

University of South Alabama

Faculty Senate – Annual Report

Senate Year: April 2025 – 2026

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Introduction:

Writing these reports serves as a time for reflection and celebration—reflection because there is always more to do, but it is also important to note the points of celebration or the acknowledgement of accomplishment—as this year has been full of those as well for the Senate at South Alabama. These achievements and milestones would not be possible without the collaboration and work of the faculty throughout all of our colleges and divisions who step forward to take on additional responsibilities in service to all. Thank you to each person who stepped forward in service of your colleagues.

In last year’s report, I noted that the focus for the year had been on increasing opportunities for trust between the Senate and external stakeholders, advocating for faculty needs, and collaboration. The results of those key goals will be reported below, but before I do, I would be remiss if I did not include some additional comments about HB 580, which passed the Alabama Senate on April 9, 2026. A great deal of quiet work took place related to this bill, through various paths (e.g. innumerable meetings, phone calls, advocacy for changes, explanations of impact, chats threads, email groups, etc.). More is still to come as we now, both as a Senate and as the wider University, in a position to have to digest the tangible implications of operationalizing compliance for this new law. This will take time, but what I will note is that our current and future Senate at USA is committed to working with our demonstration as advisors on faculty affairs, needs and issues—much as we have all along.

This report is a snapshot of a year of engagement from each person on the Executive Committee, the Caucus Leaders, the Senate at Large, but also our elected Officers. For further detail, I would urge you to consult the individual ExComm Committee reports as well as the Caucus Reports that have been developed and submitted by each Chair and Leader.

Thank you.

Key Accomplishments and Initiatives

1. Salary Survey

The administration has completed and is digesting the implications of a new faculty salary survey. The process this time was slightly different, starting with the composition of the faculty representation in the ‘room’. Typically, it had always been the chair of the Salary and Benefits committee, and perhaps the Senate president. This time, when asked for who should represent the faculty voice, we asked for a wider range of faculty to be included. Thus, the chair of that committee, Geoffrey Hudson, was joined by Jaime Adams (former Senator and involved in previous salary surveys), Greg Brower (WCOM), and Brooks Rabideau (COE). This wider array of faculty

representation allowed the perspectives of more people to be taken into consideration, both when selecting peer institutions but also when evaluating program CIP codes, which would be the way that salaries are ultimately compared with those chosen peers.

These Senate representatives were involved in peer selection from the first meeting, and changes to the peer institutions were made based on the recommendations from the faculty representatives. Another change in this survey from the survey done approximately four years ago was that in this round, instructors were also part of the group eligible for increases if gaps were found. This addition is in spite of the fact that peer data was not collected by CUPA, which resulted in decisions about how then, to include these peers. That discussion also included the faculty team.

The faculty team, led by Geoffrey Hudson, was able to ably represent different faculty concerns and were integral in both shaping the survey but also advocating for increased communication and transparency about the entire process. Thus, information about the process and survey have now been presented at several college meetings, departments, and other venues, all with the goal of clearly explaining what it is, and potentially, how the outcome will affect them or their colleagues.

Continued discussion with the administration has taken place about timing, funding, budgeting for salary adjustments as have been identified by the survey. These discussions also consider the reality of enrollment considerations, funding streams, inversion/compression questions as well as the idea of a merit increase this year. These conversations are ongoing.

2. Inversion/Compression (this is carried over from the previous year)

As mentioned in the previous section, inversion/compression (I/C) continues to be an ongoing point of discussion. In late March, Geoffrey Hudson, Laura Vrana and I met with Dr. Kent and Dr. Guest to understand when and how (I/C) is triggered when conducting hires around the campus. We also reiterated that *all* of the salary discussions that take place at USA reflect broader faculty morale and retention challenges. While we recognize that these issues do not pertain to all faculty directly, the overall wellbeing and prestige of the university *is directly impacted by turnover, as well as other negative organizational behavioral outcomes that occur as a result of salary and compensation issues.*

3. Faculty Workload

One of the primary areas of concern last year as a future priority was in the area of workload. Faculty have reported increased course caps, advising, oversight of independent studies, as well as many other types of workload 'creep' that while sometimes acknowledged with thanks, nevertheless results in less time overall for research, service or even personal activities. Often, this increase in activity has no place for clear acknowledge in our formal, or even informal evaluation processes.

Several of the Executive Committees have taken on understanding more about, and advocating for remediation of this quietly evolving issue. The committees on Mentoring (Tracy O'Conner, Wellbeing and Retention (Caitlyn Hauff), Teaching, Learning and Technology (Michael Black & Casey Brock), and Environmental Quality and Sustainability (Dalten Fox) have all been involved in looking for ways to document and remedies. This is an ongoing project, and will, in the next year involve a wider array of people from different committees, including Handbook as we look to understand more

about policies related to courses and workload, Evaluation as our peer evaluation process ‘kicks-off’ for the first time this year, etc.

Most recently Caitlyn Hauff and Dalten Fox have designed (with the input of the wider team) a workload creep survey that will be released to all faculty for their feedback before the end of the Spring, 2026 semester. That information will be used by the various committees to advise the university of both issues and potential suggestions for remedies in the coming year.

Again, a balanced and acknowledged workload is a critical component of retention. We will continue to work with the administration in various settings to continuously raise this point.

4. AHTEC → Peer Evaluation Process

Over the previous years, we have reported on the workings of the Ad Hoc Teaching Effectiveness Committee (AHTEC). The short version of this project was to find a better way to evaluate teaching effectiveness, given that our Student Perceptions of Instruction (SPIs) results are generally not useful given the subjective nature of that sort of evaluation process. Thus, the committee has, for several years, looked at various options to more accurately evaluate faculty work in the classroom setting. This process has, at various times, been met with a great deal of skepticism from the faculty.

More recently, a procedure and timeline has been rolled out to most colleges and divisions related to the implementation of a peer evaluation process for teaching. The timeline is elongated for current faculty, with many not falling into the implementation of this process until after 2030. New faculty will be integrated this year, and their first peer evaluation will take place in Fall of 2027.

Colleges have been charged with designing a process that is idiosyncratically attuned to their own, usually unique environments, and must have those completed by June 15th, 2026. They have been assisted in this process by members of the ILC, and many chairs have attended a professional development workshop on this topic that was recently offered. Further education/development opportunities are planned as we consider the integration of the information gathered into annual evaluation and development plans, as well as how to acknowledge the tangible increase in workload of the people who serve as peer evaluators.

It is important to note that Senate has been involved in many discussions on this new process, and that is an ongoing plan (e.g. Teaching, Learning, and Technology – Michael Black/Casey Brock, Wellbeing and Retention – Caitlyn Hauff, Donna Streeter – Handbook, are some examples).

5. Promotion & Tenure/Evaluation Committees

In early 2025, the Faculty Senate Evaluation committee (Clay Davidson) collected information about faculty perceptions of our P&T process at USA. This information was presented to the President’s Council on April 9th, 2025. The result of that was that the Deans’ Retreat in late June, 2025 focused almost exclusively on faculty issues related to P&T and to a lesser extent evaluation. Two working groups of deans were formed after that retreat to further develop some recommendations for the Provost—and so, now, two cross campus working groups have been recently set up to take this work on both topics further. Both groups are in the forming stage, which means they have been

nominated and the first meeting has been scheduled. The charges involve closely evaluating our promotion and tenure and evaluation processes at all levels, with the lens of understanding what we currently do, but also where it should be as we move into a future that also includes the possibility of R1 status.

The senate has representation on both committees, but it should also be noted that there are other faculty who are non-senators as well, thus widening the opportunity for voice in this group.

As this is a very new development, more information will be shared as it develops.

6. University Faculty Success Team (UFSC)/University Academic Collaborative Council (UACC)

Serving on the Senate for more than a few years gives people the perspective of how long some things take to pass through the system, and also, who on the various campuses have the ability to influence both the micro (deans) and macro (administrators) components of faculty life. Additionally, having spent a few years as part of the Student Success Team, a committee drawn from all over campus, it became clear that a Faculty Success Team would be an interesting addition to our University committee structure.

My first pass at pitching that committee to our administration didn't work (Summer, 2025). However, I went back and reformulated my 'argument', and in December of last year, got the go ahead from Dr. Kent to proceed with creating a draft committee charge and structure. I've been aided in this process by Susan Gordon-Hickey (Dean of Allied Health), who has also been helping in the same way with a committee for Academic Collaboration (which we currently have composed of a few senators and then a few deans). She, and others in the administration have been actively and specifically supportive of developing effective paths for faculty success—which is a critical component of the overall long-term success of the University.

The goal for both of these groups is to have them appointed and in place this coming summer, with initial meetings to start with the beginning of the Fall semester. I cannot overstate the potential usefulness of these two university level committees, especially in light of recent events around our state.

7. Increased communication with the Board of Trustees and USA Foundation

The level of communication between both of these groups and the Faculty Senate/Faculty at USA has been typically idiosyncratic to the leadership of the Senate. Some years, it has been more active, and others, most of the communication was limited to the quarterly meetings. More recently, we have made a concerted effort, on both sides, to be more actively aware of the needs and priorities of the other. This mutual effort has raised the consciousness of both the Board of Trustees and the USA Foundation of faculty needs but also our accomplishments.

We have shared lesser known but exciting stories of our faculty's' research, their work in communities, their fears related to internal transitions to R1 (as an example), but also how they worry about the larger landscape in Alabama. I am, personally grateful, to both groups for listening

carefully to these ‘wins’ and concerns, but *also*, for their own sharing with me and other members of our team how they care and see the opportunities at South Alabama.

Over the course of the year, we delivered four reports to the BoT at their quarterly meetings. The following topics were covered:

- i. Shared governance and professional development (June, 2025)
- ii. Faculty inclusion in strategic priorities & strategic growth (Sept. 2025)
- iii. Progress report and additional openness from administration to FS related projects (Dec. 2025)
- iv. Faculty success markers, research highlights, opportunities for collaboration and voice (March, 2026).

8. Professional Development for Chairs

Last summer, the professional development program for chairs kicked off with a short session on evaluation processes and best practices. Since then, there have been several developmental sessions per semester offered to chairs, with the lens of helping them develop and/or refine skills that will help them manage their departments/faculty more effectively. This program was in *direct response to an identified need from the Faculty Senate*.

Given the critical nature of this project, I’ve tried to attend all of the sessions personally, in addition to our chair of the TLT also being invited for each class. The program will continue and grow in the coming years, with the full support of Academic Affairs and the Faculty Senate. I will also comment Dr. Ellen Harrington (Chair of English and also the Council of Chairs) and Raj Chaudhury (Ex. Director of the ILC) for their work on this as co-chairs for this project.

9. R1 Transition

Last year, the Faculty Senate hosted a series of listening sessions on the topic of R1 and the implications, both good and concerning, of this transition process at South Alabama. The information generated from those sessions, where we heard and transmitted faculty voice, have resulted in real, and hopefully useful actions to manage this transition at the university as a positive driver for everyone, not just a few (as many feared). There are several reasons that this information has been valuable.

One of the primary reasons is that last year, also, on April 1st, Dr. Allen Parrish joined us as a colleague as the VP of Research and Economic Development (ORED). He immediately made it a point to listen to the various thoughts expressed in the report generated from the information gathered through the listening sessions and he and his team have integrated them as foundational thought into almost everything that they have developed since.

The work that our Senate and ORED have been able to do together has built a firm ‘friendship’ between our two groups that allow for collaborative event planning, information gathering, new designs for research support, the identification of support opportunities for the humanities, mid-career faculty, as well as other operational ideas to generally be more efficient in a world of competing demands for faculty time.

Most recently, the Chair of the Research and Creative Activities committee, Rebecca Thomas and Sara Davis (committee member), actively collaborated on a research mixer at the Strada Center that was oversubscribed for presentations and posters.

Structurally, ORED has been in frequent contact with faculty all over the campuses to understand more clearly their operational needs, always keeping the Senate informed as a close collaborative colleague. This will continue into the coming year, as many of the recommended changes are implemented.

10. Advocacy and Development of Strategic Priorities

Started in early 2025, these efforts were built on a belief that faculty must be seen not only as contributors to the university's mission, but as strategic stakeholders in shaping its direction who should be actively included as key components of the university priorities when creating support and financial decisions. The question became, in what way would it be best to integrate them into the priorities for the university.

A sub-committee was formed in the Institutional Process and Assessment Committee (IPAC) of faculty members who would devise some draft language for consideration by the wider committee. This language was generated from senate and ExComm feedback, and was considered draft only. As the sub-committee met, two questions became clear. The first was whether the notion of a completely separate faculty focused priority suited the document in its current form, and secondly, if faculty had a 'featured' priority, then what about staff/administration or other stakeholders?

Thus, the idea of offering two draft versions of changes came about, which has been presented to the IPAC for discussion several times, most recently in early April, 2026.

Secondly, and more importantly the question of a focus only faculty in a priority. Late in 2025, this was the main focus of the IPAC meeting and from there, the subcommittee discussed the idea of integrating a focus on *people* as one of the options that could be presented. Doug Marshall (Dean of the Honors College and former FS President) wrote a draft preamble that highlighted a focus on people. This draft has since been modified quite a lot, but for your knowledge, this is the spirit of what was presented there:

The USA way recognizes that a University's success begins and ends not with its buildings, pedigree, or name, but with the people – students, staff, and faculty – that it attracts, inspires, and empowers, and the ways that their efforts, in turn, impact and reverberate through the larger community. Accordingly, our strategic priorities are underpinned by our commitment to welcoming and supporting all members of the Jag community and thereby earning their dedication to these priorities. To that end, throughout the institution we seek to:

It's important to again note that this was a draft.

Going forward, this discussion of the integration of people/faculty more explicitly into the Strategic Priorities of the University will continue. While it has been a longer process than desired, the fact is that it showed us that we didn't really *have* a process for wide solicitation of input on this kind of work before the implementation of IPAC, which has been useful. It also has given me/us/ExComm/Senate the opportunity to bring this topic up on a regular basis, almost as a

reminder that the lack of this in the priorities means we have to bring it up as a reminder, and not as an internalized process.

11. Ad Hoc By Laws Committee

This project, led by our Parliamentarian, Candice Selwyn (CON) and a small group of appointed members has been evaluating our bylaws to align with our constitution (as established by the USA BoT), but also to evaluate if our operational activities and committees are ready to take us into the future. The first small changes which were mainly clarifying were approved by the plenary in March, 2026. This committee will be ongoing into the next Senate year and additional changes will be made as recommended by the ad hoc committee and approved by the Senate at large.

Faculty Senate Culture and Internal Growth

In my report last year I highlighted this idea of a Senate culture. We have spent the year working on developing that, as a group of people who understand their committee charges, the idea that we are a representative body of faculty whose 'jobs' are to understand the wider context of faculty experience at USA.

In many ways, we have been successful, in that our meetings continue to be useful and action-oriented. We have reached out to groups that have not recently been touched by the Senate, and we handle a great many faculty questions and needs, quietly as advocates, or in 'rooms' by elevating issues that pertain to the general wellbeing of our colleagues.

We are seeing more doors open, and are invited to more tables. We have gotten new faces involved, and have been focused on developing people who are going to be the future of faculty representation at USA. We continue to do everything we can to model transparency, shared governance, and also to be agile and invested in collaboration.

My Gratitude

Again, I will end this as I did last year, with gratitude.

Thank you. To every single person who has worked on behalf of the faculty this year. To our administration, our Board, the Foundation, our students. To the faculty who show up and who don't ask for anything other than to be seen.

I would be remiss, if I did not, just one more time acknowledge four critical people by name.

Again Donna, thank you for your wisdom, grace and continuous whispers of support. For calling me to tell me... "nope, don't say anything... let me respond to that" when she knows I've got a full plate. Laura, you are amazing. You are thoughtful, passionate, and balanced. We have been a great team and I'm so excited to see what you do next! Sandra, you have been the repositories of knowledge, information and

most importantly organization, which is the foundation that keeps the rest of us moving. I'm grateful each day that you have said yes to *almost all* of my ideas. Candice, your work as Parliamentarian has been exceptional, in all ways. You have been a quiet force for calm and interpretation that very few people see, but everyone benefits from.

It has been my honor to serve this year as the FS President in this second year and I will always support our faculty, regardless of office. Thank you for your trust.