



**Academic Council  
Minutes of Meeting**

April 29, 2026

**I. Consent Calendar**

1. Today's agenda items and their priority
2. March 25, 2026 Academic Council minutes
3. Guidance from BOARS on development of Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs)
4. UCSB Master of Engineering and Technology Leadership (METL)

**ACTION: Council approved the consent calendar with an amendment to the March minutes.**

**II. Senate Officers' Announcements**

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

**ITAP:** The U.S. Department of Justice recently extended the Americans with Disabilities Act Title II compliance deadline for digital accessibility to April 2027. However, UC must still meet an earlier May 11, 2026 deadline due to its obligations to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and compliance with the systemwide UC Information Technology Accessibility Policy ([ITAP](#)).

**Federal Research Funding:** The Trump administration recently dismissed all members of the National Science Foundation board, adding to uncertainty around federal research funding. The National Institutes of Health has received federal appropriations, but funding distribution to PIs has been slow and overall budgets may decline. The proposed 2026-27 federal budget includes significant cuts to NSF, NIH, and the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, the government dropped its appeal of a federal court decision blocking the Department of Energy policy to cap facilities and administrative (F&A) cost rates at 15%.

**State Legislative Affairs:** Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools ([BOARS](#)) Chair Volz is scheduled to testify before a California Assembly budget subcommittee on several initiatives, including the Common Course Numbering initiative. Chair Palazoglu will meet with Assemblymember David Alvarez to discuss legislation related to student access to higher education programs, including elements of the California Master Plan. Although the bills have recently been revised, broader discussions on these issues are expected to continue.

**UCAD Plus:** The UCAD Plus Task Force will hold a joint meeting on May 7 at UC Irvine with leaders of the Administrative Transformation Initiative. A comprehensive draft report is expected to be delivered to the president, chancellors, and the Academic Council in early June and will be circulated for systemwide review in the fall.

**Discussion highlights**

- Council members noted inconsistent communication across campuses regarding digital accessibility compliance deadlines and indicated that additional clarification is needed.

**III. Executive Session**

**IV. Faculty Affairs and Academic Programs & Systemwide Academic Personnel**

- **Monica Varsanyi, Vice Provost, [Faculty Affairs and Academic Programs](#)**

**Online Education:** A systemwide online education study in partnership with Noodle and Huron consulting groups is underway. The effort is gathering data on opportunities and concerns. In parallel, the Performance of Undergraduate Degree Programs (PU DP) Task Force co-chaired by Vice Chair Scott and Vice Provost Varsanyi is addressing online education as part of its charge. Its report and recommendations will be shared with relevant Senate committees prior to systemwide review.

**Expressive Activities Task Force:** The task force examining issues related to academic freedom and free speech has extended its timeline through June 2026 to allow for more comprehensive deliberation. A draft report is expected to be released for systemwide review in September.

**Early Career Faculty Research Excellence Awards:** The inaugural year of this new [program](#) has resulted in 54 awards of \$50,000 each granted to early-career assistant professors across UC. Notifications will be issued shortly, and there are plans for systemwide recognition of recipients. Vice Provost Varsanyi intends to invite Council's input on ways to refine the program in future award cycles.

**President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program (PPFP):** Recent changes to search waiver policies have removed the systemwide PPFP carve-out and shifted decisions to campuses. While PPFP fellows remain eligible for hire through open searches, the use of waivers for these candidates is now governed by campus-level practices.

***Discussion highlights:***

- Council members raised concerns that the online education study rollout included inadequate communication and limited faculty involvement. Some questioned the value of external consultants given prior studies and internal expertise. Vice Provost Varsanyi acknowledged the concerns and committed to conveying Council's feedback and encouraging more faculty consultation.
- Members noted uncertainty and variability across campuses in implementing the PPFP search waiver changes, as well as potential unintended consequences for faculty hiring priorities, including impacts on disciplinary balance and campus needs. Members encouraged additional coordination and dialogue at both the campuses and at the systemwide level.

**V. Proposed Systemwide Senate Committee on Climate Change and Sustainability**

Chair Palazoglu summarized feedback from Senate divisions and committees on the [proposed](#) systemwide Committee on Climate Change and Sustainability. In general, reviewers agreed that climate change is a critical issue and that improved coordination of campus efforts is desirable, but views were mixed on whether a new standing committee is the appropriate mechanism. Reviewers raised concerns about overlap with existing committees and administrative efforts, lack of clarity about the proposed committee's charge, and potential workload and resource implications. Some also noted structural concerns, including the requirement under [Senate Bylaw 325](#) that each division establish a corresponding committee for each systemwide committee formed. Many called for further clarification and consideration of alternative approaches.

***Discussion highlights:***

- Several Council members expressed skepticism about establishing a new standing committee, citing faculty workload, staffing constraints, and limited resources that could divert support

from existing committees. They noted overlap with existing committees and administrative bodies and stressed the need for clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities.

- Members raised several alternatives, including a time-limited special Council committee, a subcommittee of subject-matter experts, a pool of experts to advise existing committees, and regular systemwide meetings to share best practices. Some also recommended leveraging existing structures, such as the systemwide [Global Climate Leadership Council](#).
- Some members noted faculty frustration with slow progress on climate initiatives and the need for more systemwide coordination. They encouraged the identification of constructive next steps rather than simply rejecting the proposal. Other members cautioned against forwarding a proposal to the Assembly without broad divisional support.
- Discussion also highlighted additional questions about how to measure meaningful progress on sustainability, the appropriate role of the Senate, and the financial constraints facing UC.

**ACTION: Council agreed to table the item until its May meeting to allow additional time to synthesize feedback and develop clearer options and recommendations.**

## **VI. Consultation with President Milliken**

### **o James B. Milliken, UC President**

President Milliken invited Council members to discuss public confidence in higher education, referencing as a starting point for discussion the recent Yale University [report](#) on trust in higher education. He emphasized his concern that erosion of public confidence could ultimately affect public support and policymaker decisions regarding universities. He also raised broader questions about the future of higher education, including the implications of artificial intelligence, the evolving expectations placed on research universities, and whether the current framework of the California Master Plan for Higher Education remains relevant in a rapidly changing environment.

#### ***Discussion highlights:***

- Council members noted that some concerns raised in the Yale report differ from UC's context as a large public university with shared governance and broad public access, but agreed that many issues merit further consideration. Several emphasized the need to rethink teaching, assessment, and academic value in response to AI and online education, while also preserving meaningful in-person educational experiences.
- Members discussed the importance of transparency in admissions, strengthening public understanding of the value of university research and teaching, and increasing public engagement and community-centered scholarship.
- Members noted broader societal issues and challenges affecting public trust in higher education, including political polarization, misinformation, technological change, and growing concerns about return on investment. Several members argued that universities must better articulate the distinctive value of research universities in an era of generative AI and expanding online education. Others stressed the importance of developing institutional infrastructure and cross-campus collaborations to support thoughtful adaptation to emerging technologies.
- President Milliken emphasized that innovation and solutions would be led by faculty and campuses across the UC system and supported by UCOP, and expressed optimism after recent discussions with faculty working on AI-related issues. He also discussed ongoing conversations in Sacramento about the California Master Plan and noted growing public and legislative pressure to rethink higher education structures and access in light of changing demographics, workforce expectations, and technological disruption.

**VII. Executive Session: Selection of Nominee for Senate Representative to Regents' Health Services Committee**

**ACTION: Council selected UCLA Professor Michael Ong, MD, PhD, as its nominee for a second term as Senate Representative to the Regents' Health Services Committee, beginning July 1, 2026, and ending June 30, 2028.**

**VIII. UCODE Letter on President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program (PPFP) Search Waivers**  
○ **Kristen Holmquist, Chair, University Committee on Diversity and Equity (UCODE)**

Council reviewed a UCODE letter expressing concerns about recent revisions to systemwide guidelines for search waivers and exemptions affecting the PPFP. The letter argued that removing the dedicated PPFP waiver category and related diversity language from the Target of Excellence (TOE) waiver guidance undermines a longstanding and successful faculty pipeline program and may discourage campuses from considering PPFP fellows for waivers. Chair Holmquist raised concerns about the lack of Senate consultation on changes affecting faculty hiring. She also emphasized that fellows are selected through rigorous and legally compliant processes and the changes could weaken UC's competitive advantage in recruitment.

***Discussion highlights:***

- Council members expressed differing views on the changes. Some agreed that the revised guidance created confusion about whether PPFP fellows remain eligible for waivers. Others noted that some campuses prefer the current approach, which considers fellows under broader TOE provisions rather than a separate waiver category. They cited concerns about equity regarding discipline of faculty, hiring flexibility, and legal risk.
- Several members noted that campuses are implementing TOE waivers differently, resulting in uneven communication and uncertainty among faculty and hiring committees. Members discussed the need for clearer guidance regarding waivers across ranks and how PPFP candidates should be considered in existing hiring processes.
- Members also discussed shared governance concerns, agreeing that faculty hiring is an area of significant Senate interest and that earlier consultation with the Senate would have been preferable.

**ACTION: Chair Palazoglu proposed referring the matter to the University Committee on Academic Personnel to gather information on campus policies and practices regarding TOE waivers, including how campuses interpret eligibility and consider PPFP fellows in that context. The issue will return to Council for further discussion.**

**IX. UCEP Perspective on UC Online**  
○ **Catherine Sugar, Chair, University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP)**

Chair Sugar summarized the history and evolving mission of UC Online (UCO), and UCEP's ongoing concerns about transparency, governance, and academic oversight. She noted that UC Online was originally launched in 2013 as the Innovative Learning Technologies Initiative, and has undergone multiple reviews and reorganizations, including external assessments by Huron Consulting and Deloitte that were highly critical of the program. She noted that under its current leadership, UCO has shifted toward coordinating broad cross-campus educational initiatives and strategic planning efforts, often in areas traditionally under Senate purview.

Chair Sugar described some recent UCO improvements, including the creation of an annual report, a mission statement, and an Institutional Research and Academic Planning enrollment dashboard showing growth in cross-campus enrollments. However, she noted that UCEP continues to face

challenges obtaining meaningful data. She criticized the annual report as overly promotional and lacking sufficient data to evaluate outcomes, student success, funding, or return on investment. She also raised concerns about the structure of the UCO Advisory Council, which appears to lack independence and meaningful Senate input.

She highlighted several UCO initiatives, including the Global Language Network, Equity Lab dual enrollment, and intersegmental online math courses that were advanced with insufficient Senate consultation and planning around articulation, credit, funding flows, or academic impacts. She emphasized that many initiatives have been presented as unqualified successes despite unresolved operational challenges and faculty concerns.

***Discussion highlights:***

- Council members expressed concern about the lack of transparency, data, and Senate involvement in UCO initiatives. Several emphasized problems with UCO course articulation, funding flows, and credit recognition, noting that these issues undermine student participation and burden academic programs.
- Members discussed the need for more rigorous assessment of online education, including completion rates and academic performance, course quality and academic integrity, and the overall return on investment.
- Members proposed a comprehensive audit or review of UCO, conducted with Senate participation and focused on governance, finances, outcomes, and organizational effectiveness. Members also discussed the need to reconsider the structure and role of the Advisory Committee to provide greater independence, accountability, and Senate input.
- Members also noted broader concerns about the future of online education, including how AI is reshaping teaching and learning, the appropriate role of systemwide coordination, and the need to align online initiatives with the UC academic mission and shared governance.
- Chair Palazoglu indicated that the discussion would inform revisions to a draft Council communication to Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs regarding UCO.

**ACTION: Chair Sugar agreed to revise the draft to incorporate Council feedback, including possible recommendations for a formal review of UCO and changes to its advisory committee structure, for discussion at a future Council meeting.**

**X. UCFW Letters on RTAD Processes and RASC Security Issues**

- **Karen Bales, Chair, University Committee on Faculty Welfare ([UCFW](#))**

**1. Return to Active Duty (RTAD) Processes**

Chair Bales noted that recent changes to retiree health and retirement benefits, implemented to comply with federal law, have created complex and confusing RTAD processes that may discourage faculty from returning to service. UCFW recommends centralizing expertise by designating a knowledgeable coordinator at the campus or systemwide level to provide consistent guidance.

**ACTION: Council endorsed the letter and agreed to forward it to Chief Operating Officer Nava.**

**2. Retirement Administration Service Center (RASC) Security Issues**

Chair Bales reported on a recent security breach affecting retirees' pension payments and raised concerns about insufficient communication and oversight. UCFW recommends establishing a confidential advisory group, including retiree and Senate representatives, to review security practices and strengthen protections moving forward.

**ACTION: Council endorsed the letter and agreed to forward it to Chief Operating Officer Nava.**

**XI. UCORP Letter on Research Funding Transparency**

- o **James Weatherall, Chair, University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP)**

Chair Weatherall presented a UCORP letter addressing the growing role of private research funding and the need to protect research integrity through greater transparency. He explained that amid uncertainty in federal research funding, UCORP has been considering how UC can diversify research support while protecting academic integrity and public trust. He noted that UCORP is not recommending new funding restrictions or additional compliance requirements, but rather exploring ways to increase institutional transparency around research support.

He highlighted recent guidance from the International Science Council encouraging shared institutional responsibility for disclosure of research funding, and a recent UCSD Senate resolution calling for public disclosure of externally sponsored research projects and certain gifts. He noted that the UCSD resolution has not been implemented and that its legal, administrative, academic freedom, and faculty welfare implications warrant broader systemwide study. He invited Council’s feedback on whether to pursue a systemwide Senate resolution and/or create a joint Senate-administration task force or policy study group.

**Discussion highlights:**

- Council members expressed support for further study but cautioned against moving too quickly to a systemwide resolution before better understanding the issues. Several expressed support for a task force or policy work group and suggested framing the effort as an informational study rather than an implementation study tied specifically to the UCSD resolution.
- Members noted that while disclosure expectations are well established in science and engineering fields, they vary widely across other disciplines, even where industry funding may raise similar concerns.
- Members emphasized the need to balance transparency with academic freedom, donor confidentiality, and researcher safety, and raised concerns about unintended consequences, including impacts on anonymous philanthropy and politically sensitive research areas.
- Members discussed the need to better understand existing campus conflict of interest policies and administrative practices before developing systemwide recommendations. It was noted that disclosure of research grants and philanthropic gifts may present different challenges.
- Some members favored additional divisional discussion before launching a systemwide effort, while others argued that a systemwide study could help promote consistency across UC.

**ACTION: Chair Weatherall agreed to develop a more detailed proposal outlining a potential charge for a UCORP subcommittee or joint Senate-administration task force.**

**XII. Reports from Senate Division Chairs**

Division chairs raised a range of campus issues, including interest in establishing access to independent faculty-facing legal counsel, the development of Senate-led AI policies, and efforts to clarify faculty rights at university events. Members also discussed continued disciplinary proceedings related to past encampment activities on campuses, challenges in hosting informational events on law enforcement and immigration issues, and budget pressures affecting Senate offices.

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Meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm

Minutes prepared by Michael LaBriola, Assistant Director

Attest: Ahmet Palazoglu, Academic Council Chair