Agenda
UCA Faculty Senate
Monday, 17 Aug 2026
11:00 am
Brewer-Hegeman Conf Rm 1

I. **Call to order: FS President Thomas at 9:12 AM**

Present:
President Davis
Provost Hargis
FS President Thomas
Senators:
At Large: Rosenow, Rowley
CAHSS: Craun, Burley, Spivey
CHBS: Jaimerson, Downey, Jenkins
COB: Fang
COE: McClellan, , Buchannan, Couture
COSE: Yarberry, Johnson, Naumiec
Honors: Frank
Library: Lebeau-Ford

II. **Notification of Approval of Minutes**
NA

III. **Comments**

A. President Davis

a. Welcome Back! The semester is here–and it's HOT. We've got to watch out for each other.
    i. Thankfully, move-in day went well without any injuries/overheating. I really appreciate UCAPD taking proactive steps (like staging emergency services) even though - thankfully - we did not need them.
    ii. Watch out for students and others over the next few days who may be overheating.
b. Thanks to CETAL for all of their work with faculty to prepare for and aid in our transition to Brightspace. Their work has made a huge difference for everyone - including my own class prep.
c. Looking toward the new strategic plan: UCA 2035. Dr. Hargis will provide updates in a couple of days, but we have worked to be in a relatively strong position and are now able to look forward to opportunities arising as peer schools struggle with the changing landscape of higher ed in Arkansas and the nation.

Specific to the UCA 2035 plan, I am delighted with the priorities identified by you and the rest of our campus and look forward to where that work takes us.

i. The first area is centering student success. This - of course - is a long-standing priority and value of this institution. I was not surprised to see a reiteration of that commitment.
ii. The second area - Arkansas Campus of Innovation - is about making sure that UCA is seen by the state and partners in the region as a campus committed to innovation. This is going to be a focus of our new Innovation Campus, but it also is a point of emphasis across all areas of our university. We want our students as well as our faculty and staff to have a reputation for active engagement in taking our excellence in the classroom and extending that application into the world.
iii. Related to that, we want to be a university that fosters creativity and discovery, including the application of knowledge.
iv. When I gave the charge to begin the work that would become UCA 2035, I stated that I wanted our campus to establish the priorities. While I was open to where that conversation would end up, my goal was to stand ready to create the conditions necessary to pursue those goals. Future-ready Foundations as a pillar really reflects where my personal involvement in UCA 2035 most lies. It is also the spirit of our stewardship and resource optimization work as most funds to pursue this agenda will come from reallocation of existing dollars. This pillar involves addressing support for faculty and staff as UCA strives to be an employer of choice, ensuring technology and facilities excellence, financial resilience, and operational effectiveness. As with FY18 to FY27, we will continue to build budgets through FY31 that assume the likely student credit hour production and FTE figures of those years and identify reallocations that can be made to priorities such as salaries, health care subsidies, retirement contributions, and other priorities of UCA 2035. The general approach of ROI will be made sharper in the Future-Ready Foundation work in support of focused goals in UCA 2035.

d. Speaking of enrollment, someone asked me when that "spike" and "cliff" were going to take place. Well, the "sugar spike" in the number of HS graduates is ending. The last three Freshmen enrollments of around 2,000 students will, starting next year, likely be closer to 1,850 or so. As we get closer to 2029 and 2030, classes eclipsing 1,800 would really be remarkable. We are - of course - building four budgets ahead (as we do in ROI) and using those class sizes for our assumptions.

1. We know that many universities in the state are effectively "open enrollment" and have relaxed admissions standards to gain more

freshman - even with their retention numbers into the sophomore year dropping significantly. That is not anything that we are pursuing as we have held strong to our academic standards. I've not had any sign from the Board of Trustees that they think open enrollment is appropriate, and I have not had a single faculty member on our campus that has ever signaled that to be anything to pursue. We are proud of the quality standards that we have.

2. Relative to this fall, undergraduate numbers are very solid and are following our ROI expectations. Our market share compared to other universities remains strong. We feel good about UG enrollment.
3. Graduate numbers are less secure and are facing headwinds due to significant changes in federal financial aid rules and regulations for graduate students (including changes to the Grad Plus Loans). We will await official census counts, but I expect that overall grad enrollment will be down by about 150.
4. Compounding the graduate numbers because many international students are among our graduate students, the barriers that are being placed on visas for international students has certainly put a chill on international enrollments during this last year and heading into the fall semester. Barriers to visa approvals for some countries have been documented in the news.

e. We are excited about the progress toward readying the Innovation Campus space for its fall semester opening. Activities of the College of Science and Engineering this fall will mostly be by upperclassmen. Spring will begin to incorporate Freshmen/Sophomore classes with an emphasis on block scheduling to allow for maximizing time at the facility. More information to come (including news of a fall open house or two).

B. Provost Hargis:

a. Thank you for serving on FS alongside your other faculty obligations.
b. Partnership/Shared Governance.
   i. I view my role as one of partnership with faculty to achieve our shared educational goals for students and create the working environment that makes those possible.
   ii. For me, meaningful shared governance requires clear communication, respect, and providing opportunity for meaningful engagement early in the process. Partnership does not always mean unanimity, but it should mean that perspectives are heard and considered.
c. Academic Affairs and UCA 2035 Priorities/Preview of Convocation Topics

1. Operational priorities
    a. Moving UCA 2035 from planning to implementation.
    b. We're going to use the strategic plan as our decision-making guide–not as an explanatory rationale for decisions already made.
        i. Commitments:
            1. Student opportunity & Momentum
            2. Partnership and Engagement
            3. Discovery with Impact
            4. Foundations for the Future
        ii. Imperatives
            1. Centering student success
            2. Arkansas Campus of Innovation
                a. This is broader than the physical Innovation Campus. The goal is to continue developing a culture of innovation across the university.
            3. Modeling discovery in action
            4. Creating systems to ensure future-ready foundations.
        iii. Each imperative will have a working group and include faculty, staff, and administrators and chaired by a Cabinet Member. They will be formed and recruited this fall.
        iv. The Strategic Planning Committee will also remain engaged as we move into implementation, providing shared-governance stewardship, coordination, and driving communication for the plan.
    c. Faculty Excellence Awards: Nominations will begin soon!
    d. Regardless of your pedagogy, please use Brightspace as a single student-facing place to access information for all their classes: Syllabus, Schedule, Resources, and Grades. This is not an effort to standardize pedagogy or course design. The goal is simply to give students a consistent place to find essential information across their courses.
    e. Statewide Course-Number alignment.
        i. Web-materials and other resources will need to be updated, including Department-maintained sites and documents.

    ii. The State's current deadline to begin using the new numbers is Fall 2027 (Spring 2027 registration).
f. Modernizing Academic systems & curriculum review
    i. Simplify core processes that cut across programs.
    ii. This includes improving the consistency, reliability, and accessibility of institutional data so that we can use it for decision making per UCA 2035 plan.
g. HLC visit. Our mock review is November 10 - 11, followed by the comprehensive HLC visit in March.

Question: What are the goals behind the Early Retirement Incentive and how are these goals tied to faculty salaries?
Answer (President Davis): Well, the other two VERI's (early retirement initiatives) and this one are directly related to freeing up funds that can be reallocated to salaries and other priorities including budget savings. This is the third VERI that has been offered during our nine years of ROI. The first was done in 2019 and was directly tied to a need to better position the university for several years of declining student credit hours (due to demographic cliff). The full-time positions on the budget at the time were not sustainable based on enrollments and revenues. We had to make corrections across a couple of budget cycles, or we were not going to be able to do anything in the way of salary increases. At that time, we hadn't offered a retirement incentive program for all eligible employees in 21 years (I do not know why there was a 21-year gap). The 2019 offer was absolutely necessary based on student numbers/fee revenues as a means of reducing the number of budgeted positions so that we had balanced budgets in FY20, FY21, and FY22 and to allow for pay increases and health care subsidy increases that are part of all faculty and staff compensation packages.

The subsequent VERI offered in 2022 was a part of a planned sequence of ROI decisions that were again tied to freeing up funds for priorities like the across the board increases that we did in FY24, FY25, and FY26 as well as the market and equity adjustments in FY27. All told, the previous two VERI's plus natural attrition has resulted in a net reallocation of approximately $10 million which was the greatest share of all salary and benefit increases during the last seven cycles which total over $15 million. The first two VERI's also helped us to right-size our number of full-time positions relative to enrollment forecasts. So, the VERI cycles plus attrition decisions are directly tied to salary dollars being freed for inclusion in cost of living and other compensation increases. The VERI being offered in 2026 will aid us in budget reallocations and salary improvements for faculty and staff in FY28, FY29, and FY30.

When we proposed doing periodic VERI's, the board agreed that it was a healthy activity that could proactively position existing dollars toward budget priorities. Some openings have to be filled right in place. Others allow for moving lines to other departments that demonstrate greater need for the position. And some must be held for reserves and/or budget savings as balanced budgets and reserves are required by external players and for just good budget practices.

As for success this year, there is not really a number that we have to hit. It is a proactive thing related to building the next four years' budgets for the university. I would first say that we want it to be personally beneficial to our faculty/staff seeking early retirement as they have given much to the university and we want it to be a good thing for them. I have said in other meetings that I have estimated that 40-50 people may take it, and that offers us a healthy number of decision-points as we consider the needs for positions, for salary increases, and new positions that need to be established. Anything above that number is just speculation. We will work with whatever it is and have many other opportunities through ROI to make sure that FY27 through FY31 are healthy financial years that allow us to invest in priorities - including pay increases to retain and recruit great people. UCA 2035 will become the focus for all the stewardship and ROI type of work in the next ten years.

C. **FS President Thomas**
   a. Welcome & AY 2026–2027 Theme
      i. President Thomas welcomed Senators and announced the annual theme: Codifying Senate Operations, focusing on building standardized workflows and clear documentation to preserve institutional memory across annual turnover and protect Senators' time and resources.
   b. Executive Committee Priorities
      i. Governance & Operations: Initiating block-by-block reviews of the Faculty Handbook, Constitution, and Bylaws.
      ii. Operations Manual & SOPs: Advancing the Senate Operations Manual and SOPs to clarify officer roles and handover procedures (priority #1).
      iii. Treasury Oversight: Establishing clear usage guidelines and regular reporting for all Faculty Senate accounts, standardizing Treasurer updates as a regular agenda item, and evaluating combining Treasurer and Sergeant-at-Arms duties.
   c. Standing Committee Charges
      i. Committee of Committees: Reviewing all university committees for potential consolidation or elimination; establishing standardized reporting expectations and tracking for UCA committees that report to the Faculty Senate; and establishing formal Handbook guidelines for approving, revising, or deleting faculty committees.
      ii. Faculty Affairs: Conducting a post-mortem review of last year's salary study in partnership with Institutional Research (IR) and the Faculty Salary Review Committee; translating study findings into clear policy proposals and transparent communication materials regarding salary structures.
      iii. Academic Affairs: Managing the Research Empowerment Grant Program; partnering with CETAL on instructional support; collecting faculty feedback on the Brightspace LMS transition.

iv. Advocacy & Engagement: Operationalizing committee goals through the Faculty Welcome Initiative, First-Year Support check-ins, and participation in the Fall Benefits & Wellness Fair; serving as a direct channel for faculty concerns regarding campus climate and fostering cross-departmental collegiality.

IV. **Invited Guests (if applicable): None**

V. **Constituent Concerns**

See constituent concern addendum

VI. **Faculty Senate Agendas will now include a brief extract of the Faculty Senate Bylaws for senatorial review before next meeting:**

A. We will have an opportunity for Senatorial discussion (if revisions or corrections are deemed necessary)
B. Proposed problems or changes will be sent to the Chair of the Faculty Affairs Committee.

VII. **Senate Committee Reports**
A. Committee on Committees
  a. Faculty Senate Committee Appointments for approval. (See Document)
  b. Sen. Rowley moves. Rosenow accepts
  c. Vote: Unanimous 17 ayes. No abstentions.
B. Faculty Affairs Committee: N/A
C. Academic Affairs Committee: N/A
D. Faculty Advocacy and Engagement Committee: N/A

VIII. **New Business**
  a. V.P. McClellan brought up the idea of purchasing an official FS shirt (a professional shirt). It met with widespread approval. She volunteered to look into the matter and discover cost/availability.

IX. **For the Good of the Faculty: Welcome back!**

X. **Reminders and Announcements:**

A. Faculty Senate Meeting on 25 Aug is cancelled
B. Next Faculty Senate Meeting on Tue, 8 Sept 2026, Wingo Rm 315, 1245 - 1500
C. Prepare for College/Dept meetings with constituents. Consider dividing the departments among each College's reps.

Senator Craun moved to Adjourn the Meeting: 11:40am.

Constituent Concerns addendum

1. Associate Dean Evaluations

Summarized Concern:

Faculty can no longer formally evaluate Associate Deans, creating a gap in shared governance and accountability.

Detailed Submission:

In previous academic years, faculty at UCA had the opportunity to formally evaluate Associate Deans in addition to their Dean and Department Chair. This evaluation opportunity no longer appears to be part of the current administrative review process. My concern is that removing this layer of evaluation creates a gap in faculty voice and administrative accountability. Associate Deans hold significant influence over faculty matters, including program decisions, resource distribution, and day-to-day operational support. Without a formal mechanism for faculty feedback, there is no structured avenue for identifying areas where Associate Dean performance may need improvement or where faculty needs are not being adequately addressed. I respectfully ask that the Faculty Senate investigate why this evaluation was discontinued and consider advocating for its reinstatement in order to uphold the principles of shared governance and ensure that all academic administrators who directly impact faculty are subject to meaningful, structured review.

Response:

The Faculty Senate has submitted an inquiry to the Provost's Office to request a clear explanation regarding the administrative rationale behind discontinuing formal Associate Dean evaluations. Shared governance relies on mutual feedback across all administrative levels that directly impact faculty work.

2. TIAA Retirement Plan Transition Communications

Summarized Concern:

Information regarding the recent TIAA retirement plan changes was unnecessarily confusing, creating a false impression of a strict opt-out window and pushing traditional annuities.

Detailed Submission:

The information about the change of retirement plans with TIAA was extremely confusing. The UCA Plan booklet makes it look as if we only have April 22 to April 27 to opt out of the New Retirement Plus Portfolio IV models. I was also under the impression that once we opt out within this window, we could start reallocating our investments. But this was not the case at all. Not all funds listed in the UCA Plan booklet were available on the TIAA website after April 27.

Having wasted much time on the TIAA website and visiting their representatives twice in-person and once via Zoom, I found out that we could opt out any time we want.

I also wonder why UCA has to change the retirement plans with TIAA every few years—last time some funds were moved to Vanguard, and this time to Charles Schwab. At least last time the transition was painless, but this time it is unnecessarily complicated. It feels like insurance policies, written in an *intentionally confusing way. And in the RC Plus, traditional annuity is being pushed on us. It feels as if they are counting on most of us not paying attention to our plans, especially near the end of April when the semester is ending and everyone is very busy.*

Response:

The Faculty Senate has submitted this concern to the Chief of Staff and the Associate VP of HR for Human Resources for an updated response regarding third-party benefits communications. It should be noted that a similar constituent concern was submitted and responded to in the April 28 Faculty Senate minutes. A follow-up detailed response was also submitted (see attachment).

3. Adobe Acrobat Access & Digital Compliance

Summarized Concern:

Faculty lack institutional access to Adobe Acrobat Pro, which is essential for course management (Brightspace) and accessibility compliance (ADHE). Many are paying $24.99/month out of pocket.

Detailed Submission:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the provision and accessibility of essential software, specifically Adobe Acrobat, to faculty members. As you are aware, Adobe Acrobat is a critical tool for creating, editing, reviewing, and securing PDF documents—tasks that are integral to both instructional and administrative responsibilities across departments.

There is a constant and growing need for reliable access to Adobe Acrobat among faculty. The software is indispensable for editing and signing PDFs, as well as performing a range of administrative tasks that cannot be accomplished with free or limited alternatives. This need has become even more pronounced during our transition to Brightspace, which requires frequent handling of PDF materials for course management, communication, and compliance. Furthermore, Adobe Acrobat is essential for faculty to meet accessibility requirements, especially in light of the upcoming review by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE). Consistent access is necessary to ensure our documents meet required standards and that we are prepared for institutional evaluations.

Currently, faculty are required to rely on free programs or alternatives that eventually impose a paywall. Many faculty members have resorted to paying out of pocket for Adobe Acrobat licenses—at a cost of $24.99 per month. For a 9-month faculty member, this adds $225 annually; for a 12-month faculty member, an additional $300 annually. For many, this is more than the recent "bonus" we received, even before taxes, and is almost equivalent to our recent cost-of-living adjustments. Given current inflation and the fact that faculty salaries have seen limited or no increases, this places an undue financial burden on faculty. The situation not only raises significant issues of equity and access, but also impacts productivity, as not all faculty are able to secure the necessary tools to perform their duties efficiently.

The university's recent transition to DocuSign for handling a majority of administrative documents has certainly been useful for processing official paperwork and signatures electronically. However, while DocuSign streamlines certain workflows, it does not address the broader needs of faculty in providing academic materials, assignments, and other instructional documents to students. For these tasks, robust PDF editing and creation capabilities—such as those provided by Adobe Acrobat—remain essential to ensure faculty can deliver accessible, high-quality educational resources.

Response:

This issue is being formally referred to the Chief Information Officer. The Senate will ask IT to evaluate institutional licensing solutions for Adobe Acrobat Pro.

4. "Day One Access" Textbook Billing Workflow

Summarized Concern:

Students are automatically enrolled in "Day One Access" for online textbook rentals and are burdened with having to manually opt out every single semester to avoid charges.

Detailed Submission:

Student Concern: I learned some classes will automatically be enrolled in One Day Access for books, an online rental for the semester. I have opted out (with much difficulty; I needed the bookstore's help as the original opt-out form wasn't working).

I was told I have to opt out every semester or I'll be charged. This is just one additional inconvenience while balancing many other life responsibilities. Is there a way I can elevate my request to permanently opt out or request this only be an opt-in? I don't think it's ethical to add other financial burdens to students and make them remember to opt out when it was never agreed on.

Response:

This concern, submitted on behalf of the student body, has been forward to Academic Affairs for a response.

5. Mileage Reimbursement Rate Alignment

Summarized Concern:

UCA's mileage reimbursement rate is stuck at $0.52/mile (set in 2022), falling far behind the 2026 state income tax allowance of $0.725/mile, forcing faculty to absorb travel costs out of pocket.

Detailed Submission:

Dear Faculty Senate,

I'm writing to raise a concern about the mileage reimbursement rate for personal vehicle use on university business, and to ask the Senate to pursue clarification at the appropriate level.

UCA currently reimburses faculty at $0.52 per mile, consistent with the rate set by the Chief Fiscal Officer of the State for state employee travel. That rate moved from $0.42/mile (effective 2009) to $0.52/mile effective March 17, 2022, and has not been revised since — now more than four years.

This first came to my attention in October 2023, when the GSA mileage rate stood at 65.5¢ per mile — already 13.5 cents above the $0.52 UCA rate at the time. UCA's own TR-1 travel form links to the GSA website for federal per diem rates on lodging and meals, which made it a natural place to also check for *mileage rates. That comparison led to clarification from the UCA travel office that, as a state entity, UCA must use the state rate for mileage rather than the federal GSA rate. I didn't pursue it further at the time.*

What prompted me to revisit this now is the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration's newest published mileage rate, which has risen to 72.5¢ per mile as of January 2026. I recognize this figure is technically a different rate as well — DFA's optional standard mileage rate for state income tax purposes, which tracks the IRS rate — rather than the state employee travel reimbursement rate DFA separately sets and that UCA actually follows. I haven't sought that clarification again from the travel office; rather, it is the extent of that gap that prompted me to bring this to the Senate instead.

The underlying concern is the same regardless of which comparison rate gets raised: the cost of operating a personal vehicle has continued to climb, and the rate UCA actually reimburses at has not moved since 2022. For comparison, DFA's income-tax-purposes rate — meant to track the same real-world vehicle operating costs — has risen as follows over that same span:

- *2022: 58.5¢ (Jan–Jun) / 62.5¢ (Jul–Dec)*
- *2023: 65.5¢*
- *2024: 67¢*
- *2025: 70¢*
- *2026: 72.5¢ (Proclamation 2026-1, under Act 614 of 2025)*

The state employee travel rate is meant to reflect that same reality, yet it has stayed flat at $0.52/mile through all of those increases. The result is that faculty who travel for university business — conferences, recruitment, practicum and site visits, accreditation work, advisory board service, and similar duties — are absorbing a real and growing share of their travel costs out of pocket.

I'd ask the Faculty Senate to:

1. *Confirm directly with the appropriate state office whether the $0.52/mile state employee travel rate is reviewed on any regular schedule or tied to an index, since it appears to have been static since March 2022.*
2. *Advocate, through the appropriate channels, for an update to that rate, or ask whether UCA has any discretion to supplement it given the gap.*
3. *Consider clarifying on the TR-1 form or travel office FAQ that the GSA link applies only to lodging/per diem, not mileage, and noting where the correct mileage rate can be found.*

Sincerely,

Dr. Erin Shaw

Response:

This issue has been routed to the Vice President for Finance and Administration and the Procurement/Travel Office. The Senate is requesting a review of current travel policy guidelines to determine whether UCA's official travel rates can be updated to match current state allowance figures ($0.725/mile), thereby ensuring faculty are fairly compensated for university-related travel expenses.