

INSTRUCTION COUNCIL

MINUTES

**Thursday, March 5, 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: Shannon Baker, Laurie Beets, Chad Blew, Aaron Christensen, Cynda Clary, Chris Francisco (Chair), Craig Freeman, Jami Fullerton, Jeff Hartman, Ty Hawkins, Kelva Hunger, Diane Jones, James Knecht, Marlys Mason, Christine Ormsbee, Darius Prier, Carisa Ramming, Jennifer Rudd, Rebecca Sheehan, Ronna Vanderslice, Ashley Varnell.

Meeting was called to order at 9:03am.

1. BUS degree – Chris Francisco

Francisco started by saying that Instruction Council (IC) had discussed Bachelor of University Studies (BUS) degree assessment a month or two prior, and additional conversations had been occurring within the Assessment and Academic Improvement Council (AAIC) group. AAIC is expected to bring forward a proposal regarding assessment, which will be discussed at the April meeting. At that time, IC will review AAIC's recommendations and consider appropriate methods for assessing the BUS degree. Francisco emphasized the importance of demonstrating to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that the institution has a plan in place for assessing the degree, noting that recent assessment efforts have largely relied on voluntary work by Ormsbee and may not represent a sustainable or formally structured process.

The meeting then turned to discussion of a section on the BUS degree request form that asks students to write a few sentences describing their educational objectives or career plans associated with obtaining the degree. Francisco explained that the prompt has been included on the form for many years and recalled that previous administrators returned submissions if the student's response did not adequately address the prompt. Francisco has noticed a number of responses that appeared formulaic or incomplete, often consisting of brief phrases such as "allows to explore multiple areas." In many cases, the wording was identical across multiple submissions from the same advisors, leading to the suspicion that advisors may be entering responses on behalf of students rather than recording the students' own statements. Francisco expressed concern that if the prompt remains on the form, the responses should accurately reflect the student's perspective.

Francisco also shared an example of a particularly thoughtful student response that illustrated the potential value of the prompt. In that case, a student explained how accepting a full-time position

influenced their decision to pursue the BUS degree, allowing them to combine coursework from Education, Human Sciences, and Organizational Leadership in a way that aligned with their professional role. The reflection demonstrated how the BUS degree enabled the student to synthesize coursework from multiple areas to support a specific career path. Francisco noted that responses like this provide useful insight into how students use the degree and can inform ideas such as stacking certificates or developing new program structures.

IC members discussed the original rationale for including the prompt on the form. One member suggested that when the BUS degree was first created, faculty may have been concerned about students circumventing the rigor of traditional degree programs. In that context, the prompt may have served as a vetting mechanism to ensure that the degree was being used by a distinct group of students with legitimate academic or professional reasons. Another member noted that advisors have historically used the statement primarily to ensure alignment between the student's stated interests and the courses included in the proposed degree plan.

Several IC members observed that the BUS degree serves a wide variety of student needs, which complicates attempts to define a single academic purpose. Many students pursue the degree late in their academic careers when they are close to graduation but unable to complete the requirements of their original major due to GPA thresholds, course requirements, or other constraints. Others may already have employment opportunities that require a completed degree, making the BUS option an efficient path to graduation. Some members noted that these reasons are valid and honest motivations, even if they are not framed as traditional academic objectives.

IC members also questioned whether the statement is necessary if it is not actively used in decision-making. Several indicated that within their colleges the responses are rarely referenced when reviewing BUS degree requests. One member pointed out that students changing majors to other traditional programs are not required to explain their reasoning in writing, suggesting that the BUS requirement may be inconsistent with other degree change processes.

At the same time, the discussion highlighted potential value in collecting such information for assessment purposes. Because BUS degrees do not share a common set of courses or standardized learning outcomes, traditional assessment methods are difficult to apply. Some members suggested that the student statement—or a modified version of it—could provide useful contextual data about why students pursue the BUS degree, such as degree completion needs, employment requirements, or interest in interdisciplinary study. Another possibility discussed was replacing the open-ended prompt with categorical options that would allow the institution to gather more structured data for assessment. Francisco concluded that no immediate action would be taken regarding the prompt. Instead, the issue will remain under consideration while the broader discussion of BUS degree assessment continues. Francisco indicated a preference that, as long as the prompt remains on the form, responses should reflect the student's own words rather than standardized language entered by advisors. Francisco plans to consult with DSAS and others for additional perspective and, in the interim, to encourage more careful attention to the responses submitted on BUS forms. The topic may be revisited in conjunction with the upcoming assessment discussions. Francisco expressed appreciation for the thoughtful discussion.

2. HLC update – Chris Francisco

Francisco provided an update on preparations for the upcoming HLC accreditation review. Francisco began by expressing appreciation to the many individuals who have contributed significant time and effort to the process. Particular thanks were extended to the HLC steering committee, the University Assessment Team (UAT), and others who have worked extensively on drafting the institutional assurance argument. Peaster was recognized for her substantial work on the federal compliance section, with Francisco noting that her expertise as registrar has been invaluable in addressing academic compliance requirements. Burns was also acknowledged for providing a large set of institutional data to support the evidence files, which will strengthen the documentation accompanying the argument. Many individuals across campus, including several members present at the meeting, have contributed information and supporting materials.

Following circulation of the draft document earlier in the week, the team continued revising the text with the goal of reducing the overall word count. The draft currently stands at approximately 115 pages and is approaching the HLC's recommended length. Francisco plans to complete two additional rounds of edits: one in the middle of the following week and a final round at the beginning of spring break. After those edits are completed, the document will be finalized and locked in the HLC system while the team is attending the HLC conference in Chicago.

Francisco confirmed that the draft had been distributed to meeting participants and to the university's vice presidents, with the option for them to share it within their divisions. Anyone who did not receive a copy but wishes to review it was encouraged to contact Francisco. While the draft is largely complete, the team is continuing to add evidence files and make minor corrections prior to final submission.

Initial communication with the HLC review team chair has been positive. Francisco reported that Dr. Sweeney from HLC provided favorable feedback to the team chair regarding her campus visit, noting that she had a strong impression of the institution following conversations with campus leaders and especially her meeting with the university president. Francisco indicated that bringing Dr. Sweeney to campus had been a helpful step in establishing a positive initial impression before the formal review. Francisco also provided preliminary information about the schedule for the HLC review team's campus visit. While the schedule remains tentative until the reviewers have read the assurance argument, current plans include three open forums on Monday, April 20. Specific times have not yet been finalized because the review team may request changes after reviewing the report. The deans are tentatively scheduled to meet with the review team late in the afternoon on Monday, April 20. Additionally, IC and DSAS members are expected to meet jointly with the review team on the morning of Tuesday, April 21. Francisco explained that the reviewers will likely find it valuable to speak with individuals who are closely involved in student success initiatives and who have a broad understanding of campus operations.

In preparation for these meetings, Francisco plans to provide written summaries outlining key issues that may arise during discussions with the review team. These materials will likely be distributed as hard copies rather than through email. Topics likely to be discussed include general education and cross-campus collaboration, particularly how units work together to support student success.

Reviewers often ask about partnerships among units such as scholarships and financial aid, admissions, the bursar's office, and academic departments. One recommendation from the mock peer review was that it is particularly effective when participants highlight successful initiatives outside their own units. For example, a dean might reference an effective practice developed in another college or office and explain how it has informed their own work. Francisco noted that campus leaders practiced

this approach during the mock review and found it to be a useful way to demonstrate institutional collaboration.

Francisco also shared several practical suggestions for interacting with the review team. Participants should remain fully engaged during meetings, maintain eye contact, and avoid distractions such as checking phones. One attendee noted that during a recent HLC site visit at another institution, reminders about putting phones away were posted outside interview rooms and offered to share those preparation materials with Francisco.

Additional preparation for the visit will occur through the Academic Leadership Series. The originally planned budget-focused session has been postponed due to ongoing changes to the university's budget model. Instead, Francisco will lead a session in early April focused on the upcoming HLC visit.

During that session, department heads, deans, and associate deans will receive an overview of the institution's assurance argument. Rather than expecting participants to read the full document, the session will summarize the key points of the institutional narrative and explain how the university is presenting its case to the accreditation team. Francisco will also discuss areas where the institution acknowledges room for improvement and how those topics are being addressed in the argument.

In response to Clary, Francisco indicated that feedback on the student success sections of the draft would be particularly valuable. Specifically, members were asked to identify any important initiatives or practices that may have been overlooked or that require clearer explanation. While most sections of the document are considered strong, additional supporting evidence is still being added to Criterion Four, which focuses on institutional resources and budgeting practices. This section has required careful framing due to the recent presidential transition and evolving budget priorities on campus. Francisco noted that while the institution has experienced some financial challenges during the previous administration, the team is working to present the information in a balanced and constructive way.

3. Curriculum

Course Action Summaries:

N/A

Program Modifications:

N/A

4. Other

HLC and Sub-120 Hour Bachelor's Degrees

Francisco provided an additional update related to ongoing conversations with HLC regarding proposals for sub-120 hour bachelor's degrees. University leadership has been communicating with peer institutions across the state and region that are also accredited by HLC in order to gather information about how HLC intends to handle these requests. Francisco noted that some information has also been shared by OSRHE staff, and while not all details have been formally issued in writing by HLC, the guidance comes from trusted sources and individuals who have communicated directly with HLC representatives.

Based on current information, HLC appears likely to limit institutions that do not already offer sub-120 hour bachelor's degrees to submitting no more than two such proposals in their initial request. This limitation had not previously been publicly communicated. The university has not yet decided which programs would be included if only two proposals can move forward initially, and Francisco indicated that these decisions will require further discussion and likely consultation with the president.

The approval process for the first set of proposals is expected to require a formal change visit from HLC staff. This would involve a one-day campus visit as part of the review process. Current estimates suggest that approval may take five to eight months after submission. Because the information regarding this process is still evolving, Francisco emphasized that the details should be understood as well-supported preliminary guidance rather than finalized policy.

According to the information currently available, institutions may be able to submit additional programs after the initial two are approved. It appears that a second round might allow up to three additional proposals, though institutions seeking approval for more than three programs could potentially work with their staff liaison to justify additional requests. Francisco suggested that the limitation may be primarily due to staffing constraints, as many institutions across the region are likely to pursue similar program modifications. Francisco acknowledged that this process will likely proceed more slowly than state policymakers might prefer. While there is significant interest from state leaders in implementing sub-120 hour bachelor's programs quickly, accreditation requirements necessarily involve a more deliberate timeline. Francisco indicated that a realistic timeline for implementation is likely Fall 2027 rather than Fall 2026, given the anticipated approval process and required campus visit.

During discussion, a member asked whether approval of the initial programs might streamline approval for later proposals. Francisco responded that there has been no indication that subsequent proposals will require additional site visits unless they fall outside the institution's established mission or scope. Historically, most new program approvals have not required a full review, and Francisco anticipates that most of the proposed sub-120 hour degrees would be considered within the institution's existing scope of activity.

However, Francisco cautioned that if HLC limits the first round to two programs per institution, some proposals currently under discussion will likely not move forward during the initial phase. Current plans—subject to change—are to continue routing proposed programs through the OSU/A&M Board of Regents and the state regents before submitting them to HLC. The president is also consulting with the state chancellor to ensure that the university's workforce development initiatives are accurately represented as these proposals move forward.

Course Enrollment Thresholds and Deadlines for Course Minimum Exception Requests

While a broader decision regarding undergraduate courses is still pending due to newly received enrollment data, Francisco proposed establishing a specific timeline for graduate course exception requests.

Balancing feedback from graduate coordinators and department heads, Francisco suggested that requests for graduate course minimum-enrollment exceptions be submitted during the week of April 27. This timing is slightly earlier than previously discussed but would allow the Provost's office to review requests quickly—typically within approximately 24 hours—and provide decisions before final exams week. This would allow departments time to inform students and adjust schedules if necessary while students are still on campus. Francisco emphasized that this deadline is not intended to penalize programs whose graduate enrollments occur later in the process. For example, first-year graduate courses that enroll students in late summer, including international students or adult learners, would not be expected to meet early enrollment thresholds. Departments will be asked to include projected enrollment estimates and explanatory notes when submitting exception requests. For instance, departments could note that enrollment is expected to increase later due to incoming students or historically strong late registration patterns.

Ramming raised a question regarding cross-listed or combined undergraduate/graduate courses (e.g., courses offered at both the 4000 and 5000 levels). Francisco clarified that such courses will be treated as

graduate courses for purposes of minimum enrollment thresholds but will not be subject to the earlier cancellation timeline typically associated with graduate courses. This approach allows departments additional time to enroll upper-division undergraduate students who may register later in the semester. The discussion also touched briefly on student concerns related to bursar payments affecting enrollment timing. Fullerton noted that some students report that they have final bursar payments in mid-May. Beets indicated that students who are current on payment plans typically should not face enrollment holds, though individual circumstances can vary. She encouraged IC members to send students to the Bursar's office to work with these students. In cases where financial issues are affecting enrollment timing, departments are encouraged to note those factors in their projected enrollment estimates when requesting course exceptions.

Francisco reiterated that the goal of the exception review process is to ensure responsible course scheduling while allowing reasonable flexibility. While some low-enrollment courses may need to be canceled in accordance with university policy, Francisco emphasized a desire to allow courses to run when there is a reasonable expectation of sufficient enrollment or a compelling academic rationale. Several department heads have acknowledged that, while the policy can be frustrating, it has also encouraged consolidation of certain low-enrollment offerings and more efficient scheduling.

Finally, the group briefly discussed the formatting of the exception request spreadsheets used in previous semesters. Francisco confirmed that the existing format worked well but noted that the most important information includes the course prefix and number, CRN, actual enrollment, projected enrollment, and explanatory notes. Francisco indicated flexibility regarding formatting as long as the key information is included. The Provost's office will send a reminder about the submission timeline, though departments are encouraged to begin preparing their requests in advance of the week of April 27.

CAS Course Action Requests

Francisco noted that Jones had circulated several off-cycle course action requests from the College of Arts and Sciences earlier that morning in preparation for the next meeting. Francisco highlighted one specific course action that may need to be addressed more quickly than the others. The course in question is currently listed under a German (GERM) prefix but is not actually taught in German. Instead, it is a Languages and Literatures course and would be more appropriately categorized with the LL prefix. As currently listed, the course appears to satisfy the university's 4000-level language requirement under the German prefix, which could imply that students completing the course have demonstrated advanced proficiency in German. In practice, the course does not provide instruction in the German language and therefore should not count toward the language proficiency requirement in that way.

Because the current catalog listing could create a misleading impression about the nature of the course and the language proficiency it represents, Francisco suggested making the prefix change as soon as possible. To expedite the process and ensure the correction appears in the catalog for Fall 2026 enrollment, Francisco indicated that an email vote may be conducted rather than waiting for the next in-person IC meeting. Members were asked to review the proposal and consider whether they have any concerns prior to the email vote, which Francisco expects to send early the following week.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:54am.

Minutes were recorded by Ashley Varnell.