

**RUTGERS UNIVERSITY SENATE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MINUTES
May 12, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrews, Asch, Boxer, Davis, Foster (Chair), Gordy, Haley, Hussain, Kiss, Pierce, Salas-de la Cruz, Scott

ALSO ATTENDING: *F. Conway (Rutgers New Brunswick Chancellor, T. Cooper (University Senate Executive Secretary), A. Cuitino (School of Engineering Dean), J. Geary (Rutgers New Brunswick Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs), R. Gigliotti (President's Office-Chief of Staff), R. Schwartz (BOT Faculty Rep), M. Smith (University Senate Administrative Assistant)*

A special meeting of the University Senate Executive Committee was held on Tuesday, May 12, 2026 at 11:30 a.m. remotely via Zoom.

Call to Order – Lucille Foster, Senate Chair

Chair Foster called the May 12, 2026 Senate Executive Committee meeting to order at 11:35 a.m.

Discussion with Administration Regarding SoE Commencement Speaker Cancellation

Chair Foster opened the meeting by explaining that the purpose of the conversation was to gain clarification on the decision to disinvite the convocation speaker Rami Elghandour for the School of Engineering by Dean Cuitino. The following were discussion points of the conversation:

- An overview given of the situation by Chancellor Conway:
 - Students came to Dean Cuitino with concerns about the invited speaker.
 - Dean Cuitino has the responsibility to take student concerns seriously.
 - Dean Cuitino had a conversation with the speaker and left the conversation with more concerns.
 - Consultation between Dean Cuitino, Chancellor's office, and the President's office occurred.
 - Dean Cuitino made a decision/judgement call to disinvite the speaker.
- Dean Cuitino outlined the process in which a speaker is selected for convocation for the School of Engineering:
 - Members of the faculty and sometimes staff will suggest alumni members.
 - Dean Cuitino contacted the speaker a year ago, had a meeting with him in December, and invited him to participate in their fireside chat in March.
 - There is no committee or a specific group that systematically selects a speaker; mostly nominations from individuals within the school as has been tradition in the school.
- There was a question on who was consulted to nominate the speaker, how many students brought concerns to the Dean, and if others (faculty, students) were consulted. Dean Cuitino answered:
 - Several staff members within the Dean's office nominated the speaker.

- Some students talked directly with their advisors, some students wrote to the convocation page, and some from student organizations. A particular number is difficult to assume.
 - Several conversations were held with the undergraduate team (staff and deans) and campus leadership.
- The Office of General Counsel was consulted and confirmed legal permissibility to rescind a speaker invitation.
- It was agreed that a better process is needed for the vetting and approval of speakers for the School of Engineering.
- There was a question on who gave the order for the RUPD to block access to the biomedical engineering building:
 - Chancellor Conway answered that, the Chief of Police is responsible for making decisions about security responses on campus.
- Last semester, New Brunswick formed several governance committees including one on commencement and is currently developing a charge for the process of selecting speakers. What they develop will be shared with the Senate Executive Committee later in the year.
- There were concerns for a lack of process to consult constituents before disinviting the speaker and one student group's concerns being prioritized over another:
 - There was further clarification that the change to the program for the convocation was not just because of the students, but about how the following conversation went between the speaker and Dean Cuitino.
- There was a concern regarding potential 'coerced' letters of support of the Dean's decision from multiple faculty departments:
- The purpose of convocation was defined to be an opportunity for celebration of students and their families, not a platform for a speaking engagement.
- Controversial speakers have been invited to speak at Rutgers and other institutions previously, where students and faculty have successfully demonstrated peaceful protests.
- Chancellor Conway has met with various constituencies on campus and is working on a possible alternative speaker engagement in the following week but cannot reinstate him for commencement.

Administrators left at 12:14 p.m. for the Executive Committee closed session.

Resolution on Responsible University Leadership and Representation of the Full Rutgers Community in Commencement Events

Senator Boxer presented the resolution. The resolution was adopted.

Adjournment

The Executive Committee adjourned at 12:29 p.m.

Minutes prepared by: Taryn Cooper, Executive Secretary of the University Senate