USC Faculty Senate Meeting
Meeting Minutes

September 10,2025

Russell House Theater

Liam C. Hein, Chair, presiding.

The meeting was called to order at 14:33 EST by Faculty Senate Chair Liam Hein (College of Nursing). Minutes from May 7th and May 13th, were approved.

President's Report:

President Michael Amiridis discussed the university setting record enrollment, with the largest-ever freshman class of over 7,800 students (60,000 applications), pushing the total student population to over 40,000 for the first time. This reflects the university's growing national reputation, with a significant increase in out-of-state applications—three quarters were out of state. This is in part due to the lower number of graduating high school seniors in South Carolina, compared to the larger states in the country. We admit over 75% of SC applicants.

The university has had a very successful year, setting new records in research funding ($323 million) and fundraising ($260 million), demonstrating strong support and confidence from external partners and stakeholders.

Significant progress has been made on campus infrastructure projects, including the completion of the East Tower of the Science and Technology Building and the ongoing construction of the new medical school facility in the Bull Street District. The project is still on schedule for the move in the Summer of 2028. Work on the wi-fi was done over the summer with increased productivity now in the fall. The university has provided free access to ChatGPT for the entire campus community, recognizing the need to adapt to evolving educational technologies and trends. Because we are one of the first universities to do this, we were given a discounted rate, but that deal was only a one-year contract.

The university has welcomed 147 new faculty members, including 100 new tenure-track positions, reflecting a commitment to expanding the academic workforce despite challenges faced by other institutions.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY:

Abbas Tavakoli, College of Nursing: We cover tuition for Top 10% students in state and households below $80,000, what percentage of students is this?

President Amiridis: I don't have the exact numbers, but I do know there was a 10% increase last year and another 10% increase this year in number of top scholar students (top 10% high school).

Provost's Report:

Provost Mary Anne Fitzpatrick discussed changes to syllabus requirements regarding an AI statement. Instructors must have written descriptions on their syllabi on their AI policies. The university is not mandating a specific statement, just requiring that you have one. In addition, all course materials must now be accessible. CTE developed website to give ideas on redesigning existing materials. Blackboard now gives an accessibility score to assist faculty.

Report from Rhiannon Mayer, Director of E-Learning Services

There are updates to the university's learning management system: including the transition to Blackboard Ultra, accessibility requirements, and the integration of AI-powered tools and features. This was done through a university-wide committee—Learning Management System (LMS) Committee—comprised of representatives from InDev, Faculty Senate IT Committee, Columbia IT staff, and faculty members across 3 campuses and Palmetto College. It was an 18-month process, including meeting with multiple LMS vendors. Ultra was implemented in Fall 2024. There are over 220 LTIs (third-party integration, e.g. Pearson, Zoom, Panopto) in Blackboard today. Blackboard strengths include accessibility tools, SafeAssign, AI tools, 24/7 help desk support, and aligning with USC's strategic goals regarding student experience and engagement.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY:

Liam Hein, College of Nursing: Integration of H5P (if implemented) is not in Blackboard, so how would we accommodate that?

Rhiannon Mayer: It is part of the D2L platform but can be utilized as an LTI in Blackboard.

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: Moodle is being used at Coastal Carolina and is a free tool. Why was it not considered by the committee?

Rhiannon Mayer: There was a campus in USC that was using Moodle, but because the functionality of what Moodle could do overlapped with Blackboard capabilities, we didn't want to break up the experience across campuses that students are having. Moodle was not selected as a top 3 options of LMS considered for implementation at USC beginning fall 2024 because they are less innovative—it came in at number 4.

Abbas Tavakoli, College of Nursing: In terms of security for the top 3 options, how secure were these regarding hacking, etc.?

Rhiannon Mayer: As far as security, the top 3 were all basically the same. However, with more integrations, there are higher security risks that must be addressed. All are cloud-based systems with those protections incorporated.

Faculty Committee Reports:

Curricula and Courses Committee: Michael Dickson presented the committee report. C&C restructured the committee. There is still a chair and now a chair elect. If any unit wants clarification on how C&C operates, reach out to Michael and he can give a short presentation. There are 45 proposals on the docket this time. Slate of proposals were all passed.

Report of the Chair:

Chair Hein began by thanking former Chair, Wayne Outten for his service as Faculty Senate chair. Wayne's tenure as chair left a lasting impact on the Senate and broader academic community. He helped build a stronger foundation for engagement in Senate and the University. Hein presented Outten with a gavel and a plaque for his service. Standing ovation from the Senate. Hein also thanked Senate for their dedication and service, including on the 23 Senate-associated committees.

Our faculty manual gives us legislative powers in all manners pertaining to standards of admission, registration, requirements for and the granting of earned degrees, curriculum, instruction, research, extracurricular activities, discipline of students, educational policy, and standards of the university and all other matters pertaining to the conduct of faculty affairs. It's not just policy; it's a powerful declaration of the trust in our expertise, our judgment, and our commitment. Thank you for all your work.

Two new committees being formed (approved Spring 2025)—Committee on the Carolina Core (CCC) and Faculty Committee on Research (FCR)—have nominees to be voted on. The committees have different terms so not everyone rotates off at the same time.

CCC nominees were approved. FCR nominees were approved.

Good of the Order:

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 15:25 EST.

Submitted by:

Sarah A. Rogers, Faculty Senate Secretary

October 8, 2025