

UHD Faculty Council – Minutes

Date: March 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 who opened by sharing highlights from attending the Texas Council of Faculty Senates meeting. The meeting provided valuable insight into how public universities across Texas are implementing SB37. He noted that the University of Houston–Downtown (UHD) is significantly ahead of many peer institutions. Since beginning its efforts in October of the previous year, UHD has demonstrated strong engagement through consistent monthly meetings and active participation across the shared governance councils.

Several announcements followed. Commencement for the semester is scheduled for Friday, May 8, with two ceremonies planned: one in the morning for CST and MDCOB, and another in the afternoon for CPS and CHSS. The ceremonies will take place at UH at the Fertitta Center. Information was shared regarding the spring nomination cycle for university committee positions, including timelines for nominations, elections, and results, along with guidance on the nomination process. A new council member, Dr. Anthony Foster from the Department of Psychology, was welcome into the Faculty Council.

- **Approval of Minutes**

The February 3rd minutes were approved with all in favor (21 votes).

- **Policy Updates:**

Dr. Quander reported that recent updates from Faculty Affairs indicate progress on several policy initiatives. The Faculty Salary Adjustments Policy, which had been approved last year but not previously published, is now officially available. Additionally, the Faculty Credentialing policy successfully completed the full approval process this year and has also been posted. Work is ongoing in several key areas. The Department Chair Policy is currently under review and revision, particularly due to outdated references to the Faculty Senate identified during discussions related to the Ombuds function. Similarly, a small committee is actively developing a draft for the Faculty Grievance Policy. The Faculty Dismissal Policy, which had advanced through parts of the approval process last year, is being revised in response to substantial feedback from General Counsel. When the updated draft is released for public comment, the revisions will be identified to reflect the legal guidance received. Finally, efforts continue on policies related to international contracts and collaborations involving countries of concern. This remains an ongoing process requiring close coordination with UH.

Provost Bordelon provided an update regarding policy activity outside of Academic Affairs, particularly within Administration and Finance, where several policies have recently undergone expedited review and are now publicly available on the website. Additionally, policies originating from Student Success and Student Life

- **Curriculum Review Updates/Pledge**

Provost Bordelon addressed faculty concerns regarding reports of a pledge circulated by a dean at UH during a curriculum review, clarifying that no such pledge will be required at UHD. Dr. Bordelon reported that the current review of the core curriculum, conducted as part of SB 37, is nearing completion and has involved collaboration among faculty, department chairs, and deans. The process has revealed significant amounts of outdated or inaccurate course information on university websites, some dating back several years. As a result, efforts have been made to update syllabi, assignments, and course descriptions to ensure accuracy and transparency for students and the public.

The review has also prompted an evaluation of course offerings within the core curriculum, identifying several courses that have not been offered in recent years. These courses are being considered for removal from the core, though they may still be taught outside of it. The institution expects to reduce its core from approximately 93 to about 83 courses, with final decisions to be submitted by the end of March and forwarded to the Board of Regents in May. The provost emphasized that the core curriculum may continue to evolve, particularly as guidance from the state coordinating board—potentially including reductions in required credit hours—becomes available later in the year.

Beyond the core, faculty will be asked to review their courses to ensure alignment between learning outcomes, course descriptions, and assignments. This process is not evaluative in nature and does not involve oversight from the provost's office or general counsel but rather serves as a quality assurance measure to confirm that course materials are current and accurately represented. Faculty are encouraged to collaborate with department leadership if questions arise and to seek clarification when needed. Overall, the initiative is intended to improve curricular integrity, maintain compliance, and ensure that academic offerings align with institutional goals and student expectations.

- **Faculty Ombuds Search Committee Update:**

The search committee met twice in February to advance the Ombuds selection process and address related policy gaps. During the February 11 meeting, members identified that the existing Ombuds policy was outdated, as it still referenced the Faculty Senate and its executive committee, rather than reflecting the current shared governance structure. In response, the committee proposed revisions to update terminology and clarify procedural details, and these updates were submitted for approval. Additionally, due to the absence of a clearly defined search process, the committee established an approach for moving forward, which was subsequently endorsed by the Faculty Council Executive Committee, allowing the continued use of the ad hoc search committee.

At the February 20 meeting, the committee finalized next steps in the selection process, including scheduling candidate presentations to the full Faculty Assembly on March 17. During these sessions, each candidate will present their vision of the Ombuds role, followed by a brief question-and-answer period. Candidates will also participate in separate interviews with the provost. Faculty feedback will be collected through a post-presentation survey, ensuring broad input into the selection process. If unable to attend, the presentations will be video recorded and made available online. There are three candidates.

- **Shared Governance Council Reports**

University Curriculum Council

During the February 6 and February 20 meetings of the UCC, several academic program updates and approvals were addressed. The BBA in Entrepreneurship and Family Business received approval from the system Provost Council and is advancing to the Board of Regents for final consideration. Additional program proposals—including the MS in Biological Sciences, BS in Legal Studies, and MS in Workforce Analytics—remain under review. One proposal, the MS in Data Analytics, did not receive approval. At the course level, the USD 1309 First-Year Seminar was approved for inclusion in the 2027 core curriculum.

The committee also received presentations from Institutional Advancement and Accreditation regarding updates to the Texas core and general education compliance processes. Members were briefed on ongoing SACS accreditation preparations and discussed relevant standards to ensure institutional readiness. Efforts are underway to improve the usability of the Simple Syllabus system by streamlining its format. Additionally, programmatic challenges related to “2+2” transfer agreements are being addressed, particularly within Urban Education partnerships. The committee continues its work on program review and the Course-Level Learning Outcomes (CLLO) project, with a focus on refining and aligning outcomes to better integrate with syllabus systems.

Faculty Affairs Council

At its February 13 and 27 meetings, the Faculty Affairs Council addressed several key initiatives related to faculty development, policy refinement, and institutional support. A revised faculty development survey is now ready for campus-wide distribution, emphasizing clearer expectations for the use and impact of faculty development award funds and alignment with college priorities; results will inform future funding guidelines. Updates from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Engagement (CTLE) highlighted strong positive feedback on a proposed tiered structure for faculty development programming, ongoing success of the deliberative dialogue initiative, and the forthcoming AI report focused on literacy, responsible use, and data security. Additionally, a well-attended workshop for associate professors surfaced concerns about burnout, post-tenure review processes, and the need for more coordinated support, with a follow-up session planned.

The council also continued discussions on several policy areas. Work is progressing on a revised workload policy, including flexible workload ratios and service timing considerations, with drafting expected to begin over the summer. Clarification is needed in the annual evaluation policy due to inconsistencies across departments regarding the consideration of prior accomplishments; efforts are underway to gather input from department chairs and develop standardized policy language. The department chair policy has been finalized and is pending release, while the faculty grievance policy is under revision to improve timelines, intake procedures, and overall workflow.

Research & Innovation Council

During the current semester, the council is holding meetings twice a month and recently hosted a research networking event alongside an ORCA presentation. Efforts are underway to refine and improve the structure and implementation of ORCA processes. In addition, faculty have been actively discussing the role of artificial intelligence in research and broader academic activities. The college also announced an upcoming magazine that will highlight and showcase faculty research contributions.

Policy Advisory Council

At the most recent meeting, members participated in a brief session that included updates on several policies currently undergoing expedited review. Attendees were also introduced to a policy tracking system that provides clear visibility into the status of policies, including those under review and upcoming deadlines. The demonstration was well received, highlighting the transparency and efficiency of the tracking process.

Academic Affairs Council

Updates were provided across several areas of academic and administrative activity. Policy Advisory Council (PAC) introduced a new SharePoint policy dashboard designed to improve transparency and tracking; three policies have been approved, including two signed in December 2025, with public comment periods currently underway. Academic Business and Planning (ABP) reported continued efforts to revise the faculty workload policy toward a more holistic model, alongside a shift to college-level management of faculty development award funding, including a proposed \$1,500 travel grant. In academic programming and curriculum, significant progress was noted with approximately 60% of new courses (around 270) now coded into PeopleSoft, and multiple programs advancing through approval stages, including new notices of intent for graduate programs in legal studies and workforce analytics. Updates also highlighted ongoing state-level discussions regarding foundational courses.

Accreditation efforts remain on track, with successful mock and current SACSCOC site visits reflecting strong institutional preparation. Student success initiatives continue to focus on retention and completion, including targeted outreach to students nearing graduation and “super seniors,” as well as enhanced data monitoring of enrollment trends, course retakes, and credit accumulation. Positive gains were reported in persistence and graduation rates among transfer students, alongside continued improvements in transfer credit processes, four-year planning, and 2+2 pathways, with further developments anticipated.

New Business

- **UHD Gator Mobile App:** Ms. Tai Hilaire provided an overview of the new UHD mobile application, “UHD Gators,” developed as a centralized platform to enhance access, engagement, and the overall university experience. The app integrates key systems such as Canvas, PeopleSoft, Navigate, and PASS, allowing users to access essential academic, administrative, and support tools in one place. Developed collaboratively by IT, University Relations, and Enrollment Management—with significant student input, the app is designed to serve multiple user groups, including current students, faculty and staff, prospective students, alumni, and visitors, with role-specific features and customizable interfaces. For students, the app offers functionalities such as class schedules, registration, financial aid summaries, advisor appointments, Canvas integration, campus maps, shuttle tracking, and real-time notifications. Faculty and staff have access to tools such as the Canvas Teacher app, Outlook, advising systems, time and approval functions, directories, and institutional resources. Additional features include a virtual ID, chatbot assistance, news updates, social media integration, and emergency alerts. The app emphasizes personalization, ease of navigation, and consolidated access to university services, and users are encouraged to download it, explore its features, and provide feedback for ongoing improvement.

- **Deliberate Dialogue:** Ms. Megan Scales, Associate Director at the CTLE, shared a professional development opportunity available to all UHD faculty through the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. As part of this initiative, UHD faculty have free access to a five-part, self-paced “Deliberative Dialogue Quick Study” series, with each module designed to take approximately one hour. The program aims to strengthen respectful classroom dialogue, critical thinking, and student engagement with complex or divisive issues across disciplines. Faculty who completes all five modules by March 31st are automatically entered to win one of three sponsored travel awards to attend the Teaching Professor Conference in St. Louis and receive digital badges for each completed module. Access is immediate using UHD email accounts, with support available through CTLE or ACUE contacts for account or login assistance.
- **Outside Activities Notice:** Ms. Mayte Alvarez provided a compliance update on UHD faculty obligations regarding outside activities disclosures under SAM 02A08, which apply to all employees, including full-time and part-time faculty, adjuncts, and staff. The policy is designed to ensure adherence to state law and system requirements while protecting the integrity of academic work and preventing conflicts that could interfere with professional duties. Key areas covered include conflict of interest, conflict of commitment, and dual employment. Detailed guidance, including policy information, disclosure forms, and preapproval requirements, is available on the institutional policies and compliance SharePoint site, now accessible via buttons on the Faculty Council webpage. Once a disclosure form is submitted, faculty receive automated email updates tracking the approval workflow through department chairs, deans, and the office of the provost. Questions can be directed to the compliance office or the designated contact for individualized assistance.
- **Sedexo Magic Question:** The UHD Council received an update on the university’s transition to a new dining services program, a process spanning two years that included consultations, focus groups, town halls, and vendor negotiations. The university has now partnered with SedexoMagic, a collaboration between Sedexo and NBA All-Star Magic Johnson, which focuses on providing high-quality food service in diverse and underserved communities. Mr. Ray Davis, General Manager for SedexoMagic at UHD, presented an overview of current offerings, emphasizing phased rollouts of concepts to ensure consistency and quality. These include Gator Grill (burgers, fries, chicken sandwiches, tenders, and daily specials), Slices (pizza by the slice and wings), Handcrafted (custom wraps and sandwiches), and a new weekly rotating concept, Created with Love, launching in August to provide varied international cuisine. Additionally, Starbucks and vending machines are available across campus. Catering services were highlighted as a major expansion, with a fully online platform enabling event customization, menu requests, quotes, and tracking.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.

Attendance Information:

Faculty Council Member Name	Present	Absent
Mandell, Paul	X	
Shroff, Arpita	X	
Benavides, Maria	X	
Bowden, Gabriela	X	
Albrecht, Sarah	X	
Ali, Syed		X
Alvarez, Jose		X
Dowie, Cheryl	X	
Elking, Issac		X
Fedell, Luke	X	
Foster, Anthony	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
Bob Browand
Ray Davis