

NINTH SENATE REVIEW COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026
232 ENGLISH BUILDING
MINUTES

Present: Chair Nolan Miller, Jenny Amos, Nizam Arain, Hunter Farnham (Zoom), Michael Grossman, Eric Kurt, Beth Meschewski, Kirsten Pullen, Jenny Roether

Absent: Carol Symes, Joyce Tolliver, Jess Williams

1. CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9) was called to order at 12:00 pm with Chair Miller presiding.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No requests received.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 11, 2025 meeting were approved as distributed.

4. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Without objection, SR9 voted to allow remote participation by Farnham.

Chair Miller had a discussion earlier in the week with Jon Hale and Pollyanna Rhee, faculty members of the Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD). Both serve on the ad hoc committee established by HD to conduct an internal review of the honorary degree award process. The ad hoc committee is currently preparing a report on its findings, which is scheduled to be shared with HD at its February 17, 2026, meeting. Hale indicated the preference is to present the report to HD before sharing it more broadly. He also indicated the ad hoc report may not be available until later, prompting discussion about aligning timelines.

Chair Miller had a conversation with Angie Lyons, Chair, Senate Executive Committee (SEC). SR9 is due to provide a report on the honorary degree award process to the SEC by January 23, 2026. It was agreed that the deadline for the report would be extended to February 20, 2026.

Chair Miller asked if SR9 should request the report from the ad hoc committee prior to the February 17, 2026, meeting date for HD. Grossman expressed hesitation about waiting for the report, emphasizing the responsibility of SR9 is to complete the charge it was given. Pullen supported requesting the ad hoc report sooner rather than later and has concerns about how SR9 should proceed if the deliberations for the ad hoc group differ from SR9.

Arain noted SR9 may be able to move forward based on the apparent direction of the work of the ad hoc committee while offering its own perspective.

Chair Miller asked if SR9 should formally request input from HD, noting the current chair and a past chair have been consulted, as well as committee support staff, but not the committee as a whole. Kurt noted his understanding that the ad hoc committee was internally initiated and questioned whether there was value in inviting informal versus formal input. Amos expressed concern that HD may feel excluded from the process.

Chair Miller stated he would write to Prasanta Kalita, HD Chair, to note the extended timeline and to Hale to explain that SR9 cannot delay its work but would welcome any materials the ad hoc committee can provide by February 6, 2026. Grossman believes the outreach should be conducted chair-to-chair.

SR9 discussed if a rough draft of their report should be included in the communication to Kalita. Grossman advised against circulating a draft and suggested instead sharing a high-level summary of the report without soliciting feedback.

Since the deadline for the report on the honorary degree award process has been extended to February 20, 2026, SR9 agreed to adjust the spring meeting schedule as follows:

- Cancel the January 15, 2026, meeting
- Adjust the January 22, 2026, meeting time to 11:00 am-12:30 pm and change the location to the English Building
- Add a meeting on January 29, 2026, from 12:00 to 1:30 in the English Building

Pullen asked if SR9 should meet on February 19, 2026, since the deadline is February 20, 2026. SR9 agreed to keep this option in mind but did not schedule a meeting for that date.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a) Establish the Process for Collecting Feedback

No new discussion.

b) SR.26.01, Review of the Honorary Degree Award Process

Chair Miller stated that Amos took on the task of clarifying the goals and the problems this process is intending to address. Three objectives were clarified:

- Provide increased protection and privacy for candidates.
- Ensure that the process follows the criteria and merits of the case without consideration of extraneous materials.
- Shift the burden of nomination and promotion of candidates to units.

Amos emphasized the need for language that clearly distinguishes honorary degree awards from conferred degrees. Tolliver and Grossman have worked on proposed changes to the *Bylaws*.

Amos questioned whether SR9 has sufficiently addressed the criteria for honorary degree awards, noting the focus has largely been on process. Chair Miller asked whether greater clarity around the purpose of honorary degree awards would be helpful. Arain asked whether this discussion should be directed to the Board of Trustees or to the Senate, noting the *Statutes* do not articulate the underlying purpose or goals of honorary degree awards.

Roether noted HD.23.04, Honorary Degree Award Guidelines, was approved by HD and submitted to the Senate as a report for information on September 16, 2024. She suggested SR9 should review HD.23.04. Chair Miller asked whether the criteria should explicitly address donor considerations. Roether emphasized that honorary degree awards should involve a more robust process at the college or unit level, with an executive committee composed of individuals knowledgeable about the credentials of the candidates. She also raised questions about the appropriate source of letters of recommendation. Roether and Grossman agreed to review HD.23.04.

Kurt noted if reciprocal agreements are involved with honorary degree awards, those agreements should be formalized. Roether believes the Office of the Provost should have a more defined role in the honorary degree award process.

In recent years, Laura Wilhelm-Barr, former Senior Director of Special Events, informally requested two faculty members from the Senate Committee on Committees (CC) to serve on the Committee on Commencement, including the chair of HD. This process did not go through the Senate. Roether asked whether SR9 wished to consider this aspect of the process, noting the question of whether the scope of SR9 is limited to honorary degree awards or whether it should also examine related informal processes, such as the Committee on Commencement.

SR9 discussed broader questions about the role of the Senate in honorary degree awards, including whether distinctions historically existed between earned degrees and honorary awards, and why current practices developed as they did. Kurt noted it seems like one set of rules is being applied to what should be two distinct processes.

Chair Miller suggested revising the language to state honorary degree award nominations should not reference philanthropy or donations to the University. Arain agreed, recommending nomination materials containing references to donations not be considered. Pullen raised concerns about inconsistency, noting that it references ongoing reciprocal relationships while prohibiting mention of philanthropy. She

expressed concern that this could appear contradictory or imply an expectation of something in return.

Amos suggested SR9 should more clearly address the purpose of honorary degree awards and expectations regarding ongoing relationships. She also raised the question of whether responsibility for nominations should rest with the units and whether supporters on the Senate floor should come from the relevant unit or college.

Roether suggested the initial step in the process might not reside with the Office of the Senate, but instead maybe a committee model that includes administrative representation and faculty participants who are Senators rather than Senate representatives, given their responsibility to vote during Senate meetings. Pullen emphasized the need for broader buy-in earlier in the process, noting outcomes of past nominations may have differed under a different structure.

Kurt stated, ideally, responsibility for demonstrating alignment with unit-level expectations should rest with the college, while responsibility for evaluating criteria should rest with HD, with nominations returned if those standards are not met. Pullen expressed the view that honorary degree awards should not be decided by a small committee alone but should instead involve broader participation by faculty and staff.

Chair Miller recapped specific work assignments:

- Pullen and Symes will continue working on their document.
- Roether, Grossman, and Meschewski will review HD.23.04.
- Amos will continue working on her document.

c) SR.26.02, Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9)

No new discussion.

6. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Corazon Johnson
Committee Support Staff