

Council of Chairs Meeting Minutes

Date: 11/14/2025

Time: 12:15 pm

Location: In person (Tiered Classroom) with Zoom option

Attendance: Kristi DiClemente, Dorothy Berglund, Irene Pintado, Maria Scott, Julia Mortyakova, Alex Wills, Barry Smith, David Carter, Tracee Watkins, Wesley Garrett, Shonda Phelon, Kelly Ballard, Ross Whitwam, Nora Corrigan, Hunter Manasco

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Kristi DiClemente.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the September meeting were reviewed. A motion to approve the September minutes was made by Tracee Watkins and seconded by David Carter. The motion carried unanimously.

III. Administrative Council Report

Kristi DiClemente provided several administrative updates. She reported that the Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) is revising its funding formula, which is expected to be implemented next year. At this time, the specific criteria have not been released, and the potential impact on the university remains unknown. She noted that, according to President Miller, the institution is currently in a stable financial position.

Kristi also discussed the initiation of the strategic planning process through the PI Council and the expanded PI+ Council. This process will include broader faculty and department chair input, as well as community and alumni engagement. Faculty feedback is anticipated in late January through February, with strategic goals expected to move forward for a vote between February and March.

An update was provided regarding the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS). MSMS is expected to remain at the W, and the administration is supporting efforts to secure funding for long-needed facility upgrades. Departments were encouraged to explore opportunities to strengthen collaboration with MSMS.

In terms of financial status, the university remains financially stable; however, cash reserves have been reduced due to ongoing campus improvement projects. Kristi DiClemente also announced that a multi-year academic calendar has been approved, with additional details to be shared at a later date.

She further reported that efforts are underway to reopen and staff the emergency call center. Faculty volunteers will be sought to assist with staffing needs. Additionally, she noted that funds remain available in both Faculty Senate Fund A and Fund B.

Kristi DiClemente addressed recent ADA compliance initiatives, including a workshop that was held and recorded for later viewing. She reminded faculty that the deadline for ADA compliance for Canvas courses, websites, and all public-facing materials is April 2026. This includes PDFs, PowerPoints, videos, and social media content. Sheila Morgan was identified as the primary point of contact for ADA-related questions.

Finally, she shared several announcements, including upcoming campus events such as Under the Oaks and Preview Day. She also noted that a new paid parental leave policy went into effect on January 1, with implementation details forthcoming.

IV. Policy Review and Action Items

A. New Policies

The proposed Accessibility Committee Policy was reviewed by the Senate. No substantive concerns were raised. A motion to approve the policy for final review was made by Barry Smith and seconded by Tracee Watkins. The motion passed unanimously.

The proposed Disability Accommodations, Appeals, and Grievances Committee Policy was also reviewed. During the discussion, concerns were raised regarding clarification of committee membership, specifically the distinction between Academic Affairs and faculty representation, as well as references to federal Department of Education and Civil Rights websites. A motion to table the policy pending clarification was made by Tracy Watkins and seconded by Dorothy Berglund. The motion carried unanimously.

B. Regular Policy Reviews

Several policies were reviewed as part of the regular review cycle, including the Definition of Credit Hour, the Student Scholastic Appeals Committee, the Honors College Committee, Academic Grievances, the Academic Standards Board, and Textbook Adoption policies (PS1203, 3502, 3516, 3523, 3534, 7201). During discussion, concern was expressed regarding outdated references within the Online Faculty Procedures Manual, and it was noted that the manual will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

A motion to approve all six policies was made by David Carter and seconded by Irene Pintado. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Additional Discussion

During additional discussion, concerns were raised regarding inconsistencies in course release practices, including varying requirements for chair approval letters and unclear start dates for course releases associated with faculty administrative roles. Kristi DiClemente indicated that she would raise these concerns with the administration on behalf of the Council of Chairs.

Information was also shared regarding America 250 events. It was noted that events must focus on Mississippi history or heritage to qualify for related grant funding. Faculty were encouraged to submit event information for inclusion on the centralized America 250 calendar

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Helen Ruffin