

General Assembly Minutes, 23 July 2026

In attendance: Bryce Bulson, Vincent Mateescu, Julie Orr, Collin McGee, Sudhakar Jamkhandi, Brett Settles, Jeffrey Yeager, Darrel Malamisura, Joel Vance, Shannon Bowling, Billy Davis, Darrell Thompson, Dharshana Arachchi, Jack Sheffler, Hannah Gates, Vanessa Godfrey, Katherine St. Clair, Sarah Keffer, Scott Pitt, Sheila Sargent-Martin, Tabitha Young, Terene Stiltner, Thomas Russell, Sarita Rhonemus, Amanda Lessard, Ashish Patel, Charlie Chen, Amanda Matoushek, Ethan Harvey, Bonnie Reese, Amanda Quesenberry, Dan Trent, Kristin Hicks, Darrin Martin, Niranjana Warnakulasooriya Mahagrunge, Tammy Mollohan

Meeting called to order at 4:01 pm

Motion to approve minutes made by Jack Sheffler and seconded by Jeff Yeager. Motion approved via acclamation

Key decisions and action items (who / what / by when)

- Reprint: Contracts will be reprinted after corrections; Dr. Rhonemus is managing reprinting and font adjustments to reduce page count. Faculty must submit edits quickly so printing can proceed (Dr. Rhonemus requested changes urgently — “I need that like within 30 minutes” during the meeting).
- Remove clause: The thousand-point grading scale clause will be removed (Dr. Rhonemus confirmed it was taken out).
- Remove ADA compliance spring-2028 deadline: The compliance-by-Spring-2028 clause referencing a required timeline for ADA was removed from the contract draft; further discussion on ADA compliance to occur once semester starts.
- Professional conduct clause: The group agreed to retain the first paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph, but remove the last sentence of the second paragraph that they felt risked restricting academic freedom. Dr. Rhonemus to accept and make that change; committee to define terms like “accuracy” and “professional judgment” this semester.
- Final exams / in-seat assessment wording: Revise contract to match faculty handbook practice — limit dean approval requirement to final exams (not every major assessment). Amanda to draft clear language concerning normal instructional workload and in-seat assessment exceptions (she will copy Darrel and Dr. Rhonemus).
- Workload language: Clarify “12 semester credit hours” vs. load hours and adjustments for labs/clinical/low-enrollment courses. Brett and Amanda raised issues; Amanda will draft the specific wording for the normal instructional workload clause. Vincent to record and forward the requested edit items.
- Committee representation and Senate membership: Handbook must be updated to add one senator to each committee and clarify committee membership expectations; Darrel and Vincent to coordinate handbook tweaks and submit for general faculty vote at Faculty Institute.

- Union representative invited: Darrel invited a union representative to attend the Faculty Institute meeting; faculty were advised to consider union membership for grievance support.
 - Next meetings: Executive officers to meet with President Martin on July 29 (officers only). The general faculty meeting previously scheduled for next week was removed; the next general faculty meeting will be at Faculty Institute.
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Issues raised (detailed)

1. Contract draft format and distribution
 - Major complaint: contract length increased from ~1–2 pages to 10 pages without adequate notice or faculty discussion.
 - Dates were incorrect in the draft (Dr. Rhonemus acknowledged an error: missed copying 2026–2027 dates).
 - Several faculty reported not receiving contract email(s); new faculty may not have proper email access. Darrel asked faculty officers to verify all-faculty email lists include new hires.
2. Thousand-point grading scale
 - Identified as a clause not grounded in institutional, state, or federal policy; committee/faculty opposed. Dr. Rhonemus confirmed it will be removed.
3. Professional conduct and academic freedom
 - Jeff Yeager and Amanda raised concerns about vague language in the professional conduct clause that could be used to restrict academic freedom or punish faculty for professional judgments.
 - Consensus: keep the basic professional conduct paragraph, remove the sentence that risked constraining academic freedom, and plan to define terms (“accuracy,” “professional judgment,” “appropriate distinction between personal opinion and institutional representation”) this semester.
4. Accuracy and vagueness of contract language
 - Multiple examples of ambiguous or potentially wide-interpretable language (e.g., “accuracy,” scope of assessments required in-seat).
 - Amanda emphasized that if contract content duplicates policy/handbook language, it should match those sources verbatim rather than rewrite in new phrasing that could alter meaning.
5. In-seat examination / major assessments
 - Contract wording required examinations, major assessments, and final examinations be administered in-seat unless dean-approved — faculty objected because many majors use online submissions for papers/projects (e.g., English 101 essays, STEM projects).
 - Resolution: revise to restrict dean approval requirement to final exams consistent with the faculty handbook; Amanda to draft the change.

6. Instructional workload — credit hours vs. load hours
 - Draft referenced “12 semester credit hours” while the handbook references “load hours” and adjustments for low enrollment and labs/clinical (labs often have different credit/load calculations).
 - Brett, Amanda, and Katherine flagged the need for explicit language allowing adjustments for lab/clinical instruction and low-enrollment courses.
 - Action: Amanda to draft revised workload wording; Dr. Rhonemus requested changes be provided immediately for inclusion.
7. ADA / WCAG / OER and compliance expectations
 - Dr. Rhonemus removed a hard deadline but emphasized that ADA/substantive interaction requirements (federal RSI rules) and WCAG considerations remain critical; the institution is currently out of compliance in places and site visits/audits are expected if not addressed.
 - Faculty expressed concerns about administrative expectations (OER adoption and course remediation) and the support/compensation for that work. Discussion noted grant funding for OER development has ended; faculty hesitant about workload vs. compensation.
8. Jurisdiction clause (applicable law / venue)
 - Sudhakar noted a typo on page 1 (“use of public” -> “use of public office” / correction needed). Also raised question of venue language requiring disputes filed only in Mercer County — faculty suggested adjusting to Mercer County and/or Raleigh County as appropriate. Vincent/Darrel to forward correction to Dr. Rhonemus.
9. Chairs’ compensation and contracts
 - Kristin asked whether chair pay would be separated as stipend versus embedded base pay. It was confirmed that the institution is moving toward separating stipends from base pay, cleaning up embedded chair pay during the next contract cycle; not fixed for this contract round.
10. Committee participation, accountability, and governance
 - Concern over low committee engagement last year and lack of evidence/minutes from committees (affects accreditation and strategic plan reporting).
 - Decision to require a senator on every committee so representatives will report back; update handbook to reflect that.
 - Darrel emphasized need for chairs and committee members to attend and document work; Senators to be included to increase accountability.
11. Grievance handling and leadership concerns
 - Frustration about unresolved earlier grievances (including votes of no confidence) and perceived lack of administrative responsiveness. Darrel and others stated that repeated attempts to address issues (e.g., concerns about institutional leadership) had not produced substantive results.
 - Faculty encouraged others to raise issues at the July 29 officers meeting (other officers besides Darrel asked to bring up specific items).
 - Union representation suggested as backup recourse; Darrel encouraged faculty to consider union membership.

12. Enrollment and registration note

- Current full-time-equivalent undergraduate enrollment is about 20–30 students shy of target; approximately three weeks remain before classes start to boost registrations.

Specific text/typo edits requested (assignments)

- Sudhakar: On page 1, change phrase to “use of public office” (typo correction noted).
- Amanda: Draft wording to change the in-seat assessment clause to restrict dean approval requirement to final exams only; also draft revised language for the “normal instructional workload” clause that clarifies credit vs. load hours and adjustments for labs/clinical and low-enrolled courses. Amanda will copy Darrel and Dr. Rhonemus.
- Brett/Vincent: Note and confirm workload wording adjustments; Vincent to capture edits and forward.
- Vincent: Note jurisdiction concern (Mercer vs. Raleigh County) and send to Dr. Rhonemus for revision.
- Dr. Rhonemus: Remove thousand-point scale and the ADA Spring-2028 deadline from contract; correct contract dates (2026–2027) and reprint after receiving edits.
- General faculty: Submit wording edits for contract reprint immediately to Dr. Rhonemus so printing can proceed; also prepare handbook changes (committee membership/senator clause) for a vote at Faculty Institute.

Follow-up timeline

- July 29: Officers-only meeting with President Martin (time in email; officers to attend and raise officer-level items).
- Immediately/ASAP (Dr. Rhonemus requested within minutes of meeting): Submit contract wording changes (workload language, in-seat assessment wording, jurisdiction typos, etc.) for reprint.
- Before Faculty Institute (this semester): Circulate proposed handbook changes (committee membership addition of senators) for faculty review and vote at the Institute.
- Faculty Institute meeting: General faculty meeting to address remaining contract/handbook issues, committee structure, accreditation prep, and union presentation (union rep invited to attend).

Concerns and risks identified

- Lack of transparency and short notice on contract changes created faculty distrust and concern about hidden or ambiguous policy changes.

- Vague professional conduct language could be used to constrain academic freedom or sanction faculty for professional judgments.
- Rewriting policy/handbook text in the contract (instead of quoting those sources verbatim) risks inconsistent interpretation and enforcement.
- ADA/WCAG and RSI compliance needs significant work; institution may face audits/site visits and lacks full capacity to review all online courses without additional support.
- Low committee engagement and poor documentation compromise accreditation reporting and the strategic plan's demonstrable progress.
- Unresolved governance grievances and perceived inaction on leadership issues are lowering faculty confidence in administrative responsiveness.

Motion to adjourn meeting made by Julie Orr and seconded by Sudhakar Jamkhandi. Motion approved via acclamation. Meeting adjourned at 5:01 pm