

CLAS Faculty Council Meeting
Zoom
Thursday, October 9, 2025
9:00AM -10:30 AM

MINUTES

Council Members Attending: Michael Abeyta, Masoud Asadi-Zeydabadi, Emma Bunkley, Mia Fischer, Jeffrey Golub, Rodney Herring, Lorna Hutchison, Laurel Hyslop, Katharine Kelsey, Julien Langou, Michael Moore, Scott Reed, Jennifer Reich, Chad Shomura, Dale Stahl, Anna Warrener

Council Members Not Attending: Ryan Brown

Ex-Officio Attendees: Pam Jansma, Lisa Keränen, Marjorie Levine-Clark

Guests: Michelle Comstock, Betsy Jose, Alyssa Martoccio, Tony Robinson, John Swallow

Recording: Karen Fennell

Welcome and Introductions: Kathy Kelsey

Approval of Minutes for September 11, 2025 Meeting: Kathy Kelsey

- Motion to approve the Minutes, seconded.
- Minutes approved by majority vote with no changes.

Dean's Updates: Pam Jansma

Program Viability/Vitality Reports: Deadline is now December 1

Strategic Plan Refresh:

- We will have a series of department-level meetings and shared governance body meetings to talk about the refresh of the campus strategic plan.
- We've been given the four strategic core principles for the refresh and a guide on to how to facilitate discussions around this.
- The Dean will share the facilitating guide with the chairs and directors in early November and we will host a CLAS Town Hall to discuss this in early November as well.
- Departments are encouraged to hold meetings in November to discuss the strategic plan refresh also.
- Faculty Council can discuss the department feedback on the strategic plan refresh at their November meeting.
- November 17th is the deadline for this work to be in to Central Administration.

External Speaker Review:

- In a recent announcement by the Board of Regents, sensitive external speakers must be reviewed for security concerns. If you have an outside speaker coming for an event, you need to enter the information about that event into the university calendar. The event will then be reviewed for any potential impact on campus safety. Then the necessary steps will be taken if extra security is needed for an event.

Changes to CLAS Undergraduate Student Honors Policy: John Swallow, Michelle Comstock

- The Council discussed a problematic policy change from 2022 that attempted to add a second pathway for college-level honors calculations. The change went into the catalog, but it's impossible to operationalize it due to technical limitations in the degree audit system.
- Michelle explained that the 2022 change, which would exclude the first 24 credit hours from GPA calculations, was impossible to implement consistently and accurately, leading to potential errors and penalties for the students.
- The degree audit system creates a barrier that cannot be automated. There are not enough staff to do the large number of required calculations by hand, and even when staff make the calculations, mistakes are made. Nor is there a clear rubric for making required decisions and students end up being penalized.
- This isn't Latin honors. It's CLAS-level honors, where students get a pass or a graduate with distinction mark if they meet the GPA in CLAS. This is separate from department Latin honors and it's separate from the Honors Program.
- The Council voted to approve reverting back to the previous policy language and the all-credits-count system, which maintains the 45 CU Denver credit hour minimum requirement. This eliminates the complications posed by the degree audit system.

Perspectives on Modern Languages Learning: Alyssa Martoccio

- Alyssa Martuccio presented on modern languages and language learning.
- 92% of students in Europe learn another language in school.
- Some of the advantages Alyssa noted of learning world languages may include cognitive benefits, cultural competence, an expanded worldview and enhanced career opportunities with increased competitiveness in the job market.

CLAS Graduation Requirements Revisions: Lisa Keränen

- In CLAS we want to support all of our units and create opportunities for choice for students.
- We did a deep dive into our data in Colorado and in WICHE and found that CU Denver and CLAS have imposed a lot of requirements on students that our other institutions don't have.
- For example, UCCS Arts and Sciences requires a minimum of 24 credits in liberal arts and sciences.
- At CU Denver, we have a "double core". We have the university core, which already requires liberal arts and sciences, humanities, social sciences, natural and physical sciences. Those requirements are repeated in CLAS so we have 49 credits.
- If you have a 60 credit major and a 49 credit CLAS requirement, students have zero choices left. We're hearing that students can't do the minor or certificate they want because they have very few credits remaining that are not prescribed.

- The Chancellor is asking that students not take more than 120 credits. So, the focus is on reducing duplicative credit requirements and eliminating the duplicative core in CLAS to provide students with more flexibility and to free up an extra 15 to 30 credits for students to carve out their own path. We're trying to model what that could look like, but it will take a few years for CLAS to figure out what that means in terms of how students configure their pathways and what they choose to do with those freed-up credits.
- We want to make sure that we're supporting CLAS and all its units globally, but the question is what is best for students.
- We are hearing this credit barrier we're putting on students is a challenge.
- There are existing examples of programs being offered jointly with CLAS only after the foreign language requirement was removed. One is the Degree in Data Science, which Business, Engineering, and CLAS do jointly. It is headquartered in CLAS, so the majors are CLAS majors. However, Engineering and Business were reluctant to do that unless CLAS dropped the foreign language requirement. Specifically, they were concerned about the number of extra credits that were going to be required of the students in that major due to the CLAS graduation requirements.
- Similarly, Economics put together a joint degree with Business with their Finance degree. We dropped the foreign language requirement for this as well because Business was not interested in collaborating with CLAS if their students had to take all those additional credits, which would push them over 120 credits.
- When we look at what portion of students come to CLAS with the language requirement already met, it is the overwhelming majority. Of the 1000-1200 students we graduate across the three semesters, data from 2021-2022 (the most recent Rich Allen had available at the time) showed there were only about 150 students, only 10%, who didn't already have the language proficiency met when they came to campus.
- The EPCC approved Modern Languages moving their courses from 5 credits to 3 credits.
- Lisa Keränen and Alyssa Martoccio plan to meet on Monday to analyze data on the Modern Languages credit hours and potential impacts.
- The importance is to look at the CLAS graduation requirements strategically with a global eye and to encourage students not to become so hyper-focused in one particular area. Part of the goal of a liberal arts education is being a broad-based learner.
- The group discussed strategies to encourage students to explore multiple disciplines, including badges, micro-credentials, minors, certificates, and integrative capstone experiences. We have to be mindful of these credits, some of these minors are 15, 18 or 21 credits, which takes us right back to the original problem of trying to create space for students to carve out unique paths that make sense for their learning.
- We want to figure out creative ways to support different units. Rich Allen believed that there were things we could do to promote modern language instruction, such as embedding it within some of the healthcare professions. It makes sense that Spanish for healthcare and Chinese for business could be bundled into degrees. That takes partnership with other units. If we had 1 in 10 biology majors doing Spanish for healthcare, that makes up the credit hour losses. So how do we encourage the 1,000 biology majors to see this as a viable addition? The challenge right now is students have no free credits available to take. So, if we make this change it can help open things up for students and create some possibility.

- Lisa clarified that the focus here is not specifically on foreign languages but on reducing burdensome credit hour requirements across the college.

Academic Freedom and CU Administrative Policy Statement #2028: Betsy Jose, Tony Robinson

- Tony Robinson shared concerns about a university policy restricting departmental statements on public matters.
- There have been national concerns including a recent Texas case where a professor lost their job because they spoke about the possibility of there being more than just two genders in their classroom. UC Berkeley turned over 160 names of students and faculty to the federal government.
- It was incidents like these which led the Political Science department to issue a statement that reiterated the importance of academic freedom. A revised version of that statement can be found at coloradoacademicfreedom.org.
- University leadership contacted Tony to make him and the department aware of the university policy, originating from a 2024 Regents Resolution and Academic Policy Statement 2028, which prohibits individual departments, which are considered part of the body corporate of the university, from speaking on public or social concerns. The university's legal counsel and Mike Lightner clarified that while departments cannot issue statements, faculty can speak through shared governance processes.
- Tony noted this rule did not used to be in place and mentioned a long history of different types of statements that have been issued in the past across the CU system. These included anti-racism statements, land acknowledgements and statements of concern about academic freedom, among others.
- The Political Science Department has also sent out notices in the past about Constitution Day, Election Day, statements promoting involvement in civic affairs and statements of solidarity with international students.
- Tony presented this concern to the Council of Chairs and the Student Government Association as well.
- There was discussion that it would be helpful to get some clarity on exactly what the Regent's policy is as to what the policy does and doesn't allow.
- Individual faculty can make their own statements, but the department cannot issue remarks.
- Regent policy says departments are part of the body corporate, therefore departments cannot make statements. However, there is academic freedom for faculty to make statements through the shared governance process. That's also the general interpretation we've been given by legal counsel and Mike Lightner, CU System Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- This policy originated because of what happened with CU Boulder Ethnic Studies and a statement a couple of years ago about Israeli violence. This statement resulted in a doxxing event against faculty in the Department of Ethnic Studies at Boulder, so there's a safety piece to this also.
- Another consideration is that when a statement is issued on behalf of a department, it implies speaking for everybody in the department. There are power dynamics among people within a department and it could be that some folks don't agree and feel uncomfortable making their position known. That is something to think about as well.

- The Department of Political Science is asking individual faculty to sign a modified statement in support of academic freedom and is organizing a campus-wide forum on November 4th to discuss academic freedom issues.
- There were questions about what Political Science is hoping to accomplish with this statement of individual faculty signatories and what are the expected next steps with the policy and the Regents.
- Tony invited faculty to reach out to him individually if there is interest in developing a Faculty Council or other statement about this policy issue.

CLAS Bylaws Revision: Kathy Kelsey, Rodney Herring

- The Council discussed revisions to the CLAS bylaws, focusing primarily on voting thresholds and related concerns.
- Several members expressed concerns about the proposed 50% voting requirement and the potential for small groups to influence decisions.
- One reason for the proposed 50% voter threshold was because of past low voter turnout and the example of the inability to get enough votes to approve the previous CLAS Strategic Plan. Even with sending multiple reminders to faculty about voting on the strategic plan, we never got the required number of votes to approve it.
- There was some feedback regarding the strategic plan that some faculty did not vote on it, or might have voted no, because they didn't feel included in the process and felt frustrated by that. We were also in the middle of a pandemic at the time, which added another layer of complexity.
- There was discussion about what is the difference between having a small number of CLAS faculty voting versus representatives voting as part of CLAS Faculty Council to make decisions on behalf of faculty in the college? CLAS Faculty Council is a small group which votes to make decisions on things on behalf of faculty all the time.
- The theoretical difference is that the Council members are representative of our units and when we do vote, we're voting with the voice of our department. If we are not sure if we represent the will of our department, then we table the vote until we have consulted with our faculty.
- We ought to have a majority vote of the faculty to make decisions, but it's not clear this will happen if lack of voter response is a consistent issue.
- The group agreed to reconvene with the previous Bylaws Subcommittee to look at developing a new approach to voting that would ensure broader faculty input while avoiding the pitfalls of low participation.