

# Shared Governance Committee Report on No-Confidence Procedures

**TO:** Senate Agenda Committee

**FROM:** Shared Governance Committee

**MEMBERS:** Laurel Ahnert, John Bai (chair), Timothy Dransfield, Felix Muzny, Roger Sparks, Yiyuan Sun

**DATE:** April 2026

**SUBJECT:** Final Report and Proposed Faculty Handbook Language on No-Confidence Procedures

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## I. Charge

The Shared Governance Committee was formally charged with developing language for inclusion in the Faculty Handbook that would establish a clear, fair, and faculty-driven process for initiating and conducting votes of no confidence. The charge explicitly required the Committee to design procedures applicable to both (i) unit-level administrators (including deans and below), and (ii) senior administrators at the institutional level.

The Committee interpreted this charge as addressing a structural gap in the University's shared governance framework. Specifically, while existing governance structures provide for periodic evaluation of administrators, there is currently no clearly defined, faculty-initiated mechanism to respond to extraordinary situations in which faculty collectively lose confidence in leadership.

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## II. Scope of Work and Prioritization

The Committee was formally charged with multiple objectives relating to shared governance, including: (i) developing no-confidence procedures, (ii) creating a process for faculty-initiated performance reviews of administrators with non-voting appointments, (iii) evaluating shared governance practices across units, and (iv) assessing faculty representation in university decision-making bodies.

In its initial organizational meetings, the Committee determined that these charges varied significantly in scope, feasibility, and jurisdiction. Charges (iii) and (iv), which involve institution-wide audits of governance practices and committee structures, were assessed as

broad, multi-year efforts requiring substantial data collection, coordination across units, and potentially administrative support beyond the Committee's operational capacity within a single academic year.

The Committee therefore made a deliberate decision to prioritize Charge (i), the development of no-confidence procedures, as the most clearly defined and time-sensitive gap in the Faculty Handbook.

The Committee also considered Charge (ii), but determined that it substantially overlaps with existing administrator evaluation mechanisms already described in the Faculty Handbook. Given this overlap and the more urgent need for a clearly defined no-confidence process, the Committee elected not to advance separate language for performance review procedures at this time.

Accordingly, this report focuses on the development of no-confidence procedures as the Committee's primary deliverable, while recognizing that the remaining charges may warrant future committee attention.

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### **III. Committee Process, Research, and Deliberation**

The Committee undertook an extensive and iterative process over the academic year, combining internal deliberation, benchmarking against peer institutions, and detailed procedural design.

First, the Committee carefully reviewed existing provisions in the Faculty Handbook relating to administrator evaluation. These discussions revealed a fundamental limitation: evaluation processes are periodic, typically initiated by administration, and focused on performance assessment rather than institutional trust or legitimacy.

Second, the Committee conducted a broad review of practices at peer institutions. This included examining high-profile cases such as:

- Harvard University (2023), where faculty expressed no confidence in President Claudine Gay amid governance concerns;
- Texas A&M University (2022), where faculty issued a vote of no confidence in President Katherine Banks following leadership controversies;
- University of Wisconsin System, where multiple campus-level votes of no confidence have historically triggered administrative review or leadership transitions;
- University of South Carolina (2021), where the Faculty Senate cited breakdowns in shared governance in a no-confidence vote.

These cases illustrate two important points. First, no-confidence votes are a well-established feature of shared governance across higher education. Second, in the absence of clear procedures, such actions often emerge through ad hoc mechanisms, which can lead to confusion, inconsistency, and reputational risk.

Third, the Committee engaged in extensive internal debate regarding the potential risks of formalizing such a process. Members raised concerns regarding:

- the possibility of politicization or factional use,
- reputational implications for the institution,
- fairness to administrators subject to such votes,
- and the need to prevent frivolous or repetitive petitions.

In response, the Committee devoted substantial effort to designing procedural safeguards, including high initiation thresholds, confidentiality protections, structured timelines, and voting requirements that ensure legitimacy.

Fourth, the Committee developed and refined two distinct procedural frameworks (unit-level and senior administrators), drawing heavily on detailed drafting contained in the accompanying policy documents. These drafts were revised multiple times to ensure internal consistency, clarity, and alignment with shared governance principles.

Finally, the Committee presented the proposal to the Faculty Senate, where it was well received. Feedback from Senate members, as well as comments relayed through the Office of the Senior Vice Provost and the Office of General Counsel, were carefully reviewed and incorporated where appropriate.

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#### **IV. Conceptual Framework: Why No-Confidence Is Distinct**

A central conclusion of the Committee's work is that no-confidence procedures are conceptually and functionally distinct from existing administrator evaluations.

Administrator evaluations are:

- periodic and scheduled,
- administrative in nature,
- focused on performance metrics and professional assessment.

In contrast, a no-confidence process is:

- faculty-initiated,
- event-driven,
- designed for exceptional or crisis situations,
- intended to express a collective judgment regarding trust, legitimacy, and leadership effectiveness.

This distinction is critical. The Committee emphasizes that the proposed procedures do not duplicate existing evaluation mechanisms; rather, they complement them by addressing circumstances that evaluation processes are not designed to capture.

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## **V. Guiding Principles**

The Committee anchored the proposed framework in the following principles:

1. **Shared Governance:** Faculty must retain a meaningful and structured voice in institutional oversight.
2. **Due Process:** Administrators subject to a vote must be afforded fair notice, opportunity to respond, and transparent procedures.
3. **Confidentiality:** Faculty participation must be protected to ensure integrity of the process.
4. **Non-Retaliation:** Participation must not expose faculty to adverse consequences.
5. **Procedural Clarity:** Clearly defined thresholds, timelines, and roles are essential to prevent ambiguity or misuse.

These principles informed every aspect of the proposed design.

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## **VI. Detailed Proposed Procedures**

### **A. Unit-Level Administrators (Dean and Below)**

The unit-level process is designed to address situations in which leadership within a school, department, or administrative unit is perceived to impair the functioning, trust, or integrity of that unit.

**Initiation Phase:**

- A petition must be supported by at least 30% of eligible voting faculty within the unit.
- The petition is submitted through a secure, confidential, and verifiable system administered by the Faculty Senate Office.
- The Senate Office verifies eligibility and threshold compliance within a defined timeline (typically within five business days).

**Notification and Meeting:**

- Upon verification, all eligible faculty are notified in writing.
- A special faculty meeting is scheduled within a defined window (14–30 days).
- The full resolution text and supporting materials are distributed in advance.
- The initiating faculty present the resolution.
- The administrator is provided an opportunity to respond.

**Deliberation and Voting:**

- A quorum requires at least 50% participation of eligible faculty.
- Voting is conducted via a secure, confidential ballot administered by the Senate Office.
- Approval requires a two-thirds majority of votes cast.

**Certification and Communication:**

- Results are certified within five business days.
- A formal report is distributed to faculty, the administrator, the administrator’s supervisor, and the Provost.

This structure ensures that the process reflects broad faculty engagement, maintains fairness, and produces a credible institutional signal.

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**B. Senior Administrators**

Given their institution-wide responsibilities, a more structured and rigorous process applies to senior administrators.

**Initiation:**

- A petition may be initiated through:
  - (i) a majority vote of the Senate Agenda Committee,
  - (ii) 30% of Faculty Senate membership, or
  - (iii) 25% of the full faculty electorate.
- The petition must include a clear statement of concerns and supporting rationale.

**Review Process:**

- An Ad Hoc Review Committee is established to gather information, solicit input, and ensure procedural fairness.
- The administrator receives formal notice and may submit a written response and address the Senate.

**Voting:**

- Voting is conducted by secure ballot across the full faculty electorate.
- A quorum of at least 50% participation is required.
- Approval requires a majority of votes cast.

**Outcome:**

- Results are transmitted to the President and/or Board of Trustees.
- A formal written response is required within 30 days outlining any actions or further review.

This design reflects both the scale of impact and the need for procedural rigor at the institutional level.

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**VII. Safeguards and Protections**

To ensure fairness and prevent misuse, the Committee incorporated multiple safeguards:

- High initiation thresholds to ensure broad support
- Confidential handling of petitions and ballots
- Defined timelines to prevent procedural manipulation

- Protection against retaliation for participants
- Opportunity for administrator response at multiple stages
- Limitations on repeated petitions within a defined period
- Authority to dismiss frivolous or procedurally deficient petitions

These safeguards are essential to maintaining credibility and institutional trust.

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### **VIII. Response to Feedback and Concerns**

The Committee carefully evaluated feedback suggesting that the proposal may be redundant or overly broad.

On redundancy:

The Committee finds this concern unpersuasive. Existing evaluation processes do not provide a faculty-initiated, event-driven mechanism to express loss of confidence. The proposed process addresses a fundamentally different governance function.

On breadth:

The Committee notes that the procedures are, in fact, highly specific. They include clearly defined thresholds, timelines, voting rules, and procedural steps. These elements reduce, rather than increase, the risk of biased or inconsistent application.

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### **IX. Institutional Rationale and Benefits**

The Committee believes the adoption of these procedures provides significant institutional value:

- Establishes a legitimate and structured channel for faculty voice
- Reduces reliance on informal or ad hoc actions
- Enhances transparency and consistency in governance
- Reinforces accountability while preserving due process
- Aligns the University with established norms across peer institutions

Importantly, the process is advisory and does not directly effect removal. Its purpose is to ensure that faculty concerns are formally recognized and require institutional response.

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## **X. Recommendations**

The Shared Governance Committee recommends that:

1. The Faculty Senate adopt the proposed no-confidence procedures as a Senate-approved protocol.
2. The procedures be incorporated into the Faculty Handbook.
3. The University monitor implementation and revisit the procedures periodically to ensure effectiveness and alignment with governance needs.

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## **Conclusion**

This proposal reflects extensive research, careful deliberation, and a strong commitment to balancing faculty voice with procedural fairness. The Committee believes that formalizing no-confidence procedures strengthens shared governance, enhances institutional resilience, and provides a necessary mechanism for addressing extraordinary circumstances in a clear and responsible manner.