

Minutes
Auburn University Faculty Meeting
October 22, 2024 3:30 p.m.
Via Zoom: <https://aub.ie/senatezoom>

The meeting was called to order by University Faculty Chair Lori Eckhardt at 3:30 p.m.

The University [Faculty Meeting Minutes from March 26, 2024](#) were approved by unanimous consent.

Remarks and Announcements

University Faculty Chair: Lori Eckhardt
None.

President: Chris Roberts

US News and World Report ranked Auburn University as the highest rated university in the state of Alabama, 105 in the country, and 51 for public universities nationally.

Fall enrollment is now at 34,145 (undergraduates and graduate students). The freshman cohort this year is 6,103, which is 168 students larger than last year's freshman class. Auburn's 1-year retention rate rose to 95% (prior year was 93%). Auburn's enrollment has grown by over 12,000 students since 1999.

The university's newest strategic plan, "Grounded and Groundbreaking," officially launched about 2 weeks ago. The plan has 5 signature goals, 25 sub-goals, 85 action items, and 84 key performance indicators. Attention will now turn to implementation as college- and department-level strategic plans are developed in alignment with the university's plan.

Auburn University has approached \$1 billion in contracts and grants, which is a significant achievement. The Office of Advancement has set a record for fundraising this past fiscal year, with \$224.6 million in new philanthropic commitments from 29,000 donors.

Over the past year, Extension has run a Discover Alabama Extension campaign. Digital ads and banners were aimed at growing the visibility and understanding of the Cooperative Extension System at Auburn.

Updates on three capital projects: The College of Education building is more than 75% complete, with an anticipated completion in December 2024. The Stem+Ag Complex is about 1/3 of the way through, with access anticipated in May 2026. In the middle of campus, the new university housing project along the Haley Concourse is about 15% complete.

Provost: Vini Nathan

Provost Nathan provided an update regarding the Mission Enhancement Fund proposals. She noted that the Provost's office received 33 proposals from 12 colleges and 5 central units, with requests totaling \$14.7 million. About \$6 million were available to distribute through this process. A review panel looked at the proposals. The panel consisted of two department heads (Angela Wiley, College of Human Sciences, and Christopher Reutzel, College of Business), and the current or past chairs of the governance groups (Lisa Kensler, Kim McCadden, and Josh Henderson), along with Amanda Malone who provided procedural support. The panel evaluated all 33 proposals and made recommendations to Provost Nathan and Kelli Shomaker, CFO. Funded 25 proposals for a total of \$6,100,000. The maximum awarded was \$750k, which was awarded to the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts to increase graduate student stipends. The minimum award was \$100k, and the average was close to \$243k. In terms of strategic goals, the breakdown was: Goal 1 (Exceptional Student Experience) – 6 awards totaling \$1.34 million; Goal 2 (Impactful Research and Creative Scholarship) – 6 awards totaling \$1.5 million; Goal 3 (Commitment to Excellence and Innovation) – 8 awards totaling \$2.2 million; Goal 4 (Catalytic Engagement) – 4 awards totaling \$910k; and Goal 5 (Distinctively Auburn) – 1 award of about \$120k.

Questions

Michael Stern, Economics, asked President Roberts why the raises he and others in his office received were greater than the 4% merit pool allocated for faculty.

President Roberts responded that the Board of Trustees determines his raise, not him. He noted that a couple of other individuals in office also report directly to the Board. He concluded by stating that he would not speak about individual salaries in a forum like this.

Liliana Stern, Economics, asked the Provost why a faculty member in her department received a 25% raise. She noted that she had not received a response from the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

Provost Nathan responded that she and Dean Hicks had spoken about it, and a response was forthcoming.

Duha Altindag, Economics, asked why President Roberts wouldn't talk about public officials who are paid with public funds.

President Roberts responded that he would not talk about individual evaluations.

Committee Report

[Nominating Committee](#) Ralph Kingston
[presentation](#) (pdf)

Kingston, Chair of the Nominating Committee, shared the composition of the committee and its role. The committee members include Kim Garza, Asim Ali, Nedret Billor, Kevin Moore, Cheryl Seals, and Ralph Kingston. The committee is responsible for putting two names forward for each University Faculty/Senate officer position for the spring election. The names of the nominees will be presented to the faculty at least 21 calendar days before the election. For Spring 2025, the names and bios of candidates will be available by March 4, 2025. Kingston issued the first call for faculty interested in nominating someone or themselves. He noted that in addition to this meeting, a call for nominations would go out to all faculty via email as well. The committee will meet November to work through nominations received. If faculty have questions about the responsibilities of the role(s), time commitment, or support provided, they may contact any member of the committee.

Kingston also noted that the nominating process allows for faculty who were not selected by the Nominating Committee to petition to be placed on the ballot. Petitions must be signed by 10 faculty members and no faculty member may sign more than one petition per University Faculty/Senate position. Any petitions must be filed with the University Faculty/Senate Secretary (via usensec@auburn.edu) no later than 14 days before the spring University Faculty Meeting.

Voting for University Faculty/Senate officers will open the morning of Thursday, March 20, 2025 and close the morning of Tuesday, March 25, 2025.

Questions

Duha Altindag, Economics, asked if there was a list of university faculty available. Kingston responded that a list of faculty may be found in the Auburn Bulletin.

Information Items

[Office of the Senior Vice President for Research and Economic Development](#)
Steve Taylor, VPR

[AU Research Update](#) (pdf)

Taylor provided an update on the university's research and creative scholarship program. He noted that a goal from the strategic plan is to double the university's overall research and creative scholarship. The current four

areas of research emphasis are improving health and health care, advancing intelligent solutions, creating a more secure world, and building resilient communities.

Recent funding metrics for fiscal year 2024 (FY24) were shared. It was a record year for extramural funding with \$344 million in new contract and grant/extramural awards. The university has seen steady and significant growth in funding over the past several years. The total value of all currently active contracts and grants is right at a billion dollars. Total value of proposal submitted in FY24 was \$898 million, which is a record number for proposal submissions.

Each year, approximately 60% of external funding comes from federal sources (e.g., USDA, Department of Defense, National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, and National Institutes of Health), the next highest categories are industry and the state of Alabama, followed by other universities and foundations/associations.

Taylor provided a quick overview of his office and services. The SVPRED organizational chart includes Research Administration, Research Integrity and Compliance, Electronic Research Administration and Research Analytics, Undergraduate Research, Business Operations and HR, Innovation and Partnerships, Auburn Research and Technology Foundation, and Auburn University Applied Research Institute.

The SVPRED is focused on providing adequate support for faculty, modernizing business processes (i.e., Endeavor as the new research administration system), building research infrastructure, and supporting new initiatives, team science, creative work, mentoring, and more.

Taylor also announced the launch of the AU Communications Fellows program, which is intended to help faculty engage on a national/international level to explain their research.

In the spring, the OVPRED will host its periodic showcase for creative scholarship; applications are currently under review.

Questions

Michael Stern, Economics, noted that an executive order from 2019 tied federal grants to universities' compliance with the first amendment, and asked if the university was in compliance with the first amendment.

Steve Taylor responded that all of the university's programs are in compliance.

Sara Wolf, Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology, asked to clarify the goal of doubling the research enterprise was meant to be achieved next year or 5 to 10 years down the road.

Steve Taylor responded "Grounded and Groundbreaking" is a 10-year strategic plan. The goal to double the university's research enterprise is meant to be achieved over the next 10 years. He also noted that every individual faculty member is not expected to double their output. Rather, larger team efforts and other things we haven't done before can help us achieve this goal.

Budget Overview

Kelli Shomaker, Chief Financial Officer
Vini Nathan, Provost

[Budget Overview presentation](#) (pdf)

Provost Nathan noted that this presentation is in response to a motion made at an earlier University Senate Meeting which asked for an update on the current budget, information about how faculty are involved in the budget process, and a presentation of some of the university's key priorities and budget strategies.

Institutional Budget Overview: Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) runs from October 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025. Auburn University's budget includes the main campus, Auburn University Montgomery (AUM), Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES), and Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES). FY25 budget

for all four divisions is \$1.85 billion. This is \$134.9 million larger than the FY24 budget. A breakdown of revenues by source was provided. Almost 63.5% of the total budget comes from tuition and fees and state appropriations. All revenue sources have increased from last year. A breakdown of budgeted expenses by category was provided. Salaries and wages and benefits combined account for the largest expenses (51.4 % of the budget). The largest increase from FY24 is in salaries and wages and benefits. Non-personnel expenses are budgeted to increase \$86.3 million.

Shared Governance: The university uses a shared governance approach to budget preparation. Numerous meetings are held annually with various governance committees that directly influence the budget. Three university committees—Central Unit Allocations Committee, Space Management and Repair & Renovations Committee, and Budget Advisory Committee—are directly involved in budget review and feedback. These committees are constituency-based and include at least four faculty members. In addition to university committees, there are multiple senate committees (i.e., Faculty Research Committee, Library Committee, and others) that have input on key priorities and allocations. Some senate committees have a clear reporting line and others are not as clear in the budgeting process. For example, membership on the Insurance and Benefits Committee includes the chair of the A&P Welfare Committee, but does not include the chair of the Faculty Salaries and Welfare Committee as one of the faculty representatives. In terms of budget development and the timeline, budget guidelines are published around December; a first review of budgets occurs in March; in June, all budgets are finalized; the Board of Trustees approves the budget in September; and the budget begins on October 1. If a Senate or University committee has a recommendation to be considered in the upcoming year’s budget, those recommendations should be made to the appropriate committee or responsible SVP early in the Spring semester.

Budgets should not be a wish list with requests for 10-15% increases. The university budget can only handle about a 5-6% increase at any given time. Budget development guidelines are published annually, and all units are asked to build their budgets to comply with these guidelines. When the Provost’s office looks at academic unit budget, they only look at the level of the college. How each college develops its budget and distributes funds is left up to the leadership of that college.

Academic Budget Strategies: The prior budget model was an incremental budget model – annual changes were incremental, minimal, and typically tied to merit; funds were not re-allocated based on changes in enrollment or productivity. At that time, there was a single budget-focused committee, the Budget Advisory Committee. During the 2013-2018 strategic plan, the university crafted a new strategy to budgeting (the current or “new” budget model, which has been in place for the past 7 years). This new strategy, the strategic budgeting initiative, is a derivative of a responsibility-centered management (RCM) approach. With this change, two additional budget-focused committees were added. This strategic budgeting initiative is not a true RCM, where each program has full autonomy, accountability, and authority to generate 100% of its revenues to pay 100% of its expenses or risk being shutdown. Various elements of other strategies are incorporated into Auburn’s budget model to include some level of zero-based budgeting and an allocation of overhead from activity-based budgeting and the de-centralized approach which is classic in RCM models. In Auburn’s budget process, vacant positions—whether faculty or staff—don’t roll from the colleges to the provost’s office; they remain in the college. Within a college, whether the vacant position remains in the dean’s office or how it’s reallocated back to the departments is done at the unit level and it’s up to each college to manage that. How the colleges allocate resources is up to the dean and their leadership time, but the provost’s office does ask them to have some form of shared governance and transparency in decision-making.

The academic affairs part of the budget is about \$1.2 billion, about 66% of Auburn’s \$1.8 billion budget. This revenue is mainly generated by the 12 colleges through instruction, philanthropy, and other sources of revenue. Sources of revenues by academic unit were presented; the biggest revenue source for each college is tuition and fees. Expenses by academic unit were also presented. Auburn takes a balanced-budget approach – expenses equal revenues. Personnel investments are the biggest piece for each college. The colleges also fund budgets for central administrative units through the central unit allocation and covers about \$350 million/year. Colleges also contribute to the university’s Mission Enhancement Fund (MEF), and some colleges may receive MEF funds to balance their budgets.

A side-by-side comparison of sources of funds and uses of funds for the academic enterprise (and for Auburn's main campus only) was presented. The largest sources of revenue are tuition and fees, state appropriations, and contracts and grants. The largest use/investments of those funds are personnel, central unit allocations, student financial aid, and operations and maintenance.

More information about the Mission Enhancement Fund (MEF) was provided. The amount of funds available varies each year. After any supplemental funds are provided to the colleges, the remaining balance of the MEF is available for investment in strategic initiatives. A call for MEF proposals goes out in May with a submission deadline in August. A review panel (consisting of the co-chairs of the Budget Advisory Committee, academic department heads, and chairs or immediate past chairs of the University Senate, A&P Assembly, and Staff Council) conducts its work in September and makes recommendations. Funds are awarded in October. A chart was included that showed the number of proposals submitted, total budget requested, number of awards, and amount of awards for FY21-FY25.

Available online resources were also shared: Budget & Planning Services, Auburn University Annual Operating Budget, and Strategic Budgeting Initiative (the latter shows the budget methodology for those wanting to learn more).

Questions

Sara Wolf, Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology, asked if a new college were created, would they submit a budget to the Provost's office and then be told they were only going to be allotted a certain amount of the funds they'd requested.

Provost Nathan responded colleges follow guidelines and there is some back and forth between the colleges and her office before budgets are approved.

Michael Stern, Economics asked why state appropriations and tuition revenue were divided by college? He noted that the state legislature makes an appropriation to the university rather than to individual colleges and stated that the allocations to each college were arbitrary.

Kelli Shomaker responded that those revenues are distributed based on a formula, which was set when the strategic budgeting initiative was designed. Those formulas are reviewed by the shared governance budget committees every three to four years to determine if changes need to be made.

LeTrice Donaldson, History asked if it would be possible to get a universal pcard policy so that faculty do not have pay out of pocket for conference expenses and then wait to be reimbursed as this can place an undue burden on faculty.

Kelli Shomaker encouraged Donaldson to contact her directly and she will try to find out more about the policy within that department/college.

New Business – Lori Eckhardt, Senate Chair

Luke Oeding, Mathematics and Statistics made a motion to insert the clarification "(including non-faculty administrators)" into article 6, section 2 of the Faculty Constitution [note: Faculty Constitution should read Senate Constitution]:

"A grievance may be filed by one or more faculty members affected; it may be directed against the action of one or more administrators (including non-faculty administrators) or other members of the faculty."

The motion was seconded by Chris Martin, Nursing

This motion will be placed on the Spring University Faculty Meeting Agenda for discussion and vote.

The meeting was adjourned by University Faculty Chair Lori Eckhardt at 4:47 p.m.