

Admissions and Financial Aid Committee (AFAC)

**Meeting Minutes
Friday, September 17, 2021
10:00am - 11:30am**

I. Welcome and Introductions – Chair Ghassemi

Chair Ghassemi welcomed new and returning members.

II. Chair’s Report – Abbas Ghassemi**A. DivCo September 2 Meeting****a. EVC/Provost Camfield’s Report:**

- Newly agreed upon MOU with UCOP – The MOU will eliminate a portion of the campus’s debt and will provide UC Merced with the same funding mechanism for incremental student growth that other campuses have.
- Senate Faculty Grants Program – EVC/Provost Camfield suggested tying the program’s future funding to faculty numbers and creating a separate budget area for the Senate. Currently, the funds for the grants program reside with the EVC/Provost’s office, causing the Senate to have to re-confirm the available funding each year. By allowing the Senate to maintain its own budget, the Senate can make augmentation requests through the normal budget cycle.
- Graduate Education funding - EVC/Provost Camfield stated that the campus has until now been spending money on graduate education but funneling it through the temporary academic budget using TAs positions that are not needed for undergraduate education.
- Graduate Student Support – EVC/Provost Camfield mentioned that the campus wants to allow more graduate students to be able to teach their own classes as instructors of record when they advance to candidacy, and part of the enrollment growth plan is to continue strengthening the campus’s ties to community colleges.

b. Senate Chair Westerling’s Report:

- Social events are paused
- Teaching is in-person but with contingency planning.
- Fifty-one beds are set aside for quarantine. Student housing remains a serious problem and Senate Chair Westerling will meet with an ASUCM representative about this.
- R1 Status - The campus research infrastructure is experiencing serious challenges in all areas including, but not limited to, invoicing, budgeting, grant management, and staffing. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, the campus is in a place of dysfunction in which faculty

cannot conduct their research. The Senate needs to work with the administration to solve these problems

c. Update on Fall 2021 Instruction:

- GC and UGC are working with the administration to approve additional requests for remote instruction due to approved medical accommodations.
- UGC approved requests from TAs and unit 18 lecturers to teach remotely due to approved medical accommodations.

B. DivCo September 16 Meeting

- a. NS Dean Dumont was in attendance to discuss contingency plans for the potential Unit 18 strike.
- b. Interim CFO Schnier joined DivCo to provide an update on Alpha Financials. This topic will be revisited in the future and Chair Ghassemi will provide updates as relevant.

III. Consent Calendar

- A. The Agenda
- B. [May 14 Meeting Minutes](#)

A member recommended tabling item VIII. Students' Institutional Debts to the October 15 meeting to allow for additional time to discuss item VII. Academic Activity Policy.

Action:

- The agenda was approved with the above recommendation.
- The May 14 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

IV. AFAC Resources – Chair Ghassemi

- A. [Senate website](#)
- B. [AFAC website](#)
- C. [AFAC Box site](#)
- D. [Senate Policies and Procedures](#)
- E. [Divisional Bylaws and Regulations](#)
- F. [Principles to Guide the Practice of Executive Session](#)
- G. [Consultation guidelines](#)
- H. Distributing work on AFAC

All campus and systemwide review items will be posted on AFAC Box folder and on the Senate website, here: <https://senate.ucmerced.edu/review-items>. Review items will be assigned to one AFAC reviewer before each scheduled meeting.

V. [AFAC Goals and Priorities for AY 21-22](#)– All

Members discuss the committee's goals for this academic year, established at the May 14 AFAC meeting, and propose additional goals.

Chair Ghassemi discussed the list of AY 21-22 goals and priorities that last year's AFAC members formulated and welcomed additional goals and priorities.

Action:

- Send Chair Ghassemi and AFAC Analyst, Melanie Snyder, any additional goals you would like to add to the list by 12:00noon on Friday, September 24, 2021.

VI. Report from the Office of Admissions – Dustin Noji and Ruben Lubers

A. Fall 2021 Admission by Exception (AbyE) Review

Video Tutorial for Extreme and Unusual Cases

<https://ucmerced.box.com/s/0wkavwsgzl8tqkf8age5ftb3z5n6gqll>

A few additional important notes:

- Per our conflict of interest policy and the UC admissions audit, if committee members finds that they are reviewing a file where there may be a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest, which includes, an applicant who is a family member, an acquaintance, or sibling or child of a faculty or staff member they know and interact with, they should refer that file to another member of the AFAC committee.
- Please note, that is it prohibited to consider a student's familial or other personal relationships with university staff or faculty in an admissions decision.
- Committee members should not disclose an individual applicant's decision without permission from the Director of Admissions and report any attempt to influence an admissions decision regardless of source to the Director of Admissions or the Locally Designated Official via the whistleblower hotline.

Office of Admissions Director, Dustin Noji, gave a presentation on the 2021 Admission by Exception report review and approval process. The PowerPoint slides can be found in the AFAC AY 21-22 box folder, [here](#).

VII. [Academic Activity Policy](#) – Charlie Eaton - 10:35am – 10:45am

Requested Action: Members discuss and determine next steps.

A member inquired about an update on the number of students that are currently in jeopardy of having their financial aid reduced, and asked about the plans for the students whose academic activity is not recorded by the end of today?

Director Radney noted that, as of Wednesday, September 15, 2021, there were 490 students

with federal student aid that did not have academic activity reported. Today, there are 390 students, so the numbers decreased by 100 in two days. As of September 16, 2021, there were 40 faculty members and 76 courses that did not have academic activity reported for any of their students. Now, there are only 19 faculty and 42 courses that have not reported academic activity for their students. Director Radney is still assisting faculty through the process. Even though September 16, 2021 was the deadline for instructors to report academic activity for their students, aid is not being adjusted until next week.

Each student's academic activity must be reviewed separately because this issue only affects students who receive federal aid. Federal aid is primarily student loans or the Federal Pell Grant. Students can be enrolled in only six units and still receive student loans. If a student was enrolled full time and was awarded the Federal Pell grant and their academic activity was confirmed for less than 12 units, then that aid must get adjusted. Because Director Radney must review each student individually, he does not know the number of students that will be impacted; however, since 64% of UC Merced students are eligible for the Federal Pell Grant, it is predicted that about 250 students will have their aid adjusted. Registrar Webb added that if a student does not have academic activity reported, they will not be automatically dropped from the course.

A member noted the following observations:

- 91 students in the audit year had their aid adjusted as a result of no reported academic activity in some of their courses. There was a lower enrollment number that year; however, 91 students then compared to 250 students this year is more than a doubling of the number of students who will have their aid reduced.
- About 73% of the aid awards that were recalculated were for Pell Grant recipients, which raised concerns about equity and who is impacted by the policy if no adjustments are made.

Members inquired about a plan to minimize the impact on students, especially since there may have been glitches about recording their activity so close to the add/drop date as well as the challenges with housing students and the delayed instructional start-date. Members also expressed their interest in future conversations as an AFAC committee on policy revision.

Director Radney explained that the ratio of students who do not have academic activity reported compared to the overall number of students enrolled who have some form of financial aid is a relatively small number (390 students out of 9100+). The percentage of students whose aid must be adjusted is small compared to the overall population of students enrolled at UC Merced. A member disagreed and felt that with several hundred students' aid requiring adjustment, a plan must be established, as this has a substantial negative impact on students.

A member noted that the process would be more effective if deans and department chairs were made aware of this policy requirement and gave their faculty ample notice, and that the faculty should not be at fault because they were not notified in a proper manner.

Another member asked for clarification on the process in which a student's aid is reduced and when they are dropped from a class that they are currently enrolled in. Director Radney

clarified that if aid is reduced for students who have already received their aid, a balance would appear on their account. This balance would prevent the student from registering for classes in the future. The student will have an opportunity to appeal, in which they would be required to provide proof of course engagement. Once their activity is confirmed, aid would be dispersed back to them.

A member noted that there is a very short amount of time between the add/drop date and the census date and many faculty members are stressed when trying to find a way to verify activity for students who added late. Additionally, many labs do not begin until the fourth week of the semester, and therefore, there aren't any assignments until the fifth or sixth week of class. It was also recommended to include department chairs in the communication pipeline because many faculty members are more likely to listen to their department chairs than the Registrar's Office or Financial Aid office. Registrar Webb explained that the Late Add process has been identified as an issue and the Registrar's Office will be working with Financial Aid to propose a fair solution for students. She also clarified that the following improvements will be made for future semesters: 1) notifications will be sent to faculty on a regular ongoing basis that includes the course and the students, and 2) tips and tricks for ways to set up CatCourses to easily provide activity for students. Furthermore, she confirmed that she will reach out to department chairs along with curriculum staff at the beginning of the process.

Several members shared their appreciation for Director Radney and Registrar Webb for all the hard work that they have put into this issue. As a federal requirement, this is something that all faculty must comply with. A member noted that it is unclear that this is a federal requirement and that academic activity must be reported in a specific way. The audit asked for the repayment of \$114,000 in aid that had been dispersed to non-enrolled students; however, the audit did not say that instructors must identify students with inactivity by the second week of the semester. The member felt that other UC campuses probably did not report students with inactivity by the second week of the semester as UC Merced instructors were told to do and is interested in learning how they complied. UCOP guidance noted that this is a new requirement, and the member wonders whether UCM sought guidance from the Department of Education on the policy. Director Radney clarified that not all federal guidance was included in the audit.

Chair Ghassemi recommended that the Senate Office staff be notified before the faculty in the future regarding this issue, as it may result in better dissemination of information.

VIII. Students' Institutional Debts– Charlie Eaton - 10:45am – 10:55am

Over 20 HBCUs and some public universities have used Biden Rescue funds to cancel these debts: <https://www.businessinsider.com/howard-university-cancels-student-debt-latest-hbcu-use-stimulus-funds-2021-8>.

Requested Action: AFAC to engage in informational discussion.

Action:

- This item was tabled to the October 15 meeting.

IX. Systemwide Review Items – 10:55am – 11:00am**A. [Revised Presidential Policy on SVSH](#)**

Requested Action: AFAC to determine if committee will opine. If AFAC decides to opine, identify a lead reviewer. Lead reviewer will provide comments by Monday, October 11, 2021.

Deadline for comments: October 15, 2021

AFAC members decided not to opine on this item.

Action:

- The Senate Chair will be notified by October 15, 2021.

B. [Revised Senate Regulation 478 -IGETC](#)

AFAC is a lead reviewer.

Requested Action: Assign lead reviewer. The lead reviewer's comments will be sent to Chair Ghassemi, Melanie Snyder, and Fatima Paul by Monday, October 11, 2021.

Deadline for comments: October 15, 2021

Vice Chair Erik Menke volunteered to serve as lead reviewer.

Action:

- Vice Chair Erik Menke will send his comments to Chair Ghassemi, Melanie Snyder, and Fatima Paul by Monday, October 11, 2021.
- AFAC Analyst will draft a memo and circulate to AFAC members for review. Deadline: October 15, 2021.

X. Informational items will be regularly uploaded on the “Informational Items” AFAC Box Folder: <https://ucmerced.app.box.com/folder/140193076190>

Meeting adjourned at 11:17am