

USC General Faculty Meeting

Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2026

Lumpkin Auditorium

President Michael Amiridis, presiding

The meeting was called to order at 14:31 EST by President Michael Amiridis
Minutes from September 3, 2025, were approved.

President's Report:

President Amiridis provided updates on university achievements, administrative searches, campus infrastructure projects, and upcoming events.

The President reviewed recent university celebrations and accomplishments, including:

- Student Government leadership transition
- University Awards Day recognizing hundreds of outstanding students
- Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Sullivan Awards, welcoming distinguished alumni, including former Governor David Beasley
- Recognition of national scholarship recipients

The President announced:

- USC received five Goldwater Scholars, the maximum number permitted for any institution
- USC remains among the Top 20 universities nationally (public and private) in total Goldwater Scholars since 2019

The President discussed Discover USC Day, where over 100 projects in the Convention Center, and the Faculty Awards Day. Recognition was given for excellence in: Teaching, Research, Advising, Service, and Scholarship. The President also recognized national faculty honors, including:

- Dawn Staley for election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

- Professor Beth Exum (Biology) for being named an Honorary Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science

The President reviewed upcoming events including:

- Multiple commencement ceremonies across the USC System
- Investiture of Palmetto College Chancellor Greg Wilson
- Staff Excellence Awards

Faculty were encouraged to participate in commencement and university celebrations

The President welcomed two newly appointed Trustees:

- Richard Benoit (Florence)
- Seb Johnston (Murrells Inlet)

The appointments restore the Board to its full membership after several years of vacancies.

The President provided updates on the following searches:

Vice President for Human Resources

- Three finalists completed campus interviews
- Appointment expected within 2–3 weeks

Vice President for Marketing

- Search progressing.
- Appointment anticipated by early to mid-June.

The President then commented on ongoing construction projects. Construction continues on schedule for the new Health Sciences campus, which is scheduled to open next academic year. Demolition has begun on McBryde Residence Halls. Plans include approximately 1,000 additional student beds and expanded residential facilities. Construction of the new Honors College wing will proceed concurrently with housing construction. It is expected to be completed by August 2028. Renovation plans for McKissick Museum and Barnwell College include: Fifteen new classrooms, approximately 800 classroom seats, expanded study areas, mechanical and electrical upgrades, new entrances, and an addition of a coffee shop. Thomas Cooper Library Renovation planning continues. Construction will occur in two phases beginning Spring 2027 while maintaining library operations.

The President concluded by thanking faculty for their excellence in teaching, research productivity, student mentoring, and professional service. He expressed appreciation for faculty contributions throughout the academic year and wished everyone an enjoyable summer.

Provost's Report:

Provost Mary Anne Fitzpatrick summarized major academic initiatives undertaken during the academic year. The Provost reported the development of multiple university task forces focused on integrating:

- Academic success
- Student affairs
- Experiential learning
- Career readiness
- Student wellbeing
- Social responsibility

Provost Fitzpatrick presented preliminary enrollment projections, which indicate approximately 7,800–7,900 incoming freshmen. That is an overall enrollment increase of approximately 4%, with student retention exceeding 92%. The Provost credited these impressive numbers with reflects recruiting academically stronger students who are a good fit for USC and expanded retention efforts. Key initiatives include improved onboarding and advising, financial aid and academic support, academic coaching, exploratory advising, pre-orientation advising, course sharing, and enhanced math placement to ensure students begin in appropriate courses.

Provost Fitzpatrick discussed student success initiatives, including:

- Campus-wide pre-orientation advising
- Improved mathematics placement testing
- Expansion of experiential learning
- Record demand for Carolina Engagement Grants (hundreds of applications)
- External review praising Living-Learning Communities
- Launch of Engineering and Computing Living-Learning Community serving over 220 students

Provost Fitzpatrick praised the First Generation Center, which has received national recognition, external funding, and provided expanded student support programming.

Provost Fitzpatrick provided updates on Study Abroad programs, including the increase in the number of programs from 59 to 69 this year. USC ranks among SEC leaders in outbound student participation. However, international travel continues to be affected by global geopolitical events.

The Provost discussed the reorganization of the Graduate School. The Graduate School is being restructured to better support faculty in recruiting and evaluating students. Improvements include streamlined processes and policies, collaboration with graduate directors and committees, and key system upgrades to increase efficiency.

The Provost discussed expanded the Provost Research Competition. She also discussed the introduction of bridge funding for grant resubmissions and support for ambitious interdisciplinary scholarship.

The Provost announced the appointment of an Associate Vice Provost for AI Strategy. She also discussed the development of university guidance regarding AI use, and the creation of best practices for faculty communication regarding AI in coursework.

The Provost discussed on-going initiatives, such as internship management guidelines, Professional Track Faculty promotion guidelines, Promotion and Tenure evaluations, a faculty hiring initiative (110 tenured or tenure-track faculty member), and immigration and visa support (staying aligned with regulatory guidelines). Progress continues on promotion policies for professional-track faculty. Seven policies have been approved, with additional college-wide guidelines and criteria under review. Up to 12 may be approved by summer, and processes have also been established for faculty moving across tracks.

The Provost provided updates on Leadership searches including, Dean of Arts & Sciences selected (Chris Culbreath, effective July 1). The Dean of Medicine finalist interviews were

completed, the Nursing Dean search is underway, and the Business Dean search is to begin in Fall.

USC has been redesignated as a Carnegie Community Engaged Institution, reaffirming its commitment to both research excellence and community engagement.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY:

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: a question for Provost Fitzpatrick. Why did you choose to hire the new Associate Vice Provost for AI without consulting with more people in the field? The person you hired doesn't have a heavy background in the field.

Provost Fitzpatrick: Because I've worked with him and Matt Thatcher in the past. I don't think you need an extensive background in AI, as much as leadership. If this is a role we want to keep in the future, we will open the roll for applications in two years.

The Provost emphasized the position focuses on coordination and institutional strategy rather than serving as the university's foremost AI researcher.

Alexey Petrov, Physics: how have changes in federal funding and policy are affecting the university, as well as how USC plans to participate in the federal Genesis initiative, which emphasizes AI-based research in fields such as physics, chemistry, and engineering—how is the new AVP for AI going to push toward participating in that?

Provost Fitzpatrick: USC is well positioned because it has not become overly dependent on federal research funding. I didn't see anything in my previous competition in that area, but the Office of Research welcomes faculty-led interdisciplinary grant proposals and is prepared to support teams pursuing federal funding opportunities.

President Amiridis:

Federal research funding remains uncertain, but congressional budgets differ significantly from initial White House proposals. NIH funding has been less affected than anticipated, while NSF faces relatively modest reductions. Funding priorities may shift toward new federal initiatives,

with impacts varying by research area. USC's strength in health sciences has helped limit the effects so far.

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: Are there any updates on CPHE and accrediting?

President Amiridis: Liam Hein will have an update in his Faculty Senate report. Chair Hein spoke with Mark Becker, the chair of the board of the new accreditation agency, as well as the former Provost here and President of Georgia State and APLU. He is fully committed to academics and has met with Faculty Senate chairs across the university system and AAUP faculty members to address questions and concerns. However, significant uncertainty remains.

President Amiridis called Dr. Liam Hein, Faculty Senate Chair, to the podium.

Faculty Senate Report:

Faculty Senate Chair, Liam Hein, presented the Faculty Senate annual report. Chair Hein began by discussing ongoing discussions surrounding new accreditation. Faculty Senate representatives have been actively involved in discussions about CPAC, including meetings with university leadership and Board of Trustees representatives. Faculty feedback has been collected, anonymized, and submitted during public comment periods, contributing to evolving accreditation guidance. Federal negotiated rulemaking is also underway to establish accreditation standards nationwide, but the timeline for final federal standards remains uncertain.

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: How close are we to the university policy when having to choose an accreditor?

President Amiridis: Accreditation approaches vary by state and are sometimes shaped by political decisions. Iowa and North Carolina have pursued system-wide approaches, while Georgia has allowed some institutions greater flexibility. Some Florida universities are also exploring alternative accreditors. Overall, the accreditation landscape remains uncertain as institutions gain more flexibility in choosing accrediting organizations.

James Kirylo, College of Education: While the Board ultimately has decision-making authority, faculty questioned how we can formally express concerns, challenge proposals, and influence the accreditation process rather than simply accept the Board's decision? What is our pushback?

Chair Hein: Faculty pushback has focused on submitting anonymized comments during open comment periods and working through AAUP to recommend changes to accreditation standards. Faculty should monitor updates, raise concerns through Faculty Senate and general faculty meetings, and communicate their position to the Board through faculty leadership.

Sarah Rogers, Department of Criminology: to the Provost: after meeting with SACSCOC back in September, were you satisfied with the changes they proposed following earlier concerns about its accreditation processes and ongoing reforms?

Provost Fitzpatrick: The new president of SACS realizes how important change is to the organization, but maybe none of the various vice presidents. There is some movement, but it is a laborious process. We haven't seen the final course yet. But SACS is not our only option. We can go elsewhere. Our accreditation is through 2030.

Mark Minett, English and School of Visual Art & Design: I'm the immediate past AAUP president and member of the University Faculty Advisory Committee and can emphasize several points about accreditation. The issue should not necessarily be framed as a choice between SACSCOC and CPHE unless such a choice is politically mandated. AAUP previously produced a comparison of SACSCOC and CPHE, although portions are now outdated because CPHE has revised its guidance and SACSCOC may also revise its standards and procedures. Much of the current discussion focuses on accreditation standards and evidentiary guidance, but CPHE has not yet released its full policies and procedures, which will be critical to evaluating it. The Board has publicly indicated that USC has time before making an accreditation decision, since its current accreditation remains in place through the end of the decade. This was characterized as an important public commitment that faculty should remember. Faculty who want to become more involved in accreditation discussions were encouraged to participate in AAUP.

Provost Fitzpatrick: The accreditation landscape is rapidly changing as states consider alternatives to traditional regional accreditors. Increased competition may push SACSCOC and

other accreditors to revise or reduce requirements, while CPHE is expected to operate with fewer requirements. States such as Iowa and Louisiana are already considering accreditation changes, and professional accreditors in fields such as law and medicine are also revising standards. At the same time, the Department of Education is requiring accreditors to develop student-outcome standards, increasing attention to measures such as employment outcomes. USC benefits from having time before its next accreditation cycle, allowing the university to observe these developments before making decisions. Its ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes should also position the university well as accreditation expectations evolve.

Chair Hein continued to summarize Senate accomplishments during the academic year.

Highlights included:

- Participation in seventeen Blueprint Budget meetings
- Review of 371 curriculum proposals (as of this meeting)
- Faculty Advisory Committee, with Susan Kuo as chair, created a guidance document that compares CPHE to SACSCOC
- Senate meeting schedule set through 2030 will be reading by this summer
- Activity of twenty-three standing committees and three ad hoc committees, including the Ad Hoc Committee on Promoting Affordable Access to Course Materials whose report will be presented to us at the final Faculty Senate meeting next week. The LMS committee presented their report at the September meeting.
- Chair-Elect for Faculty Senate was elected last month, Michael Dixon

In addition to the highlights above, Chair Hein presented Faculty Manual revisions. The proposed Faculty Manual revisions address three issues:

1. **University Libraries:** Clarifies the University Libraries as an academic unit, consistently recognizes librarians as faculty, and standardizes language defining the faculty of colleges, schools, Palmetto College campuses, and University Libraries.
2. **Graduate Faculty:** Provides clearer definitions of regular graduate faculty on the Columbia campus and distinguishes applicable procedures from those for term faculty.

3. **Faculty Senate Title:** Corrects an error referring to the Faculty Senate Chair as the “President of Faculty Senate.”

Overall, the revisions improve clarity and internal consistency without changing existing authority structures or faculty status.

President Amiridis called for a vote on the proposed revisions, which was unanimously approved.

Old Business:

None.

New Business:

None.

Good of the Order:

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: Expressed gratitude for Dan Brackman’s outstanding work as Parliamentarian. Dan will be leaving USC for the University of Wyoming.

President Amiridis asked if we thought we should continue to hold the spring General Faculty meeting because only 23 people are in person. And 20 people online.

Marco Valtorta, Department of Computer Science and Engineering: the spring meeting used to be held at the same time as the last faculty senate meeting and the president provided refreshments.

Aaron Dicker, Department of English: Faculty are encouraged to include voting information in fall syllabi during election years, particularly for first-year and new students who may be unfamiliar with registration and voting requirements. Early guidance can help students understand the process and prepare to vote in November.

President Amiridis: The university has an on-campus polling location, making voting more accessible for eligible local voters. However, South Carolina voters generally must vote in their registered county, limiting its usefulness for students registered elsewhere. Student Government may also offer voter registration events to help students navigate the process.

The next General Faculty meeting is Wednesday, September 2, 2026. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 15:38 EST.

Submitted by:

Sarah A. Rogers, Faculty Senate Secretary

August 12, 2026