

ACADEMIC SENATE

MINUTES

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

November 20, 2024
UPC/Hybrid Meeting
2:00 - 4:00 pm PST

Present and online (Voting Senate Members): Rima Jubran (president), Lorraine Turcotte (academic vice president), Christine El Haddad (administrative vice president), Margo K. Apostolos (immediate past president), Clifford Neuman (secretary general), John Matsusaka (executive board), Grace Kung (executive board), Sofia Gruskin (executive board), Amy Cannon, Kiki Benzon, Bruno Lemgruber, Steve Hsu, Elizabeth Fife, Mari Kong, Will Coppola, Jennifer Swift, Anastassia Tzoytzoyrakos, Jason Buhle, Bill Leach, Marion Philadelphia, Susie Kim, Susan Enguidanos, Tom Davidson, Liz Blomstedt, Ivan Bermejo-Moreno, Julie Dopheide, Stacey Schepens Niemiec,, Nasrin Esnaashari, Christy Kane, Artineh Samkian, Andrea Hollingshead, Renee Smith-Maddox, Rebecca Brown, Kristi Lewton, Kristian Carlson, Hoda Abdel Magid, Jerry Walker, Mike Andersen, Karen Imagawa.

Present and online (Non-voting Alternates, Ex-officio, Speakers, Guests): President Folt, Provost Guzman, Erik Johnson, Jim Moore, Mayank Kejriwal , Yaniv Bar-Cohen, Margaret Trost, Ketan Savla (alternate), Lee Olvera, Devin Griffiths, Stephanie Shroyer, Paul Adler, Sibyl Wickersheimer, Melissa Miller (Alternate), Michael Bodie (alternate), Naomi Warren, Joseph Nunes, Laurie Brand, Amelia Jones Aneesah Smith, Aniko Imre, Aninda Das, Aro Velvet, Beth Pyatak, Bill Leach, Bob Rasmussen, Bridgid Fennell, Candice D. Mattio, Chantelle Rice Collins, Christina Dunbar-Hester, Clarissa Moreno, Devin Griffiths, Elinor Accampo, Emma Schiewe, François Bar, Gerald Davison, Grace Baranek, Harvey Kaslow, Jennifer Silverman, Jennifer Swift, Jesse Avila, Jessica Gambling, Julie McLaughlin Gray, Karrie Kingsley, Kelsey Vukic, Kendra Walther, Kimia Shahi, Larry Gross, Laura Isabel Serna, Lee Olvera, Lisa Leeman, Lodovico Pizzati, Lynda McGinnis, Margaret Moser, Mary Lawlor, Michele Kipke, Patricia Riley, Priya Jaikumar, Rene Pak, Robert V. Labaree, Ruth Wallach, Sarah Bream, Shaddin Dughmi, Shahla Bahavar, Sharon Carnicke, Shawn Roll, Sherin Guirgui, Steve Bucher, Steven Shapiro, Sue Luftschein, Taylor Dwyer, Tracy Jalaba, Uttam Sinha, Wolf Gruner, Yihyun Lim, Esther Chae, Lalou Ratsimihah (annenbergh Media)

PROCEEDINGS

Call to order: Rima Jubran, Senate President

Academic Senate President Rima Jubran called the meeting to order in DML-121 at 2:00pm.

Discussion with President Folt

Pres. Folt highlighted key points affecting the university and the broader landscape of higher education. She focused on some financial updates that had just been provided to the campus community, detailing the importance of accurate and audited financial statements, which were to be released publicly soon. She emphasized the challenges faced by universities, including structural deficits, changing financial models due to insurance issues, and the impacts of COVID-19.

Among the costs highlighted were the pressures of inflation exceeding tuition growth and significant financial shifts in cybersecurity and insurance. Dr. Folt addressed the uncertainties of potential changes in federal policies, including visa policies affecting students and potential tax changes on university endowments. She also highlighted the financial contributions of international graduate programs and the challenges that may be posed by potential policy shifts. Dr. Folt praised the university's federal and state advocacy efforts, highlighting their active presence and engagement in important policy discussions.

In summary, Pres. Folt made the point that despite uncertainties, the university administration is confident in their strategic plans and prepared to navigate the challenges ahead.

Dr. Folt also used the opportunity to address what her transition could mean for the university. She noted that she still has around seven months left and significant tasks to accomplish. This year's goal is to create an environment that attracts the best possible candidates to be her successor. She noted that any new president will benefit from initiatives like the moonshots including advanced computing, and the progress made with financial aid for students, maintaining competitiveness with peer institutions. The upcoming president will face financial challenges common across universities but she is confident they will inherit a solid foundation with significant potential. The board of trustees is handling the search.

Discussion with Provost Guzman

Provost Guzman emphasized the university's mission to attract top students, recruit and develop the best faculty, conduct world-class research, deliver exceptional medical care, and compete athletically at the highest level. This mission remains the core focus of the university.

Provost Guzman address Financial Challenges: The university is facing a structural deficit, meaning expenses exceed revenues. Key factors include rising costs in insurance, legal fees, and compliance, along with a softening graduate education market and increased competition in online education. Alongside significant salary and financial aid increases, he noted these financial pressures are common across higher education.

Every school and administrative unit has been asked to reduce their budgets. The focus is more on administrative units to protect the core missions within the schools. Various measures are being taken to manage costs more efficiently, including changes in procurement, contracting, and IT infrastructure. Streamlining financial aid practices is also a priority to support commitments to access while being more affordable. Efforts are underway to develop new revenue streams, although the results will take time to materialize.

There has been a conservative approach to hiring, partially to manage compensation costs, which make up two-thirds of the university's budget. There will also be a focus on IT infrastructure, the aim is to consolidate software instances and streamline computer purchases to enhance efficiency.

Provost Guzman expressed confidence in the university's ability to navigate these financial challenges. Despite the hard decisions ahead, he believes the university will emerge stronger and continue to fulfill its mission successfully.

Q&A with Provost Guzman

Several questions were directed at Provost Guzman concerning specific costs:

Questions were raised about annual expenses for services from global consulting firms. Provost Guzman did not address individual line items, but stated that consulting costs cover various categories including audit, legal services, and strategic planning. He noted that some reported figures floating around about consulting costs seem to him to be largely inaccurate.

There was a query about the delay in sending out information regarding the financial state of the University until the day of the senate meeting. Provost Guzman explained the timeline related to the budgeting process. The extent of the current deficit was not fully apparent until April or May

Concerns were raised about what seemed to faculty to be a lack of genuine consultation with faculty regarding changes to the TAB. Decisions such as hiring pauses or operating budget reductions also have significant impacts on people. He noted that the ideal change would be something that saves a lot of money, and nobody notices and nobody cares. We don't have those solutions available, and that creates a challenge to align spending with revenues.

Questions were raised about the cost of the additional perimeter security, and a request for a timeline for when the measures would be phased out. The costs for perimeter security were not provided and no set date was provided for its removal, noting this will depend on circumstances. A senator expressed that faculty feel isolated from the decision-making processes regarding campus security measures and do not understand how these measures increase safety. The Provost acknowledged that there are differing opinions, noting that there are some who appreciate these security measures. The future of these measures is still being assessed, and there's no certainty about the timeline for potential changes. It was asked how the information from card swipes at the perimeter was retained and the provost indicated that he believed the data was to be deleted/expunged at the end of each semester. Some individuals expressed frustration with the lack of transparency and with the answers to certain questions.

Approval of October Meeting Minutes

The Secretary General presented the October Academic Senate meeting minutes. Lorraine Turcotte moved to approve; the motion was seconded by Margo Apostolos. The September minutes were approved (29 in favor, 0 against, 3 abstentions).

Report of Senate Activities and open discussion

Rima Jubran, Senate President, provided an update on the activities of the senate. This included engagement with the Report for the Senate Task Force reviewing recent campus events where there are meetings to discuss process and findings of the task force and drafting of an action plan to address recommendations from the report. There was a presentation at the Deans of Faculty meeting led by the Senate Committee on Compensation and Benefits focusing on transparency for pay and merit increased.

The senate has collaborated with the Provost Office to provide a Tool kit for promotion guidelines and other resources to Senate Faculty Affairs Committee, and this toolkit s available to FC chairs.

Significant efforts were made by the senate, and by individual faculty councils in responding to TAB changes, and in requesting significantly more open communication from the administration about the financial health of the university.

The remainder of the meeting consisted of open discussion among the faculty, primarily around the issue of transparency by the University. A resolution regarding a request for transparency is being drafted and will be distributed to the Senate for a vote at the December Senate meeting.

President Rima Jubran adjourned the meeting at 3:42pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Clifford Neuman

Secretary General of the Academic Senate

(minutes approved by Academic Senate on 12/11/2024 [29 for, 0 against, 3 abstentions])
(portions of these minutes were drafted using Zoom's AI Companion and Microsoft Copilot)