

INSTRUCTION COUNCIL

MINUTES

Thursday, May 7, 2026

126 ITLE or Zoom

<https://okstate-edu.zoom.us/j/93408932681?pwd=k7XfZJyUQZIDaBosY89x45j3PHDFfs.1>

Meeting ID: 934 0893 2681

Passcode: 097849

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

In attendance: Laurie Beets, Larry Burns, Aaron Christensen, Cynda Clary, Chris Francisco (Chair), Craig Freeman, Richard Frohock, Jami Fullerton, Jeff Hartman, Ty Hawkins, Kelva Hunger, Diane Jones, James Knecht, Marlys Mason, Christine Ormsbee, Rita Peaster, Darius Prier, Carisa Ramming, Rebecca Sheehan, Candace Thrasher, Ronna Vanderslice, Ashley Varnell.

Meeting was called to order at 9:01am.

1. Faculty Council recommendation on syllabi for courses without a regularly-scheduled meeting time – Chris Francisco

Francisco opened the meeting with a discussion centered on a Faculty Council recommendation regarding syllabi for courses without a regular scheduled meeting time, including independent studies, directed readings, thesis, and dissertation hours. Sheehan provided background that the issue originated in Graduate Council discussions concerning disputes between faculty and students over expectations and performance in these types of courses. Because many of these courses are currently exempt from the university syllabus policy, there are often no written expectations or agreements to reference when grade appeals or complaints arise. The recommendation was framed as a way to protect both students and instructors by ensuring there is some documented understanding of course expectations and progress.

Considerable discussion focused on the wording of the proposed recommendation, particularly the use of the word “should” rather than stronger language such as “shall” or “must.” Several members expressed concern that “should” might make the policy difficult to enforce and could lead some faculty to ignore it altogether. Others noted that most faculty acting in good faith would likely view the recommendation as a helpful reminder to formalize expectations, especially for newer faculty members. It was clarified that the Graduate Council’s original language had been more prescriptive and that the softer wording emerged later during Faculty Council Academic Standards and Policies discussions.

Members also discussed whether these expectations should be governed at the institutional policy level or handled within individual departments. Some members expressed concern that the recommendation grouped together very different types of courses, such as independent studies and dissertation research, which often require significant flexibility and vary substantially across disciplines. Others argued that the proposal intentionally allows for flexibility by specifying that a “syllabus, written plan, or contract” could satisfy the requirement. The intent, according to the discussion, is not to impose a single format but to ensure there is some written understanding of expectations for the semester, even if that understanding is relatively simple and adaptable to changing research conditions.

A substantial portion of the conversation focused on thesis and dissertation hours. Members noted recurring problems in which students receive satisfactory research grades for multiple semesters without clear benchmarks for progress, only to later face unsatisfactory evaluations or dismissal from programs. The proposed written agreements were described as a way to clarify semester-by-semester goals, such as data collection, archival research, writing, or other milestones, while still recognizing that research outcomes are inherently unpredictable. Members emphasized that such plans should focus on reasonable expectations and progress rather than guaranteeing specific research results.

Discussion also highlighted that communication failures can occur among faculty at all ranks and are not solely attributable to students. Frohock noted that similar misunderstandings arise in honors thesis and pre-thesis hours and expressed support for having written expectations in place. Others observed that departments and dissertation committees already review student progress, though concerns remain about inconsistent expectations and lack of accountability across programs.

Several members requested additional time to consult with department heads and faculty before moving forward. Francisco noted that the recommendation had only recently come from Faculty Council and had not received extensive discussion there, though it had been discussed more thoroughly in Academic Standards and Policies. The group agreed that additional feedback from departments would be valuable, particularly regarding whether the language should remain advisory (“should”) or become mandatory (“must” or “shall”). The item was tabled until the next meeting to allow members to gather input from their respective units. Francisco emphasized that the delay was not problematic and that the goal was to demonstrate careful consideration of the Faculty Council recommendation while ensuring sufficient faculty feedback before any final action.

2. Curriculum

Course Action Summaries:

College of Education and Human Sciences

Prier reported that Nursing had engaged in productive discussions with representatives from Spears School of Business regarding overlap between proposed nursing courses and existing business coursework. The conversations focused on ensuring that nursing courses containing business-oriented language or leadership concepts did not unnecessarily duplicate existing offerings in Spears. As a result of those discussions, several revised course titles were developed collaboratively.

Prier noted that the discussions also opened opportunities for future collaboration between the programs, including potential consultation with Spears faculty as nursing leadership programming continues to develop. Members discussed possibilities such as shared lectures, seminars, or other collaborative instructional opportunities moving forward.

Hawkins moved to approve, and Clary seconded. Instruction Council members approved the College of Education and Human Sciences course action summary.

Program Modifications:

College of Arts and Sciences

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology (186)

Course requirement change

- Theory-related coursework changed from 6 hours to 3-6 hours
- Research-related coursework changed from 15 hours to 6-15 hours
- Comprehensive area coursework changed from 12 hours to 6 hours
- Electives changed from 39-42 hours to 14-30 hours
- Pro-Seminar changed from 1 hour to 0-1 hour

- Remove option for entry directly from a Bachelor's degree
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: To accommodate students who obtained their Master's degree from OSU. Clarifying that students must earn their Master's degree before admission to the program will be considered.

Hawkins explained that the Sociology program is currently undergoing Academic Program Review, during which the department has been evaluating multiple aspects of its graduate and undergraduate offerings simultaneously. As part of that process, faculty identified the need to better align the relationship between the M.S. and Ph.D. programs in Sociology, particularly regarding how coursework and credit hours transfer and apply between the two degrees. Hawkins noted that the department has also experienced a significant shift in student interest away from traditional sociology and toward criminology, especially at the undergraduate level, where enrollment growth has been substantial. While that trend has not translated as strongly to the graduate level, the department is working to improve graduate programming and clarify academic pathways for students. The proposed modifications are intended to streamline the progression from the M.S. into the Ph.D. by ensuring that students formally receive the master's degree before advancing further into doctoral studies and by clearly defining how coursework completed at Oklahoma State University applies toward continued Ph.D. enrollment.

Freeman moved to approve, and Frohock seconded. Instruction Council members approved the College of Arts and Sciences program modification.

College of Education and Human Sciences

Graduate Certificate in Building Level Leadership (541)

Course requirement change

- Remove the required courses section and select 6 hours from the following
- Students will select 12 credit hours from a list of course options
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: To align the program with certification requirements.

Master of Science in Dietetics (264)

Course requirement change

- NSCI 5963 is now NSCI 5962
- Reduce electives to 22 credit hours
- Total credit hours will decrease from 32 to 30 credit hours
- Reason for requested change: To align the requirements and total credit hours with the Interactive Distance Education Alliance.

Master of Science in Design and Merchandising (051)

Degree requirement change

- Remove GRE
- Reason for requested action: To remove barriers to admission.

Course requirement change

- Option in Interior Design
 - Remove DM 5001 and DHM 5112
 - Require DM 5093
 - Add REMS 5953 and DM 5113
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: Updating coursework to better meet the needs of the industry.

Graduate Certificate in District Level Leadership (542)

Course requirement change

- Remove the required courses section and select 6 hours from the following
- Students will select 12 credit hours from a list of course options
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: To align the program with certification requirements.

Doctor of Education in Higher Education

Program deletion

- No students are currently enrolled in the program
- Program deletion is effective immediately
- Reason for requested action: The Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies: Higher Education replaced this program.

Education Specialist in School Psychology (291)

Course requirement change

- Reduce SPSY 5110 from 2 credit hours to 1 credit hour
- Remove SPSY 6143
- Remove 2 credit hours of SPSY 5000 and SPSY 6210
- Total credit hours will decrease from 85 to 77 credit hours
- Reason for requested action: Updating degree requirements to better address students' needs.

Master of Science in Teaching, Learning and Leadership (057)

Option deletion

- Delete option in Workforce and Adult Education
- Delete option in Gifted and Talented Education
- No students are currently enrolled
- Reason for requested action: The options were previously suspended, and there are no plans to reinstate them.

Prier explained that the proposed changes primarily focused on improving curricular consistency, aligning programs with accreditation and licensure standards, updating degree requirements to reflect current national trends, and clarifying student pathways through several graduate programs.

Freeman moved to approve, and Sheehan seconded. Instruction Council members approved the College of Education and Human Sciences program modifications.

Francisco noted that another certificate proposal from CEHS, which had appeared on an earlier agenda, was still undergoing revisions to its name and program description. Prier explained that CEHS is working carefully on the wording to better communicate the translational and student success goals of the program. Members were advised to watch for an email vote once the revisions are finalized so the proposal can continue moving through the approval process in time for upcoming Council of Deans and OSU/A&M Board consideration.

Academic Affairs

Bachelor of University Studies in University Studies (025)

Course requirement change

- Specify that 18 credit hours must include course subject areas offered by the student's home college.
- Students must meet the 30 hours of residency requirements, in addition to degree requirements.
- Clarify that a BUS does not lead to certification.
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: To obtain consistency of requirements across all colleges.

Francisco explained that the proposal simply formalized and codified decisions previously developed and approved by the working group during the prior year. Francisco acknowledged that, although the working group's recommendations had already been accepted in practice, the formal curricular paperwork had never been submitted. Thrasher identified the oversight and noted that the official approval process still needed to be completed in order to properly document the changes institutionally. Members were reminded that the proposal contained no substantive changes beyond what they had already reviewed and approved previously.

Freeman moved to approve, and Hawkins seconded. Instruction Council members approved the Academic Affairs program modification.

Center for Health Sciences

Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Sciences (002)

Course requirement change

- Add BIOM 5641 as alternate for BIOM 6922
- Change BIOM 6000 to 20 to 40 credit hours
- Change electives from 26 hours to 14-34 credit hours
- Total credit hours will not change
- Reason for requested action: To update degree requirements to align with departmental practices.

Graduate Certificate in Forensic Criminal Intelligence (New)

New certificate request

- Delivery method: Electronic
- Total credit hours: 12
- Reason for requested action: To prepare students and professionals with the analytical skills, investigative methods, and applied knowledge required to collect, evaluate, and interpret criminal intelligence in support of public safety and security. The program is designed to bridge the gap between law enforcement, forensic science, and intelligence analysis by equipping graduates to identify patterns of criminal behavior, assess threats, and provide actionable insights to decision-makers.

Graduate Certificate in Forensic Genealogy (New)

New certificate request

- Delivery method: Electronic
- Total credit hours: 12
- Reason for requested action: To equip students and professionals with the specialized knowledge and applied skills needed to use genealogical methods in forensic contexts. The certificate is designed to prepare graduates to contribute to criminal investigations, civil legal disputes, and human identification efforts by bridging traditional genealogical research with forensic science.

Graduate Certificate in Medical Education (New)

New certificate request

- Delivery method: Electronic
- Total credit hours: 12
- Reason for requested action: To prepare residents for careers in academic medicine by cultivating skills in scholarly teaching, educational research, and effective pedagogy.

Graduate Certificate in Medical Sciences (279)

Online delivery of an existing program

- Reason for requested action: To meet student demand for online access.

Christensen explained that the proposed modifications to the Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Sciences involved an internal restructuring of coursework and research credit distributions rather than any change in total degree requirements. In addition, Christensen reviewed 3 new certificate requests, as well as revisions to the Graduate Certificate in Medical Sciences, which currently serves as a popular post-baccalaureate preparatory program for students pursuing admission to medical school. The existing one-year program provides foundational coursework in the medical sciences to strengthen applicants' preparation and competitiveness for medical school admissions. Due to increasing demand for remote access, the program will continue offering its existing in-person format while also adding a fully online delivery option.

During discussion, Hawkins highlighted the potential interdisciplinary interest in the forensic certificate programs, particularly from Sociology and Criminology students. It was noted that Sociology has experienced rapid undergraduate growth in criminology and is actively working to expand graduate-level enrollment and research opportunities in those areas. Hawkins suggested that the forensic programs could create strong collaborative recruitment and research opportunities between the units and recommended connecting with Sociology Department Head Kelly Sittner regarding possible partnerships and student recruitment efforts. Christensen expressed appreciation for the suggestion and indicated interest in future collaboration.

Sheehan moved to approve, and Freeman seconded. Instruction Council members approved the Center for Health Sciences program modifications and new program requests.

3. Other

Graduate course low-enrollment exception requests

Francisco thanked those who had already submitted final requests and acknowledged that responsibility for graduate course management varies across colleges and units. Members who had not yet submitted final versions were encouraged to do so promptly. It was noted that most requests reviewed thus far had been well prepared, thoughtfully justified, and demonstrated good-faith efforts by colleges and departments to evaluate which courses genuinely needed to continue running despite low enrollment.

Particular concern was expressed regarding justifications that simply stated enrollment would increase by August without providing additional context. Francisco emphasized that such explanations were insufficient, especially for advanced graduate courses at the 6000-level or higher that would not typically rely on incoming first-year students. Additional detail is expected regarding projected enrollment, including whether incoming students are anticipated to enroll or whether there are other documented reasons for delayed registration. It was suggested that in many cases the issue stems from continuing graduate students delaying enrollment, a situation viewed sympathetically from a faculty perspective but more critically from an administrative and scheduling standpoint because enrollment decisions must be made in a timely manner.

The group discussed the broader cultural challenge of encouraging graduate students to enroll earlier and the historical tendency in some disciplines for students to wait until late in the registration cycle. Francisco emphasized that such practices are no longer sustainable in the current environment, particularly as the university works to optimize instructional resources and make data-informed scheduling decisions. Several members noted that the review process had already helped identify situations in which students had simply delayed enrollment unnecessarily, allowing departments to address those issues earlier and more effectively. Discussion then shifted to the broader graduate course minimum enrollment expectations, particularly the graduate threshold of eight students. Hawkins observed that faculty across Arts and Sciences generally understand and accept undergraduate minimums such as 12 or 20 students, but many continue to struggle with the expectation of eight graduate students in advanced courses, especially in highly specialized research programs. Concerns were raised that some disciplines, particularly those with small, research-intensive doctoral programs, may never consistently reach that threshold while still maintaining academically necessary offerings. Suggestions were raised about the possibility of future flexibility or tradeoffs in enrollment targets,

though Francisco emphasized that any adjustments would require careful consideration across disciplines and administrative levels.

Several members highlighted that the review process itself has produced valuable outcomes by forcing departments to more carefully track enrollment patterns, distinguish between continuing and incoming graduate students, and better understand the realistic scale and structure of their graduate programs. Francisco noted that departments are now being asked to provide more precise estimates of continuing and incoming master's and doctoral students and to monitor actual enrollment activity more closely. The discussion emphasized that if enrollment thresholds are adjusted in the future, departments will also be expected to consistently meet those revised standards with fewer exceptions.

Graduate College commencement

Sheehan provided a reminder regarding graduate commencement procedures. Faculty were asked not to sit on the floor during commencement ceremonies unless they were actively hooding a graduating student. Due to space limitations, designated seating areas for faculty have been arranged in the upper levels instead. Sheehan explained that participation numbers continue to grow and that many students request to participate even after RSVP deadlines, creating ongoing logistical and space challenges. Sheehan and Francisco expressed appreciation for recent improvements in commencement planning and registration systems, including programming support that has reduced administrative tension surrounding the ceremonies.

Before adjournment, Francisco thanked members for their work throughout the semester and expressed appreciation for the collaboration and effort demonstrated across colleges and committees. Members were encouraged to enjoy some opportunity for rest at the end of the semester and were reminded to submit final grades on time.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:45am.

Minutes were recorded by Ashley Varnell.