

*Minutes
Faculty Senate Meeting
May 7, 2025*

The complete Recording for this meeting can be found at:

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

Present: Professors: Jennifer Axe, Steve Silvia, Tom Merrill, Alison Chrisler, Benjamin Djain, Nathan Harshman, Laura Beers, Sheila Bedford, Jeff Sosland, Corbin Cambell, Kurt Braddock, Douaa Sheet, Alan Levine, Clarissa Ihssen, Benjamin Leff, Tricia Bacon, Jim quirk, John Bracht, Mary Switalski, Chris Tudge, Tracy Spesia, Justin Jacobs, Dario Bernardini, Beverly Peters, Susan George, Jason Snyder, William Brent, Terry Bryant, 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 Minutes:

1. Faculty senate members **VOTED** 23-0-0 in favor

B. Committees, ad hoc Committees, and Working Groups

1. Faculty Senate Committee Reports

Faculty senate committees have completed their annual written reports. They are available online on the faculty senate website.

2. Faculty Senate ad hoc Strategic Plan Committee

The faculty Senate AD Hoc Strategic Plan Committee has meet twice since the last senate meeting. The committee's discussions have evolved. Members began by trying to identify a handful of actions that should be in the strategic plan and then shifted to developing a handful of questions that the plan should answer. The committee then discussed what American University should aspire to be and reached consensus on a definition from ten years ago: a teaching centered research university. Committee members will work on specifics for that definition and steps the university needs to take to get there. The committee will meet periodically during the summer.

3. Senate Transformation for Enhanced Performance (STEP) Working Group

Senate Transformation for Enhanced Performance Working Group STEP is working on a survey to distribute to the faculty that will ask about their experience with the senate, assessment of the senate's performance, and suggestions for improving the senate's performance.

C. Other Items

1. Dean of Undergraduate Education Bridget Trogden reappointed Martin Oliver as faculty chair of the AU core in a process that included an assessment and vote regarding the reappointment by the faculty senate executive committee, as specified in the faculty senate bylaws. The executive committee voted in favor of Martin Oliver's reappointment.

II. Provost's Report – Vicky Wilkins

A. Enrollment

As of May 4, deposits were at 1608, which was 8.5 percent lower than they were at the same point last year. This has prompted taking several steps:

- Drawing fully on the wait list.
- Extending the deadline for informing AU to May 15.
- Authorizing extra scholarship funding for 1600 undecided students, including 1100 “no need” students.
- Offer fall admission to 289 students whom AU had already accepted for spring 2026 admission.
- Accepting more transfer students; we have 922 applications. We've admitted 154 so far. We will admit more and offer aid.
- We've been contacting all applicants to ask about the admissions process and financial aid to see what we can improve.

There is also melt regarding graduate enrollment.

The academic units have been working hard to convert students. Colleagues have been contacting students and admitted student days have gone well.

There's a big difference between admissions at public and private universities. Admissions has gone up at most public universities and has gone down at most private universities.

The two things we're doing now are continuing to reach out to students and working hard to reduce melt. Anything that anyone can do to provide that extra touch can make a difference.

The deans have been discussing the causes of the enrollment shortfall. The general challenges that higher education is facing are part of the explanation, but they think it's also about what we offer and how we tell our story. Today's students may be less interested in what we offer. We need to improve our reputation when it comes to rigor. We need to make a convincing case for the “value proposition. Given current circumstances, our DC location may have become a liability. We need to come together and tackle these challenges.

B. Budget

University administrators and senior staff are working on the final aspects of implementing the \$85.4 million adjustment to the budget. There is insufficient information about the impact on the budget of a potential shortfall in enrollment for the 2025-26 academic year.

C. Federal Policy regarding Higher Education:

The 22-member strategy group has been assembled.

D. Strategic Plan Creation

The eight strategic plan subcommittees are meeting.

E. Other

It's no longer possible for anyone in the AU community to see any faculty member's Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) reports.

Questions for the Provost:

A senator asked a question about when the announcements will happen about continuing appointments and first-year reappointments.

The dean of faculty Monica Jackson replied that most everyone should have heard by now.

A senator asked which dates were important when it came to the final numbers for the incoming undergraduate class.

Provost Wilkins replied that the new date to inform AU of a decision – May 15 – was the next important date. Last year, there was a lot of melt in late June and early July. We need to keep an eye on that time as well.

A senator asked why we had admitted only 154 out of 922 transfer applicants. Provost Wilkins replied that we do them in tranches in order to get the articulation right regarding incoming credits. A senator asked what will happen to people who are being paid out of grants that have been cancelled after June 30. AU has only covered to committing to pay them up to June 30. Provost Wilkins replied that there is a need to have a conversation about that.

A senator asked about summer enrollment and whether it's true that academic units are required to pay a faculty member \$12,000 per course but receive no support from the university to cover the expense. Provost Wilkins replied that academic units do get some money back but that the recent decision to increase what faculty receive for the first time in 25 years has had unintended consequences because it increased the cost of summer courses for academic units.

A senator asked if the 2021 decision to move undergraduate admissions out of academic affairs has worked. Provost Wilkins replied that undergraduate admissions is separate from academic affairs at most universities, but it feels like there's a gap between academic affairs and admissions because we have only just started working together.

III. Presentation and Question & Answer: American – University President Jonathan Alger

President Alger discussed the unprecedented challenges to higher education. He expressed appreciation for the shared governance work in developing new language for searches and comprehensive reviews of senior administrators in academic affairs, the budget, the civic life initiative, and strategic planning.

He stated that the move to R1 is an opportunity for us to invest in enhancing our infrastructure for research and teaching and increasing the public impact that we're known for. We must work to make clearer the value proposition that we offer as a private university. We also must be more explicit about the advantages of studying in the District of Columbia because it is no longer obvious to many potential students. Given the federal landscape, fundraising and philanthropy have to be a bigger part of our funding, as well as alliances with businesses and other organizations.

Leaders from universities in the Washington consortium are meeting. University presidents throughout the country recognize that it is important to do a better job explaining the benefits universities provide. Working through national associations of colleges and universities will be critical. President Alger said that as Board Chair of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, he has been involved in developing a common position for universities and colleges, including the common letter signed by over 600 university presidents. He said that he recognized that statements alone are not enough. We need to back them with action. There's also recognition that there is likely to be more litigation and lobbying.

Other issues include grant cancellations, a cap on indirect grant expenses as a share of grants at 15 percent, and restrictions placed on international students, researchers and teachers. AU has offered opportunities for federal employees and alumni who have been affected by recent government cuts, including career support and 30 percent off the price of certain certificates.

The president said that we want to create an environment of radical hospitality. That includes everyone recognizing that they have both rights and responsibilities. The campus climate has become more challenging, which has led us to enforce our policies in all instances which the university hadn't been doing before. The transition to enforcement without exceptions has led to some difficult instances.

When it comes to the strategic plan, we're looking for strategic ideas that would differentiate us from other universities. This includes identifying big bets, and ways to build on our strengths. Key themes in the plan include civic life/civic education, transdisciplinary research, enhancing the research environment, improving professional development, enhancing the scholar-teacher model, and improving mentoring and advising. Those working on the plan need to include measurable goals and outcomes. A plan will only be successful if we all see ourselves in it. These are challenging times. We're all in this together.

Faculty Senate Chair thanked President Alger for coming to the Senate. President Alger left the meeting.

IV. Motion to Revise the Agenda to add a Resolution calling for a Two-Percent Salary Increase for Faculty – John Bracht

Senator John Bracht asked to amend the agenda to add a resolution calling for a two-percent salary increase for faculty instead of the salary freeze currently in the budget. The Senate **VOTED** 13-10-1 not in favor of amending the agenda. The resolution did not pass because a change to the agenda at a senate meeting requires a 2/3 majority.

V. Action Item: Creation of University Regulations – Steve Silvia

The creation of university regulations and the items they contain – that is, language returning full shared governance to the formation and function of search committees and comprehensive reviews for senior administrators in academic affairs – is the culmination of the work that began with a recommendation in fall 2023 of the Working Group on Faculty Engagement that the Working Group on Shared Governance picked up in spring 2024 and starting in fall 2024 the Senate pursued to completion today. As is the case with most constructive negotiations, the faculty did not get everything it proposed. For example, there is no language about the search process and comprehensive reviews for senior staff outside of academic affairs, but the faculty did get the essentials. The process itself showed a renewed commitment to shared governance by the administration that has helped the university come together.

The home for this language has changed. For many months, everyone involved envisioned adding it to the faculty manual. The senate has changed this at the advice of General Counsel Traevena Byrd because the university considers senior administrators when they are acting in their capacity as senior administrators not as faculty but as senior staff. We have instead created a new category that has the name university regulations as the home for this language. The format more creating and amending university regulations will be the same as for the regulations that we already have, that is, graduate and undergraduate regulations. Anyone in the community can suggest an addition or a change to university regulations. Suggestions go to the provost. If the provost decides to bring a change forward, it goes to the faculty senate, where it must receive a majority vote to pass. If the senate

passes a change to university regulations, the university president must approve it before it can come into force.

The multiyear process, which is being completed today, itself is a product of shared governance. The faculty leadership worked constructively with Provost Wilkins and President Alger to come to agreement about what this language should be and where to put it. Steve Silvia personally thanked them for that.

A senator asked that the language be amended to ensure that it properly reflected all types of employees at the library. Steve Silvia accepted the amendment as friendly. The Senate **VOTED** 25-0-0 in favor

VI. Action Item: Continuing Appointment and Term Faculty Affairs Committee Bylaws Language Change – Beverly Peters and Garret Martin

Beverly Peters and Garret Martin asked for an update to the Continuing Appointment and Term Faculty Affairs Committee bylaws to reflect membership changes, changes to the title for the Associate Dean ex officio member, clarify committee processes, and edit the name of the committee and its order of appearance in the faculty senate bylaws. The Senate **VOTED** 25-0-0 in favor

VII. Action Item: Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Regulations Change for Veterans' Administration Compliance – Wendy Boland and Bridget Trogden

This request to change undergraduate and graduate academic regulations is to align with new Veterans' Administration guidance and compliance to ensure that students continue to receive VA benefits. The Senate **VOTED** 23-0-0

VIII. Action Item: Name Change from Aux to Encounters: A New First-Year Learning Experience – Brad Knight and Martyn Oliver

This is a proposal to amend the undergraduate regulations as a result of the Senate subcommittee's year-long review of the AU Core's "AU Experience" (AUx) requirements. The proposed changes to regulations 8.2 and 8.3 shift the requirement to a one-credit course in the fall and a one-credit course in the spring: Encounters I and Encounters II. The Senate **VOTED** 26-0-1 in favor

IX. Core Abroad Regulation Changes

This proposal has two amendments to the undergraduate regulations regarding core requirements that may be satisfied on approved AU abroad programs. Currently, students may apply up to two courses from an approved AU Abroad program toward Core requirements in Habits of Mind, Quantitative Reasoning II, Written Communication and Information Literacy II, Diversity and Equity, and Capstone. This regulation was originally developed before the introduction of a first-year study abroad option, as students typically did not study abroad until at least the spring of their sophomore year. With the expansion of opportunities, including programs designed for first-year students—the AU Abroad office has requested that the Core Council consider allowing additional courses to count toward Core requirements, both to further incentivize participation and to facilitate academic planning for students pursuing study abroad early in their academic careers. The Senate **VOTED** 27-0-0 in favor

X. Presentation: Introduction of New Senators and Committee Members Starting in AY 2025 – Jenny Axe

Jenny Axe welcomed all the new senators and committee members for AY 2025. She thanked them for their willingness to serve.

XI. Action Item: Election of the Executive Committee At-Large and Additional Senators – Jenny Axe

The senate voted to confirm the at-large and additional senators for the Executive Committee for AY 2025-2026. The Senate elected Tony Ahrens with 24 VOTES for the at-large Senator. Sheila Bedford received **13 VOTES** and Kurt Braddock received **11 VOTES** for the additional senator seat. Sheila Bedford will represent the additional senator seat.

XII. For the Good of the Order and the Changing of the Gavel Ceremony – Jenny Axe, Tom Merrill and Steve Silvia

There were no items for the good of the order.