

University Senate Special Meeting

June 12, 2025 | 2 P.M. | Zoom

- Meeting Minutes: S. Sangregorio

Voting Members in Attendance:

A. Beringer, A. Rzepka, A. Spadaccini, A. Toro-Carnevali, C. Baird, C. Challenger, C. Dilkes, C. Gunhouse, C. Reinisch, D. Falloon-Blake, D. Trubatch, E. Jacobson, I. Ren, K. Handeli, L. Carr, L. LeFever, M. Chaifetz, M. Kamenetskiy, N. Kurzynowski, N. Panorkou, P. Haggerty, P. La Fountain, R. Kunstadter, S. Baglieri, S. Bellum, S. McCarthy, S. Nowak, S. Sangregorio, T. Gorman, W. Colucci, W. Sullivan, Y. Luo, Z. Aidala

Voting Members Missing:

A. Talamo, B. Garlick, C. Rodriguez-Unalt, D. Chong, D. Peterka-Benton, F. Lauby, J. Alexandre, M. Smith, O. Gharehgozli, R. Misra, S. Collins, S. Ghoshal, S. Mamonov, S. Nicholas, Y. Bai

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order & Call for Quorum (Required 25 or More)

- Call to Order: 2:06 PM
- **Shannon Bellum** called the meeting to order and asked if there is a quorum.

2. Land Acknowledgement Statement

- **Shannon Bellum** reads the land acknowledgement statement.

3. Announcements & Review of Procedure

- **Shannon Bellum** noted that the official land acknowledgment statement is still awaiting a response from the President.
 - **Shannon:** "I am told by the President's staff that we are very close to having a recommendation response on our land acknowledgement statement, so I hope that we can maybe begin with an official statement in September."
- **Shannon Bellum** reviews the procedure for today's meeting.

- A FAQ and Robert's Rules cheat sheet were posted in the Senate shared drive for reference.
 - **Shannon:** "The purpose of using the rules of order is to enable meaningful discussion and organized deliberation and not get distracted by the minutia of Robert's Rules, nor to pursue tricks of parliamentary procedure."
- The meeting will use a hand-raise system for floor access, prioritizing those who have not yet spoken.
 - **Shannon:** "We will proceed in an orderly fashion with one speaker at a time. If a speaker raises a question or issue and you have a response for it, raise your hand to get in the queue for the floor. I will prioritize in discussion senators who have not yet had a chance to speak over those who have already held the floor at least once."
- Open voting is the default; a closed vote requires a motion, a second, and either unanimous consent or a majority vote.
 - **Shannon:** "In this meeting, we're moving forward with open voting as a default. This is what we did before the pandemic. Always open voting. Any voting senator who wants a closed vote may make a motion for a closed or secret vote, it must be seconded and then passed by unanimous consent or by a majority vote. If at any time a point of order is raised, I may pause to confer with executive board members before responding."
- The chat is not recognized as official Senate business.
- **Mary English** asked for clarification on the process for closed votes.
 - **Mary:** "I had a question on the rules that you just read Shannon for the closed vote. You said that it had to be passed by unanimous or majority. Should we just have it be majority? Because it can't really be one or the other. Can it... you either need everybody or you need a majority."
- **Shannon** explained that unanimous consent is sought first, and if not achieved, a majority vote is required.
 - **Shannon:** "If one person asks and makes a motion and someone else seconds it, if everyone else is willing to go along with a closed vote, then we do it by unanimous consent, just like we do at all our other procedural issues."
 - **Mary:** "...we would only need a majority if we had to go to close – if it wasn't unanimous?"
 - **Shannon** confirmed.

4. Introduction of Resolution

- **Shannon Bellum** invited **Adam Rzepka** to introduce the resolution.
- Adam introduced the resolution, giving context.
 - **Adam:** “It is a slight variation on the resolution that we considered on – briefly towards the end of the meeting on May 14. It’s a very slight variation on the original, you know, compact resolution... that we were invited to consider back on May 7.”
- **Erik Jacobson** stated that the resolution must be read for ADA compliance.
- **Adam Rzepka** introduced and read aloud the resolution titled “Resolution to Seek a Mutual Compact of New Jersey Colleges and Universities in Defense of Academic Freedom, Free Expression, Institutional Integrity, and the Research Enterprise.”

5. Resolution on MADC, as introduced:

University Senate



RESOLUTION TO SEEK A MUTUAL COMPACT OF NEW JERSEY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN DEFENSE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM, FREE EXPRESSION, INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY, AND THE RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

SUMMARY

At the invitation of the Rutgers University Senate and [affiliated Senates](#),¹ the Montclair State University Senate resolves to seek a Mutual Academic Defense Compact of New Jersey colleges and universities, on the model set out in the Rutgers University Senate’s [Resolution to Establish](#)

¹ <https://www.umass.edu/senate/madcs-tracker>

[a Mutual Defense Compact](#)² and Stockton University's [Resolution to Establish Mutual Academic Defense Compacts](#).³

RESOLUTION

Whereas, recent and escalating politically motivated actions by governmental bodies pose a significant threat to the foundational principles of higher education, including the autonomy of university governance, the integrity of scientific research, academic freedom, the protection of free speech, and the ability to enroll international students

Whereas, political actors continue to target individual institutions with legal, financial, and political incursion designed to undermine their public mission, silence dissenting voices, and/or exert improper control over academic inquiry;

Whereas, New Jersey's Colleges and Universities—public and private, large and small—represent a longstanding tradition of academic collaboration, research excellence, free speech and inquiry, commitment to democratic values and shared governance, civic responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge for the public good;

Whereas, the preservation of one institution's integrity is the concern of all, and an infringement against one member one College or University in New Jersey shall be considered an infringement against all;

Be it resolved that, the Montclair State University Senate supports the establishment of a Mutual Academic Defense Compact (MADC) with other colleges and universities in New Jersey;

Be it further resolved that, under this compact, all participating institutions should commit meaningful resources to shared defense. These resources should be used to provide immediate and strategic support to any member institution under direct political or legal infringement;

Be it further resolved that, participating institutions should make available, at the request of a participating institution under direct political infringement, legal aid, governance experts, and public affairs offices to help coordinate a unified and vigorous response. Such responses may include legal representation and countersuit actions; strategic public communication; amicus

²<https://senate.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Resolution-to-Establish-a-Mutual-Defense-Compact-for-the-Universities-of-the-Big-Ten-Academic-Alliance-in-Defense-of-Academic-Freedom-Institutional-Integrity-and-the-Research.pdf>

³https://www.stockton.edu/faculty-senate/documents/2025_documents/5_may2025/RESOLUTION_MUTUAL_DEFENSE.pdf

briefs and expert testimony; legislative advocacy and coalition-building; and related topical research as needed.

6. Discussion

- **Shannon Bellum** opens the floor for discussion after confirming **Adam Rzepka** does not have anything to add at this time.
- **Adam Rzepka** states that he has a statement he can read later in the discussion.
- **Kevin Handeli** raised a question regarding the potential risks associated with the resolution, referencing the second “whereas” where the resolution talks about “political actors”. Kevin questioned the risks of publicly joining a mutual assistance compact, expressing concern that such visibility could attract negative attention or retaliation from political actors or the federal government.
- **Adam Rzepka** responds, stating that it is not possible for the university to avoid notice, as attacks on higher education are broad and ongoing. He noted that attempts at appeasement have not protected other universities and that the university has already experienced negative impacts, such as research funding cuts and student detentions. Adam argued that silence or avoidance is not a viable strategy.
- **Erik Jacobson** added that President Koppell has already signed a national letter expressing disagreement with federal actions, so the university is already publicly on record. He clarified that joining the compact would not significantly increase the university’s profile.
- **Marshal Chaifetz** provided further context, noting that the university has already faced consequences, including the cancellation of 19 grants and involvement in lawsuits. He has personally met with the Attorney General regarding these issues, emphasizing that the university is already on the authorities’ radar.
- **Bill Sullivan** explained the background of coalition efforts, including Rutgers’ role in initiating a compact among New Jersey institutions and the drafting of a resolution by the executive board. He noted that Rutgers later changed its position, and that the Senate’s action was a recommendation, not a resolution.
- **Shannon Bellum** clarified the distinction between recommendations and resolutions: recommendations require a response from the President, while resolutions are internal statements posted on the Senate website. She confirmed that the May 14th recommendation was sent to President Koppell and that positive feedback had been received, but a formal response was still pending.

- **Bill Sullivan** asked for clarification on whether the President had responded to the resolution. **Shannon** clarified that resolutions do not require a presidential response, only recommendations do.
- **Adam Rzepka** noted that the May 14th recommendation was not accepted by the coalition because it did not explicitly mention the compact. He explained that, although the recommendation was passed unanimously, it does not join the university to the coalition.
- **Shannon Bellum** provided an update that UMass had accepted the recommendation for posting, but **Adam Rzepka** clarified that, as of the last 24 hours, UMass would not post it as part of the coalition due to its lack of explicit mention of the compact.
- **Lauren Carr** expressed discomfort with the binding language of collective actions and concern about the Senate's authority to commit resources, suggesting the need for legal review before joining such efforts.
- **Ruth Kunstadter** echoed concerns about resource commitments, noting that the Senate does not control university resources and can only recommend actions to the administration.
- **David Trubatch** emphasized the importance of following proper procedures and ensuring all voices are heard. He highlighted the seriousness of the issues and the value of the Senate's unanimous recommendation. David argued that the university's real mutual defense comes from the state of New Jersey, including the Governor and Attorney General, and suggested that the Senate should focus on advocacy with these officials rather than joining a non-existent compact. He also cautioned against the Senate engaging in electoral politics.
- **Bill Sullivan** shared his experience with coalition work, noting the challenges of uniting New Jersey's higher education institutions due to legislative, political, and financial differences. He argued that the Senate's actions so far are appropriate and cautioned against unrealistic expectations.
- **Susan Baglieri** reported on a poll of college members, noting that a majority of respondents supported the resolution, but some raised questions about resource commitments and the Senate's authority. Susan noted that most replies to the resolution were supportive, but some questions were raised regarding resources and the nature of the Compact. She asked for updates on the status of other New Jersey institutions (Kean, NJCU, Ramapo, Thomas Edison, William Paterson) regarding the resolution.
- **Adam Rzepka** reported that TCNJ, Stockton, and Rutgers are involved, and referenced a tracker maintained by the University of Massachusetts. He emphasized the broad coalition, including SUNY, CUNY, and many Big Ten universities, and defended the seriousness and effort behind the initiative.

- **Lauren Carr** expressed concern that not signing the resolution could make the university stand out negatively, especially given its reliance on financial aid.
- **Marshal Chaifetz** supported the language of the resolution but questioned whether the Senate was overstepping its authority, noting differences in policy-making power among Senates at other institutions.
- **Ashwin Vaidya** posed a question about the consequences of inaction, asking if the group could accept the risk of "going out of business" by doing nothing.
- **Susan Baglieri** reiterated her question about the status of other New Jersey institutions and the specificity of the resolution to New Jersey.
- **Erik Jacobson** clarified that the resolution is an invitation to conversation, not a legally binding statement, and that it does not obligate the Senate to specific actions.
- **David Trubatch** stated that he did not foresee negative consequences from voting either way but wanted the Senate to be more sophisticated and thoughtful in its engagement with the administration.
- **Adam Rzepka** read a prepared statement supporting the resolution, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and collective action among university senates, and critiqued the previous recommendation for not effecting real change.

Text of the Statement

I was excited and hopeful on May 7th , when the Executive Board told us that Rutgers had extended an invitation to join the coalition calling for a Mutual Academic Defense Compact. I know that this was a hopeful moment for a lot of other Senators, too. The M.A.D.C. was one of the first and most visible movements to create real solidarity between university Senates, and therefore between the faculties and staffs of those universities, in the face of the current onslaught of attacks on the foundational principles of what we do in higher education.

I was further encouraged that the Executive Board suggested suspending our rules to vote on joining this coalition—it seemed that we shared an understanding that this work was urgent, and could not wait until the fall.

And so I was saddened, when we convened a week later, to find that after we had voted to suspend the rules to vote on joining the MADC coalition, it turned out that we were not going to vote on joining the MADC coalition after all. Instead, we were presented with a document that does not recommend a Compact; and, in its Recommendation section, does not recommend a single thing that our President cannot reasonably claim

he is already doing.

In its Rationale section, that document says that we, the Senate, believe “collaboration and collective action are effective.” But it does not endorse any particular collaboration; it does not lay the groundwork for any collective action. It defers any collective agency between Senates to our President, and encourages him to keep doing what he’s already been doing. I voted for this Recommendation, because I agree with everything it says; but of every Recommendation I have been able to find in the Senate archives, this one is singular in actually recommending no substantive changes to the status quo.

In short, the May 14 th Recommendation does not declare our solidarity with other Senates calling for a Defensive Compact. We are not, and will not be, counted as part of that coalition. For us, the organizers of the coalition tracker are going to have to create a separate category for related senate statements that do not join the coalition.

That is where we will appear on the basis on what we passed on May 14 th : in a special category for Senates which believe “collaboration and collective action are effective” but which are not ready to endorse them or engage in them.

The Resolution we’re considering today is, quite simply, the one that the Executive Board invited us to consider on May 7 th . It is the one that all of us without special knowledge showed up to vote on on May 14 th . Although it takes the form of a Resolution rather than a Recommendation, it is the one we suspended our rules to vote on.

Resolutions do not require a response from the President. Good: Resolutions are for stating the collective will of the Senate as a representative body. This Resolution puts solidarity first, to build a defensive coalition among Senates and among those they represent. The first thing that this coalition calls for is a commitment for colleges and universities in New Jersey to collaborate in a range of robust, tangible ways as they work to confront attacks on our students, faculty, staff, and core principles. That will not happen without a parallel coalition of University Presidents. But it will definitely not happen at all if we do not join our voices together at this level, where we live and work.

And of course it may be that then there is still no Compact, as we describe it in the Resolution; or it may look quite different from what this Resolution describes. But the coalition will still be there. Presidents come and go. Governors come and go. Solidarity lasts, even though it emerges from urgent conditions. The conditions we face are dire; existential, even. Now is the time to advance collaborative work—coalitions between

representative bodies like this one—to exert collective pressure upwards. It is not going to be enough for us to defer to executive and managerial power, merely encouraging it when it protects us. In other states and at other universities, we have seen how easily that higher-level protection can become the delivery mechanism of the attack.

I therefore urge you to vote for this Resolution today. There is no downside to passing it: in months of discussion, the most substantive reason I've heard for actively opposing such a resolution is that it is too aspirational, so that "it makes us look

unserious." For my part, I'm okay with looking unserious alongside the Senates of 14 of the 18 Big 10 universities, the entire SUNY and CUNY systems, UMass Amherst, the Universities of Arizona and New Mexico, and here in New Jersey Rutgers, Stockton, and TCNJ. But if, at the end of the day, the core reason you want this resolution not to pass is that it is naive—or if, understandably, it's because you're sick of me, personally—then I urge you to maintain appearances or show your annoyance by abstaining, rather than voting against it. The core reason for voting yes is, again, is to build a framework for collective action between university senates in New Jersey, in a time when every voice against the demise of higher education needs desperately to be heard.

- **Adam Rzepka** read a prepared statement (above) supporting the resolution that is available on the Senate shared drive, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and collective action among university senates, and critiqued the previous recommendation for not effecting real change.
- **Shannon Bellum** responded that Adam's characterization of the Executive Board's actions was divisive and not universally shared. She noted that the process had at least fostered connections with other senates.

7. Voting

- The group discussed the voting process. **Shannon Bellum** explained that the default is an open vote unless a motion for a closed vote is made by a voting senator and passed by unanimous consent or by a majority vote. The ballot would be distributed via a link in the chat, only voting senators would have access to it, and voting would be visible in real time. Votes were to be cast using the Google Form, requiring Montclair sign-in.
- **Shannon** shared her screen so Senators could watch the spreadsheet and see the live voting happening.
- **Mary English** asked for clarification on the voting process, which **Shannon** provided: a majority vote determines the outcome, and abstentions are an option on the ballot.

- **Lauren Carr** questioned the impact of abstentions on the accuracy of the results.
- **Shannon Bellum** explained that for the purposes of tallying, abstentions need to be on the ballot so those monitoring the vote will know that all senators had an opportunity to read the ballot and choose.
- **Lauren Carr** brought up an example to clarify the abstentions, stating “If people abstain, then let's say you have seven people voting or 10 people voting, and five say yes, three say no, and two are afraid to say no, because their vote will be public.”
- **Shannon Bellum** clarified that in that example, it would be a tie and not a majority, stating “The people that abstain are counted in the total. If there's 10 people voting, in your example, 10 people voting, five people vote yes, three people vote no, two abstain. Five is not the majority of 10 - six is the majority of 10.”
- **Erik Jacobson** asked if there needed to be a motion that was seconded. **Shannon** clarified that there did not need to be, per Robert's Rules.
- **David Trubatch** brought up a point of order that the motion was made before the discussion. He asked if there needed to be a motion to end debate.
- **Shannon Bellum** stated that debate seems to have ended organically. She moved to vote.

Voting Results

Total voting senators: 33

- No: 18 - 64.2%
- Yes: 10 - 35.7%
- Abstain: 5
- **Shannon Bellum** confirms that the resolution did not pass. She noted the positive aspect of collaboration with the other Senate and interest in future work. She mentioned possible actions in the fall, especially if there is a change in state government.

8. Meeting Adjournment

- **Call to Adjourn:** 3:00 PM
- **Erik Jacobson**, Motion to Adjourn
- **Tim Gorman**, Seconded
- **Shannon Bellum:** Adjourned by Acclamation