

SENATE HIGHLIGHTS

UTSA Faculty Senate Newsletter



2023-2024 OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Rene Zenteno: Chair

Alexis Godet: Vice Chair-Chair Elect

Chris Packham: Secretary of the General Faculty

Victor Villarreal: Graduate Council

Valerie Sponsel: ADTS Representative

Mike Baumann: Parliamentarian

Kirsten Gardner: Secretary

Ginny Garcia-Alexander: Academic Freedom, Evaluation & Merit (AFEM)

Mary Dixon: Budget Committee

Sonya Aleman: HOP Committee

George Perry: Research Committee

Andrew Lloyd: Curriculum Committee



Consent Agenda - APPROVED

- Approval of Minutes – November 9, 2023 Faculty Senate Meeting

The Minutes of the Faculty Senate were approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT: René Zenteno

- Dr. Zenteno provided an update from the recent University Leadership Council meeting regarding the 2024 Annual Financial Report and Fiscal Year Budget, as well as upcoming payroll changes. The financial report will be presented to the Faculty Senate Budget Committee, and a synopsis will be provided at the Faculty Senate meeting. Information on the new payroll processes will be communicated via email.
- The concerns raised during the November 9th Faculty Senate meeting were shared with Interim Provost Shipley. Dr. Shipley formed a working group to evaluate the move of Environmental Science (ES) programs from the Department of Integrative Biology (IB) to the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences (EPS) and is awaiting their recommendations.
- Dr. Shipley sent an email to the faculty, staff, and department chairs in the College of Sciences regarding a mid-point evaluation of the Dean. The online survey will be open from December 6th to December 20th. College of Sciences Faculty Senate members are encouraged to provide input and encourage others in the College of Sciences to participate, with responses being anonymous.

FOR FULL FACULTY SENATE MINUTES & REPORT, [CLICK HERE](#)

FOR MORE DETAIL, CONTACT YOUR SENATOR

The purpose of the newsletter is to communicate updates from the Faculty Senate and to encourage faculty participation in the spirit of shared governance and the success of UTSA students, faculty, and staff.

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Chair's Report (continued)

- Dr. Shipley encourages the Faculty Senate to address any concerns about shared governance by contacting her or speaking with Dr. Zenteno.
- While Dr. Shipley was unable to attend the Faculty Senate meeting, she provided a PowerPoint presentation that can be accessed on the Faculty Senate Sharepoint site and the [website](#).
- UTSA must comply with [SB 17](#) by January 1, 2024. The working group has notified those affected of the status of reviewed items, and UTSA will implement a two-step attestation by December 14. Pending inventory items will be addressed. An internal audit is planned for January 2024, which may lead to further actions or changes.
- UTSA leadership is waiting for guidance from the UT System on [SB18](#), but the working committee will continue reviewing language to determine the UTSA summary dismissal policy and establish shared values, including due process for faculty. The committee will meet on December 6th to plan the specific process and policies.

Leadership Update: Research Update

JoAnn Browning, Interim Vice President for Research, Economic Development and Knowledge Enterprise (VPREDKE)

- The Office of Research is undergoing a restructuring, as announced in an email and on [UTSA Today](#).
- The new structure for the Office of Research and the listening and learning sessions held during her time as Interim VPREDKE were discussed.
- Determining the best structure for REDKE shaped the sessions to support UTSA's research mission and provide the best services to the community. Benchmarking was used to define structures and services aligned with the university's strategic destinations.
- Consultants were enlisted to assist with listening sessions in September, where deans, principal investigators, directors, associate deans, and fiscal managers provided input on services and expenditures. Sessions were held at different times and locations to accommodate attendees. Attendees were asked about essential research administration services, investigators' challenges, and what is working well.
- She discussed the primary takeaways from the listening sessions, including the importance of local staffing for pre- and post-awards grant and contract support for the PIs, and the need to build a trust culture and team mindset within the research community at UTSA.
- Commonly cited strengths include the quality and dedication of faculty and staff, collaboration between staff across departments, faculty resilience, and the success of the CyManII capture team.
- Dr. Browning and her team identified silos between pre- and post-award leadership staff and processes, emphasizing the need for a culture of timeliness. The conversations also highlighted potential damage to the university's reputation with funding agencies and the financial costs of employing consultants regularly.
- To improve efficiency and productivity, VPREDKE should consider simplifying systems and implementing new operating policies, such as reducing approval time for revised budgets and purchase reviews. Additional suggestions from Huron consultants can be found in Dr. Browning's presentation.
- Dr. Browning discussed the process of assessing VPREDKE through benchmarking. They reviewed 20 peer models, both within and outside of Texas, including those similar to UTSA and those recently designated R1 or added to the AAU. Common themes and best practices were identified among the models:
 - The inclusion of AVPs for Research Administration, Commercialization, Research Development, and Strategic Initiatives.
 - Other leadership positions in centers, communications, research data, and IT.

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Leadership Update (*continued*)

- She found that peer models in research administration commonly use a Unified Sponsored Programs Office, which may include regulatory compliance. This office typically provides pre-award proposal support and post-award financial management support for Principal Investigators, which may differ from UTSA's current setup. Dr. Browning suggested the following:
 - Implementing a central office responsible for institutional proposal review, approval, submission, and working with funding agencies.
 - Non-financial award management.
- To support research grants, staff would be embedded within colleges closer to where the research is occurring, to develop proposals with PIs and provide financial award support throughout the grant's life cycle.
- The new structure is embedded with the core principles of assertive development of the knowledge enterprise, a nurtured R1 research culture, and service-centered research support.
- Her presentation highlights the characteristics of each theme and how the new structure aligns with UTSA's Strategic Plan. The new model aims to develop thought leaders in faculty research development to inspire the next generation of experts at the undergraduate, graduate and post-doc levels, increase research through partnerships and strategic initiatives, and promote research administration excellence for an innovative and efficient work environment.
- The new proposed structure proposed consists of three interconnected components:
 - Partnership & Strategy.
 - Faculty Research Development.
 - Research Administration.
- She provided a detailed description of each section, including the units and their components.
 - Refer to her presentation on page 17 for more information.
- New positions within the new structure will be posted soon, including:
 - Associate VP Research Partnerships & Strategy (new position and external search; although internal applicants may apply);
 - Associate VP Research Administration (external search; although internal applicants may apply);
 - Assistant VP for Faculty Research Development.
- In the past, there were embedded teams within the Research office, such as the Strategic Research Development team and the Faculty Research Development team. These teams will now be separated to give equal importance and improve research initiatives.
 - The Associate Vice President for Research Partnerships & Strategy will prioritize higher impact initiatives through partnerships and strategy, including collaborations with local, state, and federal entities, corporate and foundation engagements partnering with Advancement, and the integration of the Office of Innovation and Economic Development
 - The VP for Faculty Research Development will focus on proposal development, seed and travel grants, limited submission proposals, and assisting newly promoted faculty. They will also create councils of thought leaders to promote impactful research and community engagement, aiming to build a culture of R1 excellence at UTSA.
- The most significant changes are happening within the Sr. Associate VP for Research Administration area. The following areas, along with their teams, will now report to the Sr. Associate VP for Research Administration:
 - Research Integrity and Infrastructure.
 - Research IT and Business Intelligence.
 - Contracts and Industrial Agreements.
 - Research Finance and Operations.

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Leadership Update (*continued*)

- According to Dr. Browning, benchmarking indicated that filling the Research Integrity & Infrastructure position has been challenging nationally. The position is typically filled by a faculty member with research experience, but it is currently being filled by a consultant. An internal search will be conducted for the position.
- The Sponsored Projects Administration will undergo significant changes, including reporting to the Sr. Associate VP for Research Administration and becoming the Office of Sponsored Projects.
 - Pre- and Post-Awards will be combined to form central administration and concierge teams within the colleges.
 - The central administration will have two teams, each consisting of approximately 10 employees.
 - The concierge teams will consist of approximately 20 individuals.
 - With the new structure, there will be new positions:
 - Senior Director for the Office of Sponsored Projects (internal search)
 - Assistant Director for the Office of Sponsored Projects (internal search)
 - The Training and Financial Compliance Coordinator will be placed under this umbrella.
- The Concierge service teams embedded in the colleges, will report to both the colleges and the Sr. Director for the Office of Sponsored Projects, to provide the following services.
 - Proposal Development
 - Develop and justify budgets.
 - Ensure all required documents are present and completed.
 - Package and submit proposals to the central team.
 - Award Management
 - Provide support for financial award management throughout the life cycle.
 - Conduct financial analysis and reporting for awards.
 - Concierge Teams as part of a larger team
 - Cross-functional teams that receive training from VPR.
 - Report to college units.
 - The goal is to enhance communication to provide necessary services for quality research.
- UTSA has invested in research in the following areas:
 - Research Computing
 - Hazardous Waste Facilities
 - Cores & Lab 6
 - College Concierge Research Staff: to assist with pre- and post-award processes. This investment includes the addition of six new staff positions.
- Dr. Browning reviewed the name of the office, VP Research, Economic Development and Knowledge Enterprise, and found that many people did not fully understand its meaning. After conducting benchmarking, it was decided to change the name to UTSA Office of Research on February 2, 2024.
- Timeline for the new structure (page 27).
 - November 29-30, 2023: Announce new structure.
 - December/January: Search and hire new positions, plan with colleges, implementation teams, and training.
 - February 2, 2024: Implement new structure.
 - Spring 2024: Continued training and implementation.
- The overall vision for research at UTSA, emphasizes the importance of the UTSA Strategic Investment in Research and the Venn diagram mentioned earlier in her presentation.
 - Partnerships and Strategy.
 - Faculty Research Development.
 - Research Administration.



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Leadership Update (*continued*)

- There will be a focus on the following initiatives:
 - 5-year plan to obtain large grants.
 - Developing networks of federal influencers, supporting faculty who are already influencers, and educating young faculty in these areas.
 - Centers and Institutes – helping them make a larger impact in their areas.
 - SOP for innovation.
 - Ecosystem of Secure Research.
 - Mentoring Academies – being involved in the growth process for our researchers.
 - Councils of Thought Leaders.
 - Service Satisfaction Models & Measures.
 - Cycle of Award/Cycle of Service.
 - PI Real-Time Access to Data & Resources.
 - Research Commitments – realigning to look at large commitments and seed grants.

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How will the new research initiatives be supported? Will new proposals incur additional F&A costs?

- *No new F&A costs will be incurred. F&A costs are set by federal agencies. She plans to discuss cost sharing with the Deans in the future, but the immediate priority is to establish the right structure and ensure its proper functionality.*

How many staff members were affected by the restructuring and was there a reduction in the workforce?

- *Due to the realignment of the management structure, six individuals were impacted on November 29, 2023. Seven new leadership positions have been created, including assistant director and senior director roles.*

Within the two-tiered system of Sponsored Projects Administration, what mechanisms have been implemented to ensure effective communication? Additionally, has the potential for redundancy been considered between the central office and the concierge teams?

- *Each group will have teams with pre- and post-awards experience and will receive similar training. The leaders will have regular meetings with the senior director, emphasizing the importance of team meetings despite the dotted line relationship.*

What are the plans for training, particularly after the awards?

- *Dr. Browning plans to work with experienced consultants and leverage training modules from Attain to ensure smooth transition and implementation of research proposals. Temporary assistance will be brought in, if needed, to prevent any proposals from being neglected during this phase.*

Secretary of the General Faculty Chris Packham

- The UT System Board of Regents' met on November 15-16, 2023, where draft model policies regarding [SB 17](#) and [SB 18](#) were presented and discussed, including email communication from members of the UT System Faculty Advisory Council.
- SB 17 – policy – [UTS 197](#) – Compliance with State Law Regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Institutions of Higher Education
- SB 18 – policy – [UTS 198](#) – Termination of a Faculty Member. This policy language will guide the UTSA SB 18 working committee.
- The UT Faculty Advisory Council meeting is scheduled for January 25-26, 2024 in Austin, TX. Dr. Packham anticipates discussions on the policies presented at the November Board of Regents' meeting and their implementation/adjustment on campuses.





Academic Freedom, Evaluation and Merit (AFEM) Committee Ginny Garcia-Alexander, Chair

- Dr. Garcia-Alexander and the AFEM discussed developing an optional statement on academic freedom to include on syllabi. The statement was developed using policies relevant to UTSA. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee reviewed and approved the document. If approved by the Faculty Senate, it can be shared with the entire UTSA faculty for inclusion in their syllabi.



What does the term "reasoned exception" refer to?

- *Students are encouraged to use critical thinking and complete assignments, even if they do not accept everything faculty say as "true". Similar language has been used by other universities, such as UT School of Law.*

Does the University administration agree with wording in the statement?

- *Dr. Zenteno stated that he knows the university agrees with the protection of academic freedom. He also mentioned that the Interim Provost is aware of this statement.*

What is the specific motion being presented to the Faculty Senate?

- *The motion would be for the Faculty Senate to accept the statement as an option for faculty to adopt and include in their syllabi, should they so desire.*

According to Dr. Mary Dixon, the optional statement aligns with the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, which can be found on the [Academic Affairs website](#).

The Faculty Senate voted on the motion, and it was approved.

Budget Committee Mary Dixon, Chair

- The Budget Committee met on November 21st. The first meeting of IRM is scheduled for January 9th, with more information to come following the meeting.
- The Budget Committee will meet with Sheri Hardison on January 10th for the Annual Financial Report and Fiscal Year Budget 2024. The meeting is open to all Faculty Senate members who can attend. Questions should be shared with Dr. Mary Dixon in writing before the meeting.

Research Committee George Perry, Chair

- The Research Committee met with Dr. Browning about the new Research structure and their intention to decentralize certain aspects of their office. They also met with Dean Hendrix to discuss the Open Access fee and will share more information with faculty.
- UT System and other organizations in the state will provide relief to faculty on publication fees. UT System will now cover Sage Publications, a major publisher, and smaller venues will offer smaller discounts.
- Dr. Perry, Dean Hendrix, and Emily Johnson will collaborate to expand the project to ensure that all faculty can participate despite limited grant funding.
- Dr. Packham mentioned that the UT System Faculty Advisory Council is also discussing the subject.



New Business

- The Faculty Senate Executive Committee has been reviewing and editing the Faculty Senate By-laws. Senators are encouraged to review the changes on the document available on the SharePoint site.
- A PowerPoint presentation summarizing the changes has also been provided. The proposed changes will be discussed and potentially voted on at the next Faculty Senate meeting:
 - The position of the Secretary of the General Faculty will be dissolved, and its duties will be transferred to the Secretary position. The Secretary's term will be extended to three years for continuity. The new position will continue to represent the university, serve as a liaison with UTSA administration, and support the Faculty Senate.
 - The term of the Chair will change from two years to four years:
 - 1st year: Vice Chair/Chair Elect
 - 2nd and 3rd year: Chair
 - 4th year: Past Chair
 - The term of the Parliamentarian will change from one year to two terms, while still being a voting member and representative of their academic unit.
 - A change will be implemented to have an ad hoc nominating committee, led by the Secretary, identify and prepare a slate of nominees for the position of chair in the Faculty Senate.
 - Other changes are outlined in the PowerPoint.
 - To amend the By-laws, a two-thirds (2/3) affirmative vote of Faculty Senate members is required, as stated in the By-laws.



Does the FTT representative on the Executive Committee need to serve as the chair of one of the Standing Committees?

- No, it is independent of chairing a committee. The goal is to have an FTT representative on the committee to ensure their voice is heard by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.



Alvarez College of Business

- **Dennis Lopez**, Dept. of Accounting
- **David Beheshti**, Dept. of Economics
- **Zijun Wang**, Dept. of Finance
- **Maho Sonmez**, Fixed-term Tenure Track Representative
- **Glenn Dietrich**, Dept. of Information Systems & Cyber Security
- **Huy Le**, Dept. of Management
- **Victor DeOliveria**, Dept. of Management Science and Statistics
- **Ashwin Malshe**, Dept. of Marketing

College of Education and Human Development

- **Sidury Christiansen**, Dept. of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies
- **Devon Romero**, Dept. of Counseling
- **Curtis Brewer**, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
- **Michael Karcher**, Dept. of Educational Psychology
- **Rica Ramirez**, Dept. of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching
- **Sonya Aleman**, Dept. of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality Studies
- **Zaid Haddad**, Fixed Term Track Representative

Klesse College of Engineering and Integrated Design

- **John Alexander**, School of Architecture and Planning
- **Jeffrey Prevost**, Dept. of Electrical and Computer Engineering
- **August (Gus) Allo**, Fixed-Term Track Representative
- **Alex Mejia**, Department of Biomedical and Chemical Engineering
- **Harry Millwater**, Dept. of Mechanical Engineering
- **Jie Huang**, School of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction Management

College of Liberal and Fine Arts

- **Marcus Hamilton**, Dept. of Anthropology
- **Humberto Saenz**, School of Art
- **Kim Kline**, Dept. of Communication
- **Kimberly Garza**, Dept. of English
- **Mary Dixon**, Fixed-term Tenure Track Representative
- **Kristen Gardner**, Dept. of History
- **S. Andrew Lloyd**, School of Music
- **Xunwu Chen**, Dept. of Philosophy and Classics
- **Neil Debbage**, Dept. of Political Science and Geography
- **Valeria Meiller**, Dept. of Modern Languages
- **Neil Debbage**, Dept. of Political Science and Geography

College of Sciences

- **Kirk Schanze**, Dept. of Chemistry
- **John Quarles**, Dept. of Computer Science
- **Alexis Godet**, Dept. of Earth and Planetary Sciences
- **Hector Aguilar**, Fixed-term Tenure Track Representative
- **Edwin Barea-Rodriguez**, Dept. of Integrative Biology
- **George Perry**, Dept. of Neuroscience, Developmental and Regenerative Biology
- **Dmitry Gokhman**, Dept. of Mathematics
- **Stephen Saville**, Dept. of Molecular, Microbiology and Immunology
- **Cristian Botez**, Dept. of Physics and Astronomy

College for Health, Community and Policy

- **Marie Tillyer**, Dept. of Criminology & Criminal Justice
- **David Weber**, Fixed-term Tenure Track Representative
- **Branco Ponomariov**, Dept. of Public Administration
- **Ginny Garcia-Alexander**, Dept. of Sociology & Demography
- **Jimi Francis**, Dept. of Kinesiology
- **Jelena Todić**, Dept. of Social Work
- **Mike Baumann**, Dept. of Psychology
- **Jusung Lee**, Dept. of Public Health

University College

- **Lauren Riojas-Fitzpatrick**, Fixed-term Tenure Track Representative

Ex-Officio Members

- **Rene Zenteno**, Chair, Faculty Senate
- **Alexis Godet**, Vice Chair
- **Chris Packham**, Secretary of the General Faculty
- **Victor Villarreal**, Chair, Graduate Council
- **Mark Bayer**, Department Chair Council Representative
- **Valerie Sponset**, ADTS Representative
- **Justin Marmolejo**, Staff Senate Representative