

[Admissions and Financial Aid Committee \(AFAC\)](#)

Meeting Minutes
Friday, March 22, 2024
1:00pm – 2:30pm

Documents available in [box](#)
[AFAC Duties](#)

I. Consent Calendar – Chair Eaton – 1:00pm – 1:05pm

- A. The Agenda
- B. [February 16 Meeting Minutes](#)

Action:

- The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

II. Chair’s Report – Chair Eaton – 1:05pm – 1:15pm

- A. Welcome Interim Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management (VCEM) Brenda Amenson-Hill

VCEM Amenson-Hill introduced herself. She began her role as Interim VCEM in January 2024 and will remain in the role until the position is permanently filled. She has 30 years of experience in higher education and enrollment management, and she looks forward to helping launch the new Division of Enrollment Management at UC Merced.

- B. March 1 BOARS Meeting

BOARS members discussed the Data Science admission requirement as an option to satisfy the Algebra 2 requirement, which caused concerns for the Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) faculty. Faculty shared equity concerns about students being admitted but not prepared to succeed. A policy was adopted to remove the Data Science course as a way of satisfying the math requirement; however, the UC Regents would prefer to maintain the Data Science pathway.

BOARS, Academic Council, and the Regents also discussed online versus in-person instruction. Approximately one year ago, systemwide Academic Senate implemented a policy stating that at least 50% of courses must be completed in person, known as the “campus experience requirement”. The Board of Regents has rejected the Senate policy for having a “campus experience requirement” but stated that campuses have the autonomy to implement their own online degree policies.

C. March 11 DivCo Meeting

- The TAS Work Groups are making progress.
- Members discussed the “campus experience requirement” that mandates all undergraduates complete a minimum of six units of in-person courses during a quarter/semester for one year, with the in-person course defined as having at least 50% of instruction occur face-to-face. The revision was rejected; however, campuses have autonomy to implement their own requirement, and UC Merced currently has a policy that states that no more than 30% of instruction can be offered online.

III. Consultation with Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Kurt Schnier and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs (VCSA) Charles Nies – Students’ Institutional Debts – 1:15pm – 1:55pm

CFO Schnier has generated a report on students’ institutional debts, available [here](#). Today, CFO Schnier and VCSA Nies will join the meeting to further discuss students’ institutional debts and answer questions from the membership.

VCSA Nies reported that Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) were allocated during the pandemic to cover students’ past debt without counting as financial aid.

CFO Schnier shared PowerPoint slides, available [here](#), highlighting the debts that have been forgiven (Slide 2). A real-time system is used, so if a debt was accrued and then paid off, it was removed from the data. The data only portrays the debt that was written off by term if it was not paid. CFO Schnier will share snapshots of data at intervals, both in the fall and the spring.

CFO Schnier reported that financial aid and housing are among the highest forgiven debts. In the four years preceding COVID, \$392,000 in debt was written off. There were no write-offs during COVID (Fiscal Year 2021 and 2022); instead, HEERF was used for students who requested hardships. Slide 3 illustrates a trend upward in write-offs, and 89 students were allocated HEERF following Summer 2020.

Slide 4 includes information that indicates that UC Merced currently has \$6.9 million in outstanding debt. The bottom of the chart states that the sum between 1 and 30 days is about \$650,000, and between 31 and 60 days is about \$4 million. CFO Schnier clarified that those who have accrued debt typically do not keep their balance at 0 and different funds are paid at different times. It is assumed that this debt gets cleared through notice and regular activity. The data included after 90 days will be the most accurate, as it shows debt accrued from one semester to the next.

Chair Eaton explained that Title IV is part of the Federal Higher Education Act, which is the law that creates Federal student loans and Pell Grants. When a student withdraws before completing a semester, UC Merced is required to return their Federal student

loans and their Pell Grants to the U.S. Department of Education. UC Merced will then bill the student for the balance that they were required to return.

The final slide explains how the Finance and Administration Office handles past-due accounts. CFO Schnier and his team review accounts monthly after every payment deadline and send internal collection notices via email for active students and via mail for inactive students. After three notices, the student would typically be transferred to a collection agency; however, this practice has been put on hold for approximately three years. CFO Schnier noted that having approximately \$2 million dollars in student debts is substantive, and VCSA Nies stated that some of the debt growth is proportionate with enrollment growth.

Action:

- CFO Schnier will provide AFAC with snapshots of data in the fall and in the spring semesters that show total outstanding debts and how they differ semester by semester.
- Chair Eaton will meet with CFO Schnier and SBS Director Tessier to discuss the snapshot data.

IV. Campus Review Items – All – 1:55pm – 2:25pm

A. [SNS Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology B.S. Proposal](#)

The policy governing the review and approval of Undergraduate Degree Programs is available [here](#).

Lead Reviewer: Mike Cleary

Lead reviewer's draft memo is available [here](#).

Requested Action: Members discuss the proposal and lead reviewer's draft memo. If there is consensus, voting members vote to approve the draft memo.

Comments due to the Senate Chair: Friday, March 22, 2024.

Member Cleary summarized his assessment highlighting the following main points:

- The emphasis on Conservation Biology sets this degree program apart from similar programs at other UCs.
- There is a focus on alternative ways to acquire quantitative skills while removing some of the Chemistry requirements that similar programs typically include; there is no Organic Chemistry requirement.
- There are 2 tracks - a general Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Biology track and a Pre-Health track.
- The Pre-Health track will allow completion of all the Pre-Med requirements, which will serve students that are interested in areas spanning from evolution of disease and evolution of pathogens to zoonotic diseases, etc.
- The projected enrollments are between 70 and 145 majors by 2031.

Action:

- AFAC unanimously endorsed member Cleary's memo.
- The final memo will be transmitted to the Senate Chair.

B. [SSHA Proposal for a Science, Technology, and Ethics B.S. Degree Program](#)

The policy governing the review and approval of Undergraduate Degree Programs is available [here](#).

Lead Reviewer: Sapana Doshi

Lead reviewer's draft memo is available [here](#).

Requested Action: Members discuss the proposal and lead reviewer's draft memo. If there is consensus, voting members vote to approve the draft memo.

Comments due to the Senate Chair: Monday, April 2, 2024.

Member Doshi summarized her assessment highlighting the following main points:

- The proposal brings together SSHA disciplines with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) sciences.
- The program will help to attract students that are interested in climate change science and policy, artificial intelligence and data science, or biotechnology and public health.
- The proposers did particularly well with the job market analysis.
- The projected enrollments are estimated to begin with 50 students in the major, 80% of them in philosophy.
- One of the strengths of the proposed program is in its design by marrying STEM field knowledge with social science and humanities framings by drawing on courses and expertise from SSHA, SNS and SoE.
- The major has three STEM pathways focused on: biological sciences, public health, environmental systems, and data science.
- Member Doshi recommends the proposers consult with other programs within SSHA that bring in additional diverse perspectives on social and cultural power relations based on race, gender, and sexuality.
- It is unclear whether the core curriculum adequately addresses such intersectional perspectives on race, ethnicity, and indigeneity or if they are only covered in optional electives.
- The proposers revised their previously planned hires given the lack of guaranteed resources and that the program can be operationalized without additional FTE. However, the proposal mentions that already planned hires would fit well into the new major and would also support a graduate program in Philosophy. Member Doshi suggested that Philosophy prioritize hires with expertise in the intersection of Science and Technology Studies (STS) with race, indigeneity and coloniality, alongside gender and sexuality.

Action:

- AFAC unanimously endorsed member Doshi’s memo.
- The final memo will be transmitted to the Senate Chair.

VI. Any Other Business – 2:25pm – 2:30pm

No other business was discussed.

- VII. Informational Items** will be regularly uploaded on the “Informational Items” AFAC Box Folder [here](#).