



University of Houston Chapter

November 10, 2025

AAUP Memorandum re: THECB Core Curriculum Review Process

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Dr. Renu Khator, Chancellor University of Houston System, President University of Houston

Dr. Diane Z. Chase, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Dr. James Briggs, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Faculty Affairs

Dr. Teri Longacre, Vice Provost and Dean, Undergraduate Student Success

Dr. Sarah Larsen, Vice Provost and Dean, Graduate School

Dona Cornell, General Counsel

Dr. Elena Grigorenko, President, Faculty Council

Dr. JeAnna Abbott, Curriculum Committee Chair

Dr. Bradley McConnell, Curriculum Committee Associate Chair

Dear Chancellor Khator, Provost Chase, Vice Provost Briggs, Vice Provost Longacre, Vice Provost Larsen, General Counsel Cornell, Faculty Council President Elena Grigorenko, Curriculum Committee Chair JeAnna Abbott, and Curriculum Committee Associate Chair Bradley McConnell,

The hundred and fifty member UH Chapter met as a whole on Friday, November 7, to discuss the UH and statewide Core Curriculum review process. We write, as a chapter, to request immediate clarification and modification of the Core Curriculum review process currently underway. We believe the current process, as described to Faculty, risks producing curricular decisions that neither serve students well, nor comply with the standards mandated by SB 37. We are prepared to work collaboratively to implement procedural safeguards that will ensure this review meets both legal requirements and quality standards.

Our Concerns and Requested Actions

Primary Concern: The Core Curriculum review process marginalizes Faculty expertise at precisely the moment when curricular decisions require it most. Faculty with disciplinary knowledge and classroom experience appear to have no rights or privileges in this review, while administrators without subject-matter expertise make final recommendations to the Board of Regents.

Impact: Decisions about which courses meet SB 37's four statutory criteria cannot be made accurately without input from the faculty who create the curriculum, teach those courses, track student outcomes, and understand workforce needs.

What We Request: Eight specific procedural safeguards (detailed below) that ensure faculty expertise meaningfully informs the review process while respecting the Board's final authority under SB 37.

Compounding Factor: The current Faculty Council composition reduces the body's capacity to provide the robust advisory input that SB 37 contemplates.

Context

Senate Bill 37 requires the Board of Regents to ensure that Core Curriculum courses meet four specific criteria. These criteria are:

1. Foundational and fundamental to a sound postsecondary education
2. Necessary to prepare students for civic and professional life
3. Equipping students for participation in the workforce and betterment of society
4. Ensuring breadth of knowledge in compliance with current accreditation standards

These are not simple checklist items. Determining whether a course is "foundational" or "prepares students for professional life" requires pedagogical expertise, knowledge of student outcomes, and understanding of workforce demands. Faculty who teach these courses possess this knowledge. Administrators, however well-intentioned, do not.

As we understand the current process, the Faculty Council Curriculum Committee will categorize courses and make recommendations, but Faculty will not have decision-making authority, and it is unclear to us whether they will even have the opportunity to provide comments. Final curricular judgments will rest with administrators and ultimately the Board of Regents.

We accept this framework. Education Code Section 51.3522(c) explicitly states that Faculty Councils are "advisory only" and may not be delegated "final decision-making authority on any matter." We are not challenging the Board's ultimate authority, but we do hope that University administration including the Board agree that we have a shared commitment to privilege expertise in all curricular decisions at the University. A review process that treats faculty expertise as optional window-dressing risks:

- Removing courses that may appear "objectionable" on paper but deliver essential workforce skills in practice, ensure breadth of knowledge, and prepare students to be engaged citizens working toward societal betterment
- Producing a curriculum that fails SB 37's own criteria because decisions were made without adequate understanding of how courses function pedagogically

When administrators make curricular decisions without meaningful consultation with subject-matter experts, the result is often superficial compliance that looks good on paper but fails students in classrooms. With its diminished numbers and lack of expertise in all subjects and courses that will be considered under these reviews, the Faculty Council Curriculum Committee is not equipped in its current form to undertake such a review. We are concerned that any reduction in privileging Faculty expertise in such matters now creates the potential for a continued decrease in Faculty governance and instead toward a situation in which curricular reviews and other processes requiring Faculty expertise are given such perfunctory glances that they might merely serve as grounds for pre-textual

and/or uninformed manipulations of our curriculum. The recommended procedural safeguards that we list below do not diminish the Board's final authority; they offer ways to strengthen it. The Board cannot fulfill its statutory duty to ensure courses meet SB 37's four criteria without meaningful input from Faculty who possess the disciplinary expertise and pedagogical knowledge to make those assessments.

The eight procedural safeguards proposed below call for basic due process and evidence-based decision-making. The alternative—a process that lacks sufficient consultation with Faculty experts—risks removing valuable courses and producing a Core Curriculum that fails to meet SB 37's own standards.

Procedural Safeguards

To ensure that the FCCC's core curriculum review meets both SB 37's requirements and basic quality standards, we request the following procedural safeguards:

1. Faculty Subject-Matter Experts Must Serve on the Review Committee

Education Code Section 51.315(e) permits the Board to appoint a committee including Faculty. The Curriculum Committee conducting this review must include Faculty with direct teaching experience, with disciplinary expertise, and with experience undertaking course reviews. Administrators cannot meaningfully assess whether a philosophy course is "foundational to a sound postsecondary education" or whether a composition course "equips students for workforce participation" without input from faculty who teach those courses and track student outcomes.

2. Mandatory Departmental Consultation Before Course Removal

Before any Core course is recommended for removal, the department that teaches it must be:

- Formally notified and given at least 30 days to respond
- Invited to present evidence regarding how the course meets SB 37's four criteria
- Allowed to submit student outcome data, employer feedback, and pedagogical rationale

This consultation must occur *before* recommendations are finalized, not *after* decisions have already been made.

3. Transparent Evaluation Criteria and Process

Faculty cannot provide meaningful advisory input if they do not know what standards are being used or what evidence is relevant. We request that the Curriculum Committee publish in advance:

- Specific standards for how each of SB 37's four criteria will be applied
- What evidence will be considered (catalog descriptions alone? syllabi? student outcomes? employer surveys?)

- How courses will be categorized (what makes a course "questionable" vs. "clearly meets criteria"?)
- The timeline for departmental consultation

4. Documentation of Faculty Recommendations

All Faculty recommendations regarding specific courses—including supporting evidence and rationale—must be:

- Formally recorded in writing
- Included in materials presented to the Faculty Council and Board of Regents
- Made available to the Departments whose courses are under review

5. Written Justification When Faculty Expertise Is Overruled

Transparency requires that when expertise is overruled, the reasoning be documented and defensible. When Administrator recommendations differ from Faculty expert recommendations on specific courses, we request that written justification be provided explaining:

- Why Faculty disciplinary expertise was deemed insufficient
- What alternative evidence supports the divergent recommendation
- How the decision serves SB 37's statutory criteria

6. Faculty Council Review Before Board Submission

Under Education Code Section 51.3522(c), the Faculty Council exists to "advise the institution administration ... regarding matters related to the general welfare of the institution." The Core Curriculum is at the heart of a college education; there is perhaps no other matter over which faculty input and expertise is more critical.

The full Faculty Council must receive from the Board:

- The Board's complete list of courses recommended for retention/removal
- All supporting documentation and Faculty expert recommendations
- Time for formal advisory comment before the Board finally makes their proposed changes

7. Appeals Process

To ensure that errors made in any review stage are given the chance to be corrected by Faculty expertise, we request that Departments and Faculty members whose courses are recommended for removal have the right to:

- Present evidence directly to the Faculty Council and/or the Board

- Submit written appeals with supporting documentation to relevant administrative parties
- Have those appeals and responses included in Faculty Council, Administration, and Board of Regents materials

8. Open Process with Public Minutes

Transparency protects against both political interference and arbitrary decision-making. Under Education Code Section 51.3522(j)-(m), Faculty Council meetings must be open and live-streamed to the public with agendas posted in advance. The Curriculum Committee conducting this review should operate with similar transparency through the following actions:

- Meeting dates and agendas posted 7 days in advance
- Curriculum proposals under discussion made publicly available
- Meetings made open and accessible to all Faculty
- Minutes published showing which courses were discussed and what recommendations were made

Our Request

We, the UH AAUP Board and Policy Committee leadership, request a meeting with University Administrators and Faculty Council leadership within the next two weeks to discuss implementation of the procedural safeguards outlined above. We are prepared to work collaboratively to ensure this review produces a Core Curriculum that:

- Meets SB 37's statutory requirements
- Prepares students for workforce success and civic engagement
- Reflects evidence-based decision-making informed by Faculty expertise

The University of Houston has an opportunity to conduct a thoughtful Core review that strengthens student preparation while complying with SB 37. SB 37 does not require that a Core review be completed internally by the end of this year. Taking the time that is necessary and including the experts who are necessary to a proper and thorough review process would ensure that any curricular review undertaken at UH would be in keeping with academic freedom and with the field-appropriate standards of all Faculty whose work is reflected in the Core.

We trust that you all share our commitment to student success and academic quality, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The UH AAUP Chapter