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University Senates Conference
Academic Affairs & Research Committee
Minutes

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DATE: Thursday, October 16, 2025

PLACE: I Hotel & Conference Center
      Alma Mater Room
      1900 S 1st Street
      Champaign, IL

PRESENT: Clancy, Herrera, Kalita, Mi, Symes, Wink

ABSENT: None

Meeting Guest: Nicholas Jones

I. Call to Order
  The meeting was called to order at 7:38 a.m. by Professor Clancy.

II. Approval of remote participation
  None

III. Public Comment
  None

IV. Meeting with EVP Jones

  a. AARC inquired about how the UI System is making it easier to work across the campuses.

   EVP Jones responded that all three campuses are using the same learning management system (LMS).

  b. Professor Herrera inquired about having more stackable degrees across different campuses in order to reach new markets, to serve new communities of students. This should help with agility, the demographic cliff, and other shocks to the system.

   EVP Jones responded that at the end of the day it is up to faculty to figure out how to make it happen. There are currently "pseudo-stackable credentials" now. There are degrees based a bit more on time (number of semesters) than content. In the future the hope is there will be multiple different kinds of ways to get degrees across the system. Lots of non-traditional students who aren't served by residential learning.

  c. Professor Herrera expressed interest in EVP Jones's thoughts on how to build more system-wide collaborations

   EVP Jones responded that the UI System has not leveraged technology as much as possible yet, and clarified that the goal is not to be the same as Penn State or ASU, but instead need to determine the best approach for the entire UI System. As an example: what mentoring to fill the gap in online education would look like. This is the model used by IVSA (Illinois Virtual Schools & Academy), coaching and

mentoring while students take online classes.

    d. Mini-symposia: How to discuss issues of academic freedom and challenging topics. Faculty have the opportunity, obligation, and expertise to teach and do research in current events and have excellence in those places.
        i. Professor Wink inquired about what the University of Illinois Board of Trustees thinks about the work of faculty. Do they understand that often the work needs to be confidential, cutting edge in order to seek knowledge?
        ii. Professor Herrera inquired about the priority of this topic.

        EVP Jones responded: How do we have this extension program that has built deep trust? Once upon a time faculty would be connected to farmers, for instance, and "tell them what they didn't want to hear." Yet many of those farmers likely voted in a way that caused us and them direct harm.
        1. Professor Clancy: What would it look like to put our humanists, social scientists, artists in front of our broader community? Extension is largely agriculture and sciences.

           EVP Jones: our communities have changed, and our approach has maybe not changed. Can we leverage or complement rather than ask extension to do more? Can we be more embedded across the state?

        2. Professor Wink: This is very similar to conversations had early in DPI (Discovery Partners Institute). DPI was supposed, in part, to fill the gap of the topics extension did not have.

           EVP Jones: An example was when steel and coal collapsed, Penn State observed rather than helped. Illinois has chronic needs. How can we step in and address that? How can we become the state's go-to place, putting uncomfortable ideas in front of people sometimes.

        3. Professor Symes continued to reflect on ways we make the state flourish? Helping people engage with technologies, helping with health, etc – not just agricultural flourishing.

        4. As part of the wrap up to this broader conversation, EVP Jones offered that his office can help figure out budget for the mini-symposia, Professor Clancy can reach out to Sarah Gantz

V. <u>Approval of the Minutes from September 22, 2025</u>
Professor Herrera made a motion to approve the minutes from September 22, 2025, as amended spelling out "KYR" to "Know Your Rights." Professor Kalita seconded the motion. No discussion. The minutes were approved with a voice vote by AARC Members.

Yes: Clancy, Herrera, Kalita, Mi, Symes, Wink
No: None

Abstain: None

VI.   Today's Business
    a. Discuss AARC Mini Conference Planning

    Once we know the model we know the budget points.
        i.   Professor Wink: inaugural event spring 2026, hybrid. Key question, is it public or private? Can we ensure BOT is at least invited? From there we plan the series that is more extensive and public. Thinking over a two AY plan.

        ii. Professor Herrera: start with U of I committee – bring in school principals, community members, etc, have a real exchange. Educating ourselves first about the needs of the state.

        iii. Everyone is threatened right now, how can we make it clear we're all in this together. Threats, precarity, fears.

        iv. Professor Wink: contacted Illinois Library Association (meeting today! Theme of You Belong Here). What does it mean to be safe in libraries? And it's a place full of contested ideas. This is not a U of I or even higher ed problem, it's a community problem. Teachers in K-12 are also silenced. Doctors – considering trans health.

        v.   Professor Mi: can we link back to the mission of the land grant institution? How can we provide public goods and have faculty and staff exercise academic freedom?

        vi. Professor Symes: What is the overall shape of the goal? Start with spring, and then a series of symposia, bringing in partners with the goal of …. Can we work from existing models like Extension, CARLI (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois), and take what we learn and start operationalizing it in the community? We want to build something sustainable and permanent. IL originally meant to be a small agricultural college that served farmers, and then people realized they could and should reinvent the university. Faculty led because of our expertise that can be placed in the service of the community.

        vii. Lots of positive engagement with term "flourishing."

        viii. Professor Mi: do we have more of a focus or keep it broad?

        ix. Multi: an inclusion agenda is important here, how can we center restorative justice and reparations, being intentional about how we are thinking about Illinois while acknowledging that we can't do it all. Thinking on the history of our institutions and being honest about that. Also consider our international population and how Illinois is a global university system.

x.   Narrowing in on knowledge workers – teachers, librarians, professors, as well as non-traditional non-Western ways of knowing as with Indigenous knowledge production – as maybe where to focus first efforts. Well-grounded and well-intended work needs to be attempted and needs space to sometimes be wrong.

xi.   How can these efforts be tied into shared governance. If we have all this expertise, why are we not more involved in decision-making? The more you can empower students they know a lot of things, they just need to learn to articulate them, the better.

b.   First mini-symposia topic: Knowledge work: challenges and opportunities. A focus on how to support the flourishing of the people of Illinois via our knowledge workers. Ensuring that this is both global and Indigenous in our thinking of the levels/layers of knowledge work, history.

    i.   What can we offer to understand, document, integrate our various kinds of knowledge work and production?

c.   Budget concerns, things to bring to Sarah Gantz: do we know what it cost to do the one in the 90s. Involved assembling a committee of 20, gathering, and producing a report. There were outside speakers.

Next steps: we all use our networks to think through who we could invite to think through participation across all three campuses and a wider net across the state. Ideally, we want 20-30 people to be a part of the initial conversation.

VII.   <u>New Business</u>
None

VIII.   <u>Old Business</u>
None

IX.   <u>Adjournment</u> - The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 a.m.

Information for Minutes provided by Professor Clancy.

David Perryn
USC Administration