

USC Lancaster Faculty Meeting Minutes September 12, 2025

Please note that chat messages are preserved in the Teams meeting record but are not necessarily reported in the minutes. Minutes are not verbatim and as such, pronouns may be mixed in the comment sections.

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Faculty Meeting Minutes

Appendix 1 – Statement on CPHE

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CALL TO ORDER: 12:30 PM Elizabeth Easley

REPORTS OF OFFICERS: None

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES: None

USC SYSTEM COMMITTEES: None

LOCAL COMMITTEES: None

OTHER SYSTEM COMMITTEES: None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Motion to enter executive session to discuss a statement from the USC Lancaster Faculty Organization regarding the Commission for Public Higher Education (CPHE) accreditator.

Vote to enter executive session passed. **The meeting entered executive session and remained from 12:40 PM to 2:02 PM.**

During executive session, faculty discussed a statement on CPHE drafted by the Executive Committee. After revising the document, members voted to approve the statement, which will be shared with CPHE and key University personnel during the established comment period (see Appendix 1).

Questions and/or comments:

R. Van Hall – [prior to vote] Expressed concerns about the intended purposes of executive session and whether it was appropriate for the matter at hand. Discussion about the use of executive session for matters involving personnel and other sensitive topics.

SPECIAL ORDERS: None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

ADJOURNMENT: 2:05 PM

ATTENDING:

Sahar Aghasafari, Connor Austell, Marybeth Berry, Christopher Judge, Logan Cocklin, Stephen Criswell, Elizabeth Easley, Rebecca Freeman, Garane Garane, Amy Gerald, Claudia Heinemann-Priest, Alyssa Kate Holland, Jason Holt, Jill Castiglia, Mary Allison Jobe, Dana Lawrence, Nicholas Lawrence, Patrick Lawrence, McKenzie Lemhouse, Tamika Lewis, Fernanda Marques Burke, Lynnette Martek, Franklin Evan Nooe, Bettie Obi-Johnson, Allan Pangburn, Phillip Parker, Suzanne Penuel, Kim Richardson, Deborah Rowell, Sarah Sellhorst, Nahid Swails, Brittany Taylor Driggers, Richard Van Hall, Jerrod Yarosh, Andrew Yingst

ABSENT:

Shemsi Alhaddad, Dwayne Brown, Christopher Bundrick, Li Cai, Stephen Campbell, Courtney Catledge, Mark Coe, Walter Collins, Kimberly Covington, Susan Cruise, Annette Duker-Golonka, Lucius Stanley Emanuel, Lissa Hammond, Darris Hassell, Ernest Jenkins, Howard Kingkade, Vincent Lewis, Angela Neal, David Roberts, Peter Seipel, Michael Sherrill, Suzette Taylor, Tania Wolochwianski

Faculty Secretary: Document submitted by M. Lemhouse on September 12, 2025 for faculty and staff review.

To: Commission for Public Higher Education

From: USC Lancaster Faculty Organization

Date: September 12, 2025

To the Members of the Commission for Public Higher Education

Thank you for the opportunity to review and share comments on the proposed accreditation standards. The restrictive timeline faculty were given to discuss these changes allowed for minimal feedback. Despite that, this memorandum serves as a collective response summarizing faculty comments on the proposed accreditation standards. While we understand the potential benefits of exploring a new accrediting body, faculty have shared numerous concerns. Faculty concerns fell into the following broad categories:

1. Academic freedom and political pressures
2. Governance, structure, and institutional autonomy
3. Clarity of standards and evidence requirements
4. Commitment to general education and democratic citizenship
5. Financial and reputational risks
6. University community wellbeing

The most frequent comments dealt with political interference and its negative impact on academic freedom, student trust, job security, and perception of the University's ability to fulfill its mission. Faculty also expressed apprehension about the overemphasis of job-readiness at the expense of general education noted in CPHE's standards, as well as the use of vague language such as "appropriate," "reasonable," and "sufficient." Of further concern was the emphasis on state over federal regulations. More clarity is needed to fairly assess the potential benefits and costs of the proposed changes. The lack of specific information regarding CPHE's proposed structure, the financial commitment of the University, and lack of explicit protections of independence and faculty authority pose significant concerns to the stakeholders in our educational mission.

To address these faculty reservations, we recommend the following:

1. Provide additional information regarding CPHE governance structure and financial commitments of the University.
2. Provide additional protections for academic freedom and faculty's primary role in the design and assessment of curriculum.
3. Clearly define procedures and processes for appeal in cases of alleged political interference.
4. Solicit meaningful feedback from faculty and other stakeholders during the exploratory phase and implementation.

We appreciate your invitation to share our concerns and trust that we all share a belief in the value of public higher education. We look forward to continued opportunities to participate in this process.