

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
Faculty Senate

Faculty Senate Plenary Meeting
Mar 19, 2025- MCOB- 3:00-5:00 p.m.
MINUTES

Present (In-house or on Zoom): Abeynanda, Gayan; Adams, Jamie; Bates, Robin; Baughn, Christina; Black, Michael; Borchert, Glen; Brock, Casey; Brower, Greg; Bunch, Jaclyn; Cole, Tracy; Coronado, Yun; Cutchen, William; Davidson, Clay (Cordell); Davis, Sara; Davis, Tara; Donaldson, Amanda; Dzwonkowski, Brian; Ellzie, Joel; Getch, Yvette; Godang, Romulus; Hauff, Caitlyn; Huang, Jingshuan; Hudson, Geoffrey; McDonald, Tyler; Merritt, Brandy; Migaud, Marie; Miller, Jennifer; Minton, Bonnie; Ní Chadhain,; Sinéad; O'Connor, Tracy; Pancione, Kirsten[Remote]; Pavelescu, Andrei; Rabideau, Brooks; Richardson, Joe; Robertson, Justin; Salvitti Fermin, Mariarita; Santanu Dasgupta; Selwyn; Candice; Shaw, Christy; Shea, Allyson; Stenson, Alexandra; Streeter, Donna; ter Horst, Eleanor; Thomas, Rebecca; Thompson, Christina; Turnipseed, David; Vrana, Laura; Walker, Sean; Wassenaar, Christina; Webb, Bret
Wu, Charles (Kuan-Sheng)

Excused: Holliday, Candice; Holliday, Nicolette; Fleck, Lorie

Unexcused: Ferguson, Susan; Gavrilita, Christina; Huang, Ying; Khan, Zoya; Kilgo, William A.; Lin, Mike; Marass, Ashley; Meola, David; Pfleeger, Jenna; Raczkowski, Christophe; Swofford, Jim [Sabbatical]; Williams, Ashley

Guests: Judge Mike Windom (BoT)

I. Preliminary Business:

The meeting was called to order ~ 3:00 pm with President Christina Wassenaar presiding. Quorum was met.

Approval of Minutes: Approved by General Consent*

Approval of Agenda: Approved by General Consent*

Guest Welcome & Introduction:

Judge Mike Windom from our Board of Trustees introduced himself and emphasized the importance of communication between faculty and the Board, expressing his support for the faculty's efforts and the University's mission.

President's Report:

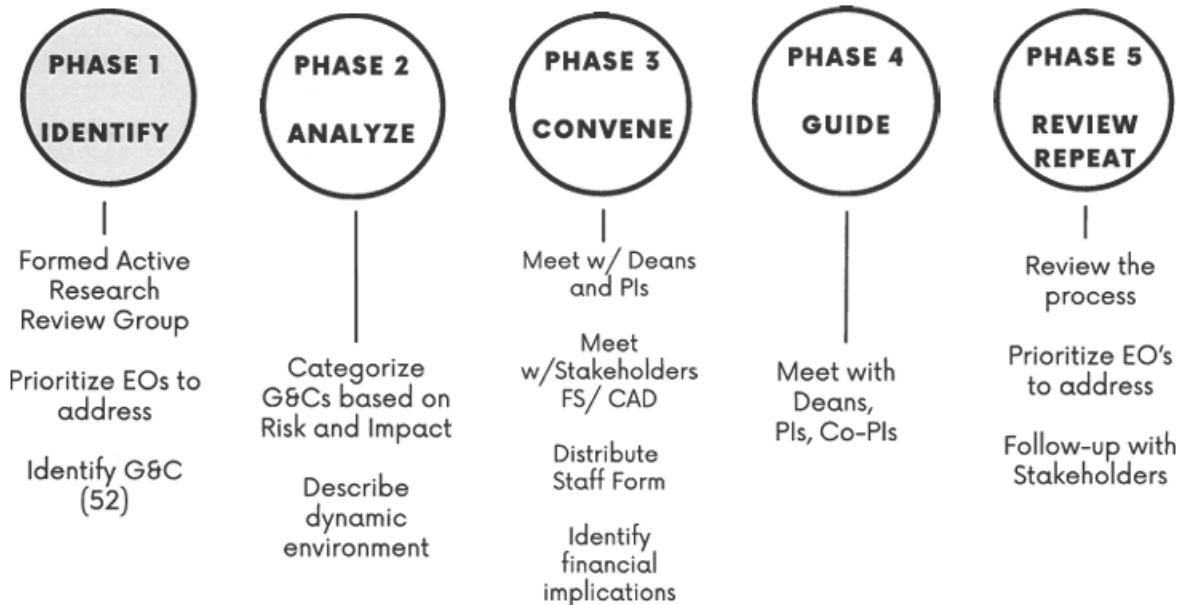
The President's Report was submitted in writing prior to the meeting.

II. Old Business:

Executive Orders and Grants: Bret Webb (VP) updated us on how the Faculty Senate (FS) has been involved in the University's response to Executive Orders impacting grants, DEI initiatives, and international programs. He reminded us of the efforts of the Active Research Review Group (ARRG), a cross-departmental committee designed to identify and aid in managing direct impacts to grantees and PIs across campus. ARRG came up with a 5-phase plan (see below). They are now in Phase 4, during which Michael Chambers' office is reaching out to Deans, Chairs, and faculty PIs, who have grants that are/may be impacted and meeting with them individually. Combined, Bret W. (FS-VP), Christina W. (FS-P) and Marie M. (Chair FS Research & Creative Activities Committee) have been sitting in on all individual meetings between PIs of at-risk grants, their deans and members of ARRG. FS has also been involved in advising administration of faculty concerns related to Tenure & Promotion (T&P) evaluation, research productivity, and Teaching Assistants. Phase 5 involves an action plan to deal with funding gaps or freezes to ensure we are protecting our students, our employees, our staff, our research time-continuity.

ACTIVE RESEARCH REVIEW

Active Research Review Group
Academic Affairs
Office of Research & Economic Development
Finance & Administration
Office of General Counsel
Office of Community Engagement



In answer to questions that followed, Bret informed us that ARR/ the University are not pre-emptively searching for/eliminating language where no mandate exists yet and reminded us that, for now, none of the grant freezes or F&A changes that are being addressed in ARR's effort have gone into effect. For now, as it comes to administering grants and applying for grants, we continue with business as usual. Although Christina did remind us that, the previous week, an appeals court lifted the block on enforcing the executive orders related to DEI. Therefore, while the lawsuit makes its way through the rest of the judicial system, the order can be enforced. In the FS President's Report Christina W included the following link to an article with some info about the ruling: <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/14/nx-s1-5328791/trump-diversity-executive-order-block>

IPAC/ Executive Orders & SB 129 in relation to Strategic Priorities: Next Christina W. told us that the University's Strategic Priorities posted online had still included "diversity", "diverse student body" and other words that potentially do not align with evolving federal guidelines. The Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee (IPAC), (which includes FS members, academic leaders from across campus, representatives from student affairs & financial affairs, community partners and alumni) met in response. In very short order, but upon thoughtful and collaborative discussion, the Committee came up with revisions. The goal of the rewording was to update terminology with phrasing that still holds true to our core values yet aligns with federal guidance & with SB 129. For example, "diversity" was replaced with "welcoming

and supportive environment”; “student access and success” with “student success”; “diverse student body” with “all students”. However, no pre-emptive changes were made to other wording that might or might not need to be addressed based on future rulings or orders (e.g., global or culture). The changes were approved by the Board of Trustees within the week of drafting and are now live on the University’s website.

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/presidentsoffice/strategicplan/>

On the Floor Discussion: Following both presentations regarding Executive orders, faculty members from across colleges and disciplines shared their experiences with recent legislation affecting course content, academic freedom, and grant administration. As a group, the Faculty Senate requested our FS President and VP to ask for clearer, timely communication and support from administration to navigate these challenges. The emphasis was on the importance of academic freedom and the need for guidance on legal obligations that will keep us within the law and able to obtain federal funding but also still able to educate at the highest academic level, as deemed appropriate by experts within each discipline. Specific recommendations were:

- Ask our university to join with other institutions of higher learning to communally fight for the integrity of academia and academic freedom, as it becomes necessary.
- Commitment from Academic Affairs to academic freedom and trust in the experts to know what needs to be taught and how.
- Clear guidance as to what is legally necessary to prevent pre-emptive self-censorship in preparation for the worst-case-scenario from, in effect, inescapably ushering in said worst case scenario.
- A “hotline” for concerned faculty as a universal first point of contact regarding questions related to impacts on grants and teaching.
- Guidance on how to communicate impacts to students who do not have much adult life-experience, let alone familiarity with academic structure, norms and safeguards. While we want to educate, not shield, we want to avoid severely and unhealthily amplifying the angst and frustration with which individual sources might share such information, through proper guidance for best practices in sharing both information and context in a productive fashion.

III. Committee Reports:

- **Sustainability & Environmental Quality Committee:**

David Turnipseed (Chair) reported on continued positive movement towards the creation of more lactation rooms. In addition, the issue of parked cars with the engine running has been brought to the University Sustainability Committee who have agreed to launch an awareness campaign.

- **University Planning & Development Committee:**

Sean Walker (Chair) encouraged voting on FS Awards and RSVP'ing to the end-of-term FS party at the Post on the Hill.

- **University Policies & Handbook Committee:**

Sínead Ní Chadhain (Chair) presented a summary of the Committee's activities and the Council of Academic Dean's (CAD's) response to them for the Senate year.

2024/5 Faculty Senate University Policies and Faculty Handbook Committee End of Year report (March 19, 2025)	
FS bill	Fate/notes
1025 - MPR	Allows sharing of mid-probationary review materials with department and college T&P committees. Denied by CAD
1026 - Leave & Sabbatical policy revisions	Added a new category of professional leave. Added more transparency to the sabbatical application review process. Colleges develop rubrics. Evaluative feedback provides to applicants after BoT vote. Added language that non-sabbatical leave would not restart sabbatical clock. Approved by CAD with revisions
1027 - Ombudsperson policy revision	Adds second ombudsperson, President selects ombudsperson from list provided by FS. Removed any DEI language. FS approved CAD revisions – awaiting final approval in DocRoute
1028 - NTT Promotion Policy revision	Proposes a revision to the NTT promotion policy to ensure all time in rank at USA is counted on promotion clock. Removes policy where NTT faculty promotion criteria were identical to TT criteria. Adds NTT research and clinical tracks in addition to current undefined and instructional NTT professorial tracks. Denied by CAD but still in DocRoute? CAD revising
1029 - NTT Promotion Policy revision	Simple revision that counts all time in rank towards promotion, regardless of title. Approved by FS, awaiting response from CAD (have not presented at CAD)
S1030	Revisions to Faculty Promotion Process (HB section 3.10.3) Submitted to CAD (have not presented at CAD)

- **Remaining Committees:** All other committees stated that they had nothing to report in addition to what was provided on the agenda.

IV. Caucus Leaders Reports:

- **MCOB (David Turnipseed):** A caucus meeting is planned to take place in the next two week following the Plenary.
- **Remaining Caucuses:** all other caucuses stated that they had nothing to report in addition to what was provided on the agenda.

V. University Committees Reports:

- **University Committee on Teaching and Learning (Laura Vrana)** – The report was prepared in writing and distributed prior to the meeting.

- **University Fringe Benefits Committee (Pavelescu)** – The report was prepared in writing and distributed prior to the meeting.
- **University Sustainability Committee:** Preparations to apply for AASHE rating under its Sustainability Tracking, Assessment (STAR) & Rating system is progressing. It looks as though South will come it at the aimed-for silver star, but it may be bronze. Earth Day celebrations will provide a good number of points. Earth Day celebration events are actually going to take up an entire week around Earth Day, which occurs on the 20 second of April.

Action Items: Christina asked that if anybody has additional activities that are taking part in relation to Earth Day that have not yet been brought to the Sustainability Committee's attention to please let her or Steven Scyphers know.

- **University Sustainability Committee:** That Committee was informed that on April 1st, we'll have both a Mass Casualty and an Active Shooter Drill in UCOM starting at 11 am. Also, drilling of piling for the new Medical School Building was scheduled to be concluded by the end of the week.

VI. New Business:

- **Formalized Zoom Option for Off-Campus Senators for all FS business:** Glen Borchert (Caucus Leader for the College of Medicine) advocated for changes to the bylaws to permit Zoom attendance for senators not based on the main campus, emphasizing that current bylaws do not explicitly prohibit this option. Additionally, he proposed hosting two meetings each semester at various locations on the health campus to enhance participation and visibility among faculty from different centers. Language for the proposed changes had been previously shared in writing. During discussions a hybrid approach of hosting two simultaneous face-to-face meetings and joining them through Zoom, as well as allowing senators who cannot attend either location to also join through Zoom was proposed.

Discussion centered on the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various formats with regard to active participation, voting/quorum, ability to include out-of-town faculty, working-relationship building, technical issues (equipment failures, learning curves for each new setting, audio quality for mixed in-person + Zoom meetings, attendance & vote counting, Zoom gatekeeping, engagement gauging, etc.). After this discussion, the issue will be put to a vote at the next meeting.

Adjourned: 4:50 pm

Document prepared by Alexandra C. Stenson (FS secretary) with assistance from AI summary and transcription tools.

*Robert's Rules, **General Consent**: Business can be expedited greatly by avoiding the formality of motions and voting in routine business and on questions of little importance, the chair assuming general (unanimous) consent until someone objects. It does not necessarily mean that every member is in favor of the motion, but that knowing it is useless to oppose it, or even to discuss it, the opposition simply acquiesces in the informality. Thus, in the case of approving the minutes, the chair inquires if there are any corrections, and, if one is suggested, it is made: when no correction [or no further correction] is suggested, the chair says: "There being no corrections [or no further corrections] the minutes stand approved." While routine and minor matters can be rapidly disposed of in this way, if at any time an objection is made with reasonable promptness, the chair ignores what has been done in that case even if he has announced the result, and requires a regular vote. – **information compiled by Candice Selwyn, FS Parliamentarian**