

*Minutes  
Faculty Senate Meeting  
March 5, 2025*

*The complete Recording for this meeting can be found at:*

*<https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/fs/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>*

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**Present: Professors:** Jennifer Axe, Stephen Silvia, Thomas Merrill, Alison Chrisler, Benjamin Djain, Nathan Harshman, Laura Beers, Sheila Bedford, Jeff Sosland, Emily Peterson, Kurt Braddock, Douaa Sheet, Alan Levine, Clarissa Ihssen, Benjamin Leff, Tricia Bacon, Jim quirk, John Bracht, Mary Switalski, Shawn Bates, Tracy Spesia, Justin Jacobs, Dario Bernardini, Beverly Peters, Susan George, Jason Snyder, William Brent, Garret Martin, Rachel Borchardt, Acting Provost Vicky Wilkins, Dean of Faculty, Monica Jackson.

**I. Chair's Report – Jenny Axe**

The Faculty Senate Chair, Jenny Axe, called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm and presented the Chair's report:

A. Approval of the February 5 Minutes:

1. The Senate **VOTED** 20-0-0 in favor

B. Working Groups:

1. Senate Transformation for Enhanced Performance (STEP) Working Group:

STEP, which is a working group tasked with reforming the faculty senate, is continuing to meet in two subgroups: function and structure.

C. Senate Vice-Chair Election

The faculty senate will hold the election for vice-chair at the April senate meeting. Anyone who has served on the Senate or a senate committee in the last five years is eligible to run for the position.

Under the rotation system, candidates this year must be continuing or term faculty members.

Candidates can put their names forward at any time up to the April senate meeting itself. If candidates would like a statement to go to the senators before the vote, it would be best to send it to the senate chair in time to go out with the materials for the April meeting, that is, one week before the April Senate Meeting.

**II. Provost's Report – Vicky Wilkins**

A. Budget:

The provost told the senate that academic unit deans had met the deadline for their budget submissions to the academic affairs office. There's no sugar-coating things. It's a difficult budget.

Regarding the voluntary retirement incentive program (VRIP), April 7 is the deadline for those eligible and interested to decide whether they will go ahead with it. The administration has been working hard to honor people's requests. This has been possible in academic affairs; there are a few instances outside of academic affairs where it was not.

B. Enrollment and Revenue:

American University received a record number of applications. This is in part the result of adding early action applications as an option. Preview Day and Eagle Day were highly productive. Eighty-one percent of those who said they would come actually did, which is a strong turnout. All the academic units did well. SIS and SPA had full attendance, which is notable given recent

circumstances at the national level. Deposits are a little slow in coming, but that is true across universities nationwide.

C. Results from the February Board of Trustees Meeting:

1. The Board voted to increase tuition by four percent. The Board approved reorganizing the structure of the fees students pay and increasing them. This is the first increase in ten years. Even after the increase, the fees do not cover the full cost of providing the services, but they will come much closer to doing so. The Board also approved an increase in financial aid that exceeds the tuition and fee increase.
2. The Board decided to maintain the current policy of not arming the American University police department. The process of reaching this decision, which involved a high degree of shared governance, worked well.

D. Trump Administration and Higher Education:

The AU administration is keeping close track of the actions of the new Trump administration. Principal investigators are still receiving letters regarding their research awards. In other instances, federal sponsors have not been responding to inquiries. Vice Provost for Research and Innovation Diana Burley has been working with PIs regarding appropriate responses and changes. American University faculty members have been awarded more federal grant funding in recent years than in the past. We are nonetheless relatively less exposed than some other universities. Our total overhead from federal grants is \$5 million, which is divided 50/50 between central and the academic units. This is not to downplay the distress that our PIs are experiencing, however, or the magnitude of adjustments that the university would need to make if our federal funding is curtailed. Other actions have affected our students and alumni, for example, the cancellation of the Presidential Management Fellowship, and the cutback of opportunities for federal employment. Some other universities have undertaken preemptive compliance, but American University is not going to back away from inclusive excellence. We're not going to review syllabi. We're going to build on what we've done. We remain committed to it.

Questions for the Provost:

A senator asked if the take up of the voluntary retirement incentive plan exceeded what the administration anticipated. The provost responded that this was the case, particularly when it comes to staff, but the administration thought it best to accommodate the requests to the greatest extent possible.

A second senator asked if the administration has created a process and or a group to deal with changes regarding federal grants and other federal policies. The provost replied that there is a subgroup, which includes the provost, the deans and Vice Provost for Research and Innovation. It's akin to the group formed to address the COVID crisis, but it's not as extensive.

Two senators spoke to thank the administration for using shared governance processes to address the budget and the question of whether to arm the American University Police Department. They expressed gratitude to chief financial officer Bronté Burley-Jones for holding town halls on the budget.

In response to a question, the provost said that the administration was working on sorting the information on the university's I-990 tax filing regarding consultants and subcontractors to make it clearer when and how AU was using them.

### **III. Action Item: Revised Preamble Language for the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Regulations – Wendy Boland and Bridget Trogden**

The addition of a preamble to the graduate and undergraduate regulations explains what the academic regulations are and how to change them.

Two senators asked whether action items in academic affairs would regularly go to the graduate and undergraduate curriculum committees. Several senators expressed the view that this would be a good idea. Sending items to the senate committees used to be standard practice, but it became less common during and after the COVID epidemic. Starting with the committees as a rule would involve a tradeoff. Actions could take a little longer to complete but there would be a fuller discussion about them from a larger number of faculty colleagues with a wider range of experiences. This would increase knowledge about changes and improve buy-in. Discussion is also easier at the committee level than at the senate.

The Senate **VOTED** 22-0-0 in favor

#### **IV. Action Item: Social Media Syllabi Language Update regarding the Recording of Classroom Content – Bridget Trogden**

The faculty senate began discussing this question in fall 2024. Current policy language fits a lecture format. The amendment covers seminars. It limits recording to students with a disability and restricts use to personal use of a recording, which means that distributing or posting recordings would be a policy violation. The Amendment also drops language regarding signed letters of accommodation because AU does not use these anymore.

A faculty member observed that doxing is just one use of recordings. Additionally, some lecture-transcription companies are using recordings to train artificial intelligence. Vice Provost Trogden said she would ask the office of information technology about this.

The Senate **VOTED** 22-0-0 in favor

#### **V. Discussion: Faculty Participation in Presidential Search Language – Steve Silvia**

In May 2024, shortly after the completion of the recent presidential search, the Faculty Senate approved a resolution that asked for a constructive dialogue with the Board to clarify and to formalize the role of faculty in future presidential searches. Misunderstandings that arose between the board and the faculty in the recent search and the search preceding it unnecessarily generated significant tensions between the faculty and the board. A written process agreed upon in advance would go a long way toward eliminating tensions regarding the role of faculty in future presidential searches. The language presented to the senate is a proposal for achieving that end. It draws on the procedures that the senate has developed in cooperation with the president and provost during this academic year for senior searches in academic affairs (e.g., academic units elects a pool of potential faculty committee members, the senate executive committee selects the actual committee members from that pool, and the senate ratifies those choices, and the remainder of the pool serves as a faculty advisory committee). The language covers the selection and role of faculty members in presidential searches, which does not limit Board discretion regarding other aspects of a presidential search. Language covering this matter could either be added to the faculty manual or become a board policy. Senate Chair Jenny Axe shared this draft with General Counsel Traevana Byrd. GC Byrd said that she would share it with the Board leadership. Senators expressed support for this language and for pursuing an agreement with the Board of Trustees regarding this matter.

#### **VI. Action Item: Proposal to Create a Faculty Strategic Plan Ad-Hoc Committee – Steve Silvia.**

President Alger has announced that AU has begun working on a new strategic plan. The objective is to complete a plan by the end of 2025. Steve Silvia observed that the most effective strategic plan the university ever had was the one drafted in 2008. This plan included substantial input from the community, which was one reason why it was so successful. The faculty formed an ad hoc strategic plan committee at the time, which drafted a set of recommendations (see the appendix to the

resolution), many of which became a part of the plan. This proposal is to create a similar faculty senate strategic plan committee, which would produce a set of recommendations for this plan. Senators from each academic unit would choose one person to serve on this committee. Two senate officers would also serve on the committee as co-chairs.

The Senate **VOTED** 24-1-0 in favor to create a Faculty Senate strategic plan committee

### **VII. Presentation: University Library on Cuts to Collection – Gwendolyn Reece**

Gwendolyn Reece – who is Director of Research, Teaching, and Learning at the University Library – shared with the faculty senate the University Library’s strategy for adjusting to the budget cuts that the UL has been asked to implement. The library has built up a robust collection over the years and has not undertaken an exercise like this for some time. In recent years, efficiencies have been achieved through cuts to personnel and in other areas rather than cutting the collection itself. Librarians are now assessing the collection. They are endeavoring to make as many savings as possible by eliminating redundancies, particularly when it comes to online sources, and expensive but little-used material that can be accessed elsewhere. The effort includes also examining usage to preserve access to sources that receive heavy use. Librarians welcome any inquiries that faculty members have regarding plans for library resources that they currently use.

### **VIII. Presentation: Use of AI Working Group – Regina Corran & Susan George**

This is a university-wide working group. Given rapid change regarding artificial intelligence and its use, the WG has decided not to try to formulate policy but instead to provide guidance to the university community. The WG is now in an intentional phase of outreach. It is interacting with the community and inviting colleagues to share how they are using AI. The WG anticipates this outreach phase lasting from late March to April. The WG will then use May to refine recommended guidance and deliver recommendations in late June.

### **IX. For the good of the order – Jenny Axe**

There were no items for the good of the order.