently through the review process. During the meeting, members received a detailed overview of the DocTrack system from Christian Purdy and asked clarifying questions about the process.

Academic Affairs Council

Dr. Mandell stated that the Academic Affairs Council has not yet met since the last update but is scheduled to meet on Friday morning. The council plans to provide a report or updates at the next meeting.

- Public Comment/Open Forum**

Dr. Travis Crone (Psychology Department) expressed concerns about the current policy review and revision process, particularly in relation to the SharePoint site used for collecting comments. He noted that the comment format makes it difficult to provide meaningful feedback. As a member of the task force that helped develop some of the foundational criteria under discussion, he acknowledged that while many of the criteria make logical sense, the process being used to implement them is deeply troubling.

He argued that departmental criteria should remain under the control of departments and tenure-track faculty, developed collaboratively within the established policy framework. He emphasized that even if the proposed criteria are reasonable, they should still be adopted through proper channels that ensure faculty input and approval.

He also voiced frustration that the faculty voice has been diminished in recent years, citing the new policy system's limited and opaque feedback mechanism. While comment periods exist, there appears to be no clear process for how feedback is used, how much input is necessary to prompt revisions, or how decisions are communicated back to faculty. He called on the council and the wider faculty body to push back against the current approach. He rejected the argument that changes need to be rushed for reasons of compliance, noting there is no immediate regulatory deadline requiring expedited revisions. Instead, he urged the university to take the necessary time to ensure that all policies reflect true shared governance, collaboration, and broad faculty engagement.

Some questions and comments from Faculty Council followed Dr. Crone's talk. A Faculty Council member raised a question about why faculty members have become increasingly silent during discussions and governance processes. As a new member of the faculty council, he expressed curiosity about potential root causes and whether these issues could be addressed. Another Faculty Council member responded with historical context, explaining that the Faculty Council only came into existence after the state legislature mandated faculty senates to be dissolved, which coincided with significant changes in shared governance. She described these changes as a "great silencing". While acknowledging that administrators' intentions may be well-meaning, she emphasized that the lack of faculty involvement creates a perception of being undervalued. Another Faculty Council member pointed out procedural issues, such as feedback mechanisms in policy development, where faculty input is optional rather than required. And finally, a Faculty Council member echoed these sentiments, emphasizing that faculty are the ones who interact daily with students and understand their needs.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 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		
Ali, Syed		X
Alvarez, Jose	X	
Colon Rivera, Edgardo		X
Dowie, Cheryl	X	
Elking, Issac	X	
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	

Other Attendees
Deborah Bordelon
Judith Quander
David Ryden
Mayte Alvarez
Christian Purdy
Travis Crone
Kristin Anderson
