



**Academic Council
Minutes of Meeting**
March 25, 2026

I. Consent Calendar

1. Today's agenda items and their priority
2. February 25, 2026 Academic Council minutes
3. UCR Online Master of Business Administration
4. UCD Online Master of Engineering in Biomedical Engineering for Healthcare Technologies
5. Recommendation from BOARS regarding new minimum score for TOEFL iBT exam
6. April 9 Assembly Meeting Topics

ACTION: Council approved the consent calendar.

II. Senate Officers' Announcements

- **Ahmet Palazoglu, Academic Council Chair**
- **Susannah Scott, Academic Council Vice Chair**
- **Monica Lin, Academic Senate Executive Director**

Health Services Committee: Chair Palazoglu noted that nominations remain open for a Senate representative to the Regents Health Services Committee, with a deadline of April 17.

ICAS Legislative Day: The Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates ([ICAS](#)) held its annual Legislative Day on March 12, during which UC, CSU, and CCC Senate leaders met with state legislators and staff. Discussions focused on student basic needs, STEM pathways, and the Common Course Numbering (CCN) initiative. ICAS raised concerns about proposed legislation that may impede intersegmental progress on CCN, infringe on academic freedom, and erode the segmental differentiation in the California Master Plan by expanding the types of degree offerings at CSU and community colleges.

Special Charge to BOARS: Chair Palazoglu has charged the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools ([BOARS](#)) with reviewing UC undergraduate admissions policies and identifying opportunities to strengthen K–16 intersegmental partnerships to improve student preparation. By June 2026, BOARS will develop a “Policies and Partnerships Roadmap” outlining potential policy directions.

March Regents' Meeting: In his [remarks](#) to the Regents, Chair Palazoglu highlighted challenges associated with declining numbers of teaching assistants and graduate student researchers, and rising labor costs. He noted that these trends may affect UC's research mission and R1 status, and emphasized the shared responsibility of the Regents, president, and Academic Senate to sustain the University's research enterprise.

UCAD Plus: [UCAD Plus](#) workgroups have developed initial recommendations and begun drafting their reports and recommendations. Two additional meetings are planned, including one in person at UC Irvine. Council will be one of the recipients of the final consolidated report, along with the president and chancellors.

III. Executive Session

IV. Faculty Affairs and Academic Programs & Systemwide Academic Personnel

- **Monica Varsanyi, Vice Provost, [Faculty Affairs and Academic Programs](#)**
- **Amy K. Lee, Deputy Provost, [Systemwide Academic Personnel](#)**

Expressive Activities Task Force: Vice Provost Varsanyi reported that the Task Force’s work is progressing well, but the group is extending its timeline beyond the originally planned four meetings due to the complexity of the issues.

Online Education: Discussions about online education are occurring in multiple venues across the University, including [UCAD Plus](#) and the Performance of Undergraduate Degree Programs (PUDP) Task Force. Although the PUDP charge is focused on assessing the quality of undergraduate programs broadly, issues related to online programs are a central component of its work.

UCOP Academic Affairs and UC Online have engaged two consulting firms to conduct a systemwide assessment of views on online education and a market analysis of demand. The firms are administering a survey to deans and department chairs and conducting stakeholder interviews across campuses. The consultants have operated largely independently, although Vice Provost Varsanyi and Senate leadership have provided input on the survey.

Discussion highlights:

- Council members requested consultation with key Senate committees on the survey and emphasized the importance of involving faculty with direct experience in online teaching. Members also raised concerns about academic integrity challenges in online education. Vice Provost Varsanyi acknowledged these concerns and noted that academic integrity issues are being discussed in the PUDP.

V. UC Davis Online Master of Engineering in Water Resources

- **Eleonora Grandi, Vice Chair, Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA)**
- **Neil Gilbert, Member (UC Berkeley), CCGA**

Professor Gilbert, CCGA’s lead reviewer of the program, addressed Council’s concerns about its fully asynchronous design. He noted that external reviewers raised similar concerns regarding academic integrity, student engagement, and AI, which the proposal addressed by highlighting the capstone project as a key mechanism to support academic integrity, with structured milestones, peer review, and a final presentation component. The proposal also described opportunities for student interaction through online engagement and optional in-person activities, though proposers acknowledged limitations in direct faculty and peer interaction.

Discussion highlights

- Council members expressed broad concerns about fully asynchronous programs, particularly the lack of real-time engagement between students and faculty, limited evidence about student outcomes, and the absence of robust data on the effectiveness of such models. They emphasized the need for a systematic evaluation of existing asynchronous programs to inform future online offerings.
- Members also raised concern about the impact of AI on assessment integrity, noting that current approaches are insufficient and that CCGA should address AI considerations more explicitly in future program proposals and review processes.
- Additional concerns included the potential impact of self-supporting programs on state-supported programs and the need for clearer expectations around student engagement.
- CCGA representatives noted that the program will undergo campus-level review three years after implementation, and that both CCGA and divisional graduate councils are developing more explicit review criteria for asynchronous online programs. Council members encouraged

coordination between CCGA and the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) and recommended systematic data collection to assess program quality and outcomes.

ACTION: Council approved the proposal (10 in favor, 0 opposed, 7 abstentions).

ACTION: CCGA will review the existing program reviews for asynchronous online degree programs, discuss data related to program quality and outcomes, and report back to Council.

VI. Consultation with UC Senior Managers

- **Rachael Nava, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, UC Operations**
- **Nathan Brostrom, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, UC Finance**

Financial Outlook: COO Nava and CFO Brostrom noted the growing structural financial challenges facing UC, driven by a widening gap between revenue growth and rising labor and benefit costs. Labor expenses, which comprise roughly 70% of the UC budget, are increasing at rates that exceed growth in tuition and state funding. Increased unionization puts pressure on the budget through negotiated increases in wages/benefits. UC leadership is evaluating the long-term sustainability of the University's current financial and organizational model and engaging the Board of Regents in these discussions.

State, Federal, and Capital Funding: The short-term state budget outlook includes stronger-than-expected revenues and a potential opportunity to access one-time funding for capital projects if the state reaches the Gann limit (which caps annual state spending growth and requires excess revenues to be used for one-time purposes or returned to taxpayers). However, the longer-term picture is uncertain, and includes risks of continued state deficits and federal disruptions related to research funding and changes to Medicaid and healthcare coverage that could increase uncompensated care costs for UC health enterprise.

Labor, Benefits, and Workforce Impacts: UC faces significant cost pressures from collective bargaining agreements, healthcare cost growth, and pension obligations. Recent labor agreements typically include base increases of 4–5% plus step increases, contributing to overall cost escalation. These pressures are already affecting campus decisions regarding doctoral program enrollment and graduate student hiring. UC is pursuing efforts to moderate cost growth, including shifting from healthcare premium caps to subsidy models and examining pension funding strategies.

Administrative Transformation Initiative: UC has launched a systemwide Administrative Transformation Initiative to identify systemwide efficiencies and new revenue opportunities, in coordination with UCAD Plus. Efforts include reassessing budget practices, improving the use of restricted funds, reducing administrative complexity and unnecessary bureaucracy, and promoting more consistent financial management approaches across campuses.

Discussion highlights

- Council members expressed concern that rising labor costs are contributing to reductions in PhD enrollment and shifts toward master's programs. CFO Brostrom agreed that graduate enrollment is likely to contract and noted that this will require adjustments to UC's research and teaching models.
- Members discussed tensions between UC's contraction in doctoral education and legislative efforts to expand degree programs at CSU and the community colleges, with some noting potential implications for the California Master Plan.

- Council members raised concerns about the state’s reliance on capital gains-driven tax revenue and the potential impact of stock market fluctuations on future funding. CFO Brostrom acknowledged that this volatility poses challenges for capital funding.
- Members sought clarification on labor cost growth across bargaining units, impacts on research funding, and rising healthcare costs and disparities across employee groups. COO Nava and CFO Brostrom explained that cost increases are driven by negotiated salary increases, salary step structures, and market-based compensation, and described efforts to shift to subsidy-based healthcare models and reduce disparities in employer contributions. They also acknowledged the challenges faced by faculty and principal investigators and the need for clearer data on costs and impacts.

VII. Executive Session: Nomination of 2026-27 Vice Chair

ACTION: Council selected Professor Amani Nuru-Jeter of UC Berkeley as its candidate for 2026-27 systemwide Senate vice chair. The nomination will be forwarded to the Assembly of the Academic Senate for consideration at the April 9, 2026 meeting.

VIII. Executive Session: Selection of Nominee(s) for 2026 Oliver Johnson Award

ACTION: Council selected Professor Adrienne Lavine of UC Los Angeles and Professor Robert Horwitz of UC San Diego as co-recipients of the 2026 Oliver Johnson Award. The selections will be forwarded to the Assembly for ratification at the April 9, 2026 meeting.

IX. Presidential Policy on Anatomical Donation Program and Anatomical Materials

Council reviewed comments from Senate divisions and committees in response to the systemwide review of the proposed Presidential Policy on Anatomical Donation Program and Anatomical Materials. Reviewers expressed broad support for the revisions, noting improvements in clarity, alignment with existing practices, and strengthened ethical standards. Reviewers also recommended further clarification of scope, definitions, governance and implementation processes, training requirements, and procedures related to unclaimed remains and acquisition and use of anatomical materials.

ACTION: Council agreed to forward the Senate comments and a summary letter to UC Health Associate Vice President McRae.

X. UC Online

- **Rolin Moe, Associate Vice Provost for [UC Online](#)**

Associate Vice Provost Moe presented UC Online’s 2024–25 annual report and described a strategic shift in the unit’s role. He emphasized a move away from primarily funding course development and facilitating cross-campus enrollment in online courses, and instead serving as a systemwide infrastructure and coordination entity focused on technology, data integration, policy, and administrative support.

He noted that online education is already a significant component of UC’s academic enterprise and should be treated as core infrastructure rather than a standalone initiative. The goal of UC Online is to better align systemwide tools and processes such as learning management systems, data systems, and course articulation to support campuses and improve student access and time to degree.

He highlighted several operational challenges, including fragmented technology systems across campuses, inconsistent data reporting, and inefficiencies in course articulation and credit transfer. He also identified financial and structural challenges, including the lack of a clear, agreed-upon model for how tuition revenue and instructional costs are shared across campuses and departments for online courses, uneven course demand (with many low-enrollment offerings), and the need for more sustainable funding models to support ongoing operations and align campus incentives.

He discussed broader strategic questions about UC's role in online education, noting that a systemwide consulting study is underway to assess market demand, institutional capacity, and potential areas for expansion, without presupposing large-scale growth.

Additional topics included regulatory barriers (such as state authorization and reciprocity requirements), efforts to address academic integrity and assessment (including pilots for in-person testing), and opportunities for systemwide cost savings through shared technology procurement. AVP Moe emphasized that these issues and constraints complicate expansion and require coordinated systemwide approaches.

Discussion highlights

- Council members raised concerns about academic integrity in online courses, particularly in cross-campus contexts. AVP Moe acknowledged these challenges and noted ongoing systemwide assessment initiatives and pilots for in-person testing centers.
- Council members questioned the effectiveness and scale of cross-campus enrollment, citing issues with course equivalency, articulation, and low enrollment in many UC Online courses, and raising concerns about overall cost-effectiveness. AVP Moe agreed that improving articulation and ensuring meaningful credit transfer are key priorities, and noted that while development costs are front-loaded, instructional costs increase with enrollment.
- Members emphasized that issues with unresolved funds flow may disincentivize participation and strain departments. AVP Moe indicated that a revised funding model is under development but will be complex.
- Members asked about the potential centralization of course management systems such as Canvas. AVP Moe clarified that any systemwide approach would preserve campus-level control while seeking cost efficiencies through coordinated procurement.

XI. Reports from Senate Division Chairs

Divisional chairs highlighted ongoing budget pressures, faculty workload concerns, and challenges related to graduate student support, research funding, and administrative processes. Multiple divisions also described active work on AI governance, research administration, and Senate engagement in admissions, Extension programs, and faculty welfare.

The Berkeley chair raised concerns about a recently announced settlement between UC Berkeley and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law regarding allegations of antisemitism, noting that it was reached without Senate consultation and may affect Senate authority, including potential external influence on curriculum and programs. Council members discussed the settlement's ambiguity and possible implications for academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty control over curriculum.

Additional topics included concerns about shared governance in specific campus programs (including University Honors at Riverside), faculty interest in greater involvement in admissions processes (including concerns about student preparation in mathematics), and questions about

retirement benefit defaults for new faculty. Chairs also raised concerns about faculty conduct investigative procedures, transparency in administrative decision-making (including research funding and admissions), increasing disability accommodation requests and associated faculty responsibilities, and the need for clearer policies and Senate oversight.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm

Minutes prepared by Michael LaBriola, Assistant Director

Attest: Ahmet Palazoglu, Academic Council Chair