

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA**  
**Faculty Senate**

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

**Present (In-house):** Abeynanda, Gayan; Adams, Jamie; Bates, Robin; Black, Michael; Borchert, Glen; Brock, Casey; Brower, Greg; Bunch, Jaclyn; Cole, Tracy; Davidson, Clay; Davis, Tara; Donaldson, Amanda; Dzwonkowski, Brian; Ellzie, Joel; Getch, Yvette; Hauff, Caitlyn; Meola, David; Migaud, Marie; Minton, Bonnie; Ní Chadhain, Sinéad; O'Connor, Tracy; Pavelescu, Andrei; Pfleeger, Jenna; Rabideau, Brooks; Raczkowski, Christopher; Richardson, Joe; Robertson, Justin; Shaw, Christy; Shea, Allyson; Stenson, Alexandra; Swofford, Jim; ter Horst, Eleanor; Thompson, Christina; Turnipseed, David; Walker, Sean; Wassenaar, Christina; Webb, Bret; Wu, Charles; Selwyn; Candice

**Present (Zoom):** Baughn, Christina; Coronado, Yun; Cutchen, William; Ferguson, Susan; Fleck, Lorie; Godang, Romulus; Hudson, Geoffrey; Marass, Ashley; Pancione, Kirsten; Salvitti Fermin, Mariarita; Streeter, Donna; Vrana, Laura

**Excused:** Davis, Sara; Holliday, Candice; Merritt, Brandy; Miller, Jennifer; Thomas, Rebecca; Lin, Mike; Holliday, Nicolette; McDonald, Tyler;

**Unexcused:** Gavrilita, Christina; Huang, Jingshuan; Huang, Ying; Khan, Zoya; Kilgo, William A.; Williams, Ashley

**Guests:** Nicole Carr, Jim Berscheidt, Raj Chaudhury

**I. Preliminary Business:**

The meeting was called to order with President Christina Wassenaar presiding. Quorum was met.

Approval of Minutes: unanimously approved by all who were present at the time (33 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain)

Approval of Agenda: unanimously approved by all who were present at the time (33 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain)

## **Guest Speakers:**

- **Student Retention:**

Nicole Carr summarized initiatives aimed at enhancing student success and retention at South. Nicole emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to student success, which includes not only academic metrics but also personal growth and career readiness. She mentioned the additional challenges faced by low-income students and how that affects current retention “ceilings”. Students who receive Pell grants or are admitted test-optional post lower retention and graduation rates. As a potential remedy to achievement gaps for low-income and underprepared students, Nicole highlighted the need for comprehensive support systems, such as accessible curricula, student centered pedagogy, and resources like the campus pantry and the Jaguar Clothes Closet.

Overall, South has seen notable improvements in retention as well as success rates in the last two decades. Four-year success rates in 2006 were near 14%; they rose to nearly 40% by 2020. Nicole attributed these gains to learning communities, early -term intervention with struggling students, probation advising, calling up students with lots of credit who aren’t signed up for graduation to help them graduate, removing registration holds tied to outstanding balances, a second-year experience program designed to support students transitioning from their first year, peer leadership programs and various other support initiatives, including need-based aid and graduation grants. Faculty are instrumental in many of these efforts. Our role in this effort was summarized in the term “love”; we were encouraged to work on forming personal connections with our students, wherever possible.

USA One Stop (<https://www.southalabama.edu/onestop/>) a campus resource with the primary focus of connecting students with the financial, academic, and campus resources was confirmed as a good way to connect students to resources such as the food pantry and the clothes closet.

Finally, Nicole let us know that they will be testing out the ability for Navigate 360 to pull mid-term grades directly from our Canvas grade books rather than requiring us to tediously type it in. This may mor may not work.

- **Marketing & Branding:**

Jim Berscheidt presented updates on the University's brand refresh initiative, including the recognition of the new undergraduate Viewbook (<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/admissions/viewbook.html>) and plans for a comprehensive website overhaul in 2025. Changes made were data-driven based on

research about what people thought about South. Based on these data changes were made both visually and in wording. Jim discussed the importance of standardized branding across colleges and the need for effective marketing strategies for online programs. Templates for Departmental Websites and signature blocks were rolling out soon. Faculty was encouraged not to add other marks/emblems to their signature blocks unless required by grants.

Brand templates for faculty to employ can be found here:  
<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/brand/templates.html> .

## **President's Report:**

Christina updates us on her and Bret's recent recruitment trips on the bus with President Bonner and Dr. Kent. FS leadership had recommended the inclusion of faculty on these trip to ensure their long-term sustainability. In the long term, the idea is to include faculty from different colleges.

Christina also mentioned that the Honor's College has encountered more applicants than usual and, as a result, was still looking for volunteers to help with student-interviews at that time.

## **II. Old Business:**

- **Chair Professional Development:**

Raj Chaudhury presented an update of how this initiative is progressing. Appointments to the Committee were made based on FS and ILC recommendations. In addition, the Council of Chairs, the ILC and the Faculty Senate (FS) are working together to generate a list of topics. Based on these, the ILC (Raj) will create a program that will likely combine Canvas modules (e.g., on budgets), workshops, seminars possibly even from invited speakers (e.g., on conflict resolution), peer-mentoring, etc.

On the floor discussion focused on how this training might be linked to subsequent expectations and performance reviews.

- **Faculty-Focused Strategic Priorities:**

FS is synthesizing a document based on best practices at other institutions and input from FS Executive Committee and University IPAC. Christina summarized her previous initial effort involved in compiling data from ~40 Universities into a cohesive document with clear, measurable priorities that are broad enough to apply to all colleges. The initial document identified 2 main priorities and 5 sub-priorities. Since, members of the Executive Committee have added their suggestions. Once the

document has brought to cohesion again, it will be presented to IPAC again and then to the full Senate. The goal is to complete various rounds of revisions and have something through various cycles of input and revision and in front of the Board by June.

### **III. Committee Reports:**

- **Faculty Salary & Benefits Committee:**

Andrei Pavelescu (Chair) mentioned that the University's Fringe Benefit Committee was to meet the following week providing a chance to ask questions.

He also encouraged all Senators to keep funneling information about uncompensated labor in their colleges/departments to him or Laura Vrana as Chairs of two of the committees collaborating on addressing uncompensated labor in teaching and research. Laura added that she, Clay and Andrei have been working on a Google Form survey that will soon be sent to Caucus Leaders and possibly all senators as well.

Questions from the floor centered on old business like the promised renewed survey about compression and inversion and the promised Instructor Survey. Andrei shared that the compression/inversion survey had been completed but the data not shared, initially because of technical issues with the spreadsheet and later because of a missing sense of urgency to identify issues without the funds to resolve them. Andrei and Senate leadership are still working on diplomatic encouragement for these data to be made available. Similarly for the instructor survey; it had been postponed until most recent data for other institutions were made available. Since this has now happened, reminders may be necessary.

- **Sustainability & Environmental Quality Committee:**

David Turnipseed (Chair) reported on continued positive movement towards the creation of more lactation rooms. New initiatives regarding parking lots and more reliable recycling pick-up were also introduced. David requested that senators share if recycling pick-up has also been spotty in their Departments.

- **Teaching, Learning, and Technology Committee:**

Laura Vrana (Chair) provided updates for the AHETEC document on demonstrating teaching effectiveness for Instructor T&P. Tweaks were made to the document based on feedback from the upper administration. Next it was presented to the Council of Deans. From there, it'll head to Institutional Effectiveness. After that, there will be another opportunity for feedback and reflection from FS.

- **University Planning & Development Committee:**

Sean Walker (Chair) encouraged nominations for the FS Awards.

All other committees stated that they had nothing to report in addition to what was provided on the agenda.

#### **IV. Caucus Leaders Reports:**

All caucuses stated that they had nothing to report in addition to what was provided on the agenda.

#### **V. University Committees Reports:**

On floor updates had to be skipped for sake of important new-business items. In writing updates are shared with the Senate electronically.

#### **VI. New Business:**

- **Executive Order/OMB/Active Research Review Group (ARRG)**

Bret Webb provided an update on ARRG, the University's task force in identifying grants that are at risk for funding cuts or freezes because of executive orders. The Active Research Review Group brought together by Charlie Guest. By it, 52 out of the 700 active grants across campus have been identified as "at risk" based on DEI executive order. Next, at-risk grants were categorized by college, risk (high vs. low based on keywords in the executive order) and impact. Meetings were/are being scheduled for each PI, their Chair and Deans. Marie and Bret were present at the first of these meetings because FS had insisted that faculty be involved in the process.

Bret informed us that no funding has been rescinded/frozen yet, no instructions had been given in front of the Dean's to let anyone supported by at-risk grants go. Bret suggested we recommend for anybody who is worried or feels affected to reach out to him, Christina and/or Marie. They will respond by obtaining the facts and connecting faculty with the proper person and/or resources related to their concern(s).

Marie reminded us that, as people reach out to us for answer, to be mindful not to "speak on behalf of the Institution".

- **R2-R1 Presentation Update:**

The caucus leaders and executive committee members were invited to presentation by Dr. Powers and Dr. Pardue providing a high level summary of the plan

that came out of the R2 to R1 Transition Committee prepared for Dr. Kent and President Bonner as an indication of where we currently are and how long a transition to R1 status can be projected to take based on our current trends and trajectories. Some action items were identified by that Committee that might proactively to boost PhD production and research-related PhD areas. In response, College Deans were asked to either identify existing PhD programs that could be augmented or to start new programs. The full plan from that committee has not been shared; we only got a brief overview indicating that, if we just continued on our current trends of increases in PhD production and research spending, we are on track we should naturally surpass the thresholds for R1 classification currently in place by 2034.

Since a lot can happen in that time frame to affect our trends and/or move the thresholds, natural transition by 2034 is in no way guaranteed. The University's goal is to be more proactive and attain transition early, perhaps by 2028 or 2031 (it's a 3-yr evaluation cycle).

The FS Executive Committee is currently in the process of crafting a document that takes into account feedback from this meeting, faculty responses to the survey sent out by FS last year, as well as listening sessions held next month. The goal is to represent the widest scope of faculty concerns, expectations, and also excitement and creative ideas related to a transition to R1. These findings will be summarized and shared as a general report to the administration and academic leadership for the University.

- **R2-R1 Listening sessions:**

Laura Vrana then provided a little more detail about the listening sessions. These are coordinated by several FS committees with the goal of obtaining systematic and comprehensive reflection of areas of concern so that we are able to share with Admin the score and scale of what might otherwise appear to be anecdotal. Dates for these meetings along with Zoom Links were not yet available at the time of the meeting but have been shared since and are summarized here:

- Monday March 17th
  - 10:10-11:10 am (Zoom, <https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/98157951218>)
  - 3:35-4:35 pm (MCOB101 plus Zoom <https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/96759298298>)
- Tuesday March 18<sup>th</sup>
  - 8:00 - 9:00 am (Zoom <https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/93039512991>)
  - 3:30 - 4:00 pm (Zoom <https://southalabama.zoom.us/j/91412575861>)

- **Promotion Procedures, revised policy proposal**

Sinéad Ní Chadhain, Chair of the University Policies & Handbook, presented proposed changes to the promotion procedures that would provide feedback to the candidate after each stage of review. Sinéad also presented data that almost all of our peer institution provided far more feedback than we do. Only U. Nevada LV provided as little or less.

Discussion on the floor focused mainly on balancing transparency with anonymity of reviewer's votes. In the end, the changes were brought to a vote after a minor (syntax-related) friendly amendment with the understanding that minutiae of execution can be worked out after initial feedback from the Council of Deans.

The proposal passed with strong majority (36-yay, 1-nay, 0-abstain).

## **VII Important Dates**

During the meeting, we did not have enough time to address this agenda item. The data have, however, been furnished electronically at a later date.

## **Adjourned:**

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