

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Billesbach, Buan, Dam, Dawes, Eklund, Franco Cruz, Gay, Hanrahan, Kolbe, Krehbiel, Minter, Weissling, Woodman

Absent:

Date: Tuesday, November 17, 2020

Location: Zoom meeting

Note: These are not verbatim minutes. They are a summary of the discussions at the Executive Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

1.0 Call (*Buan*)

Buan called the meeting to order at 2:34 p.m.

2.0 Tips for Speaking with State Legislators and the Media – Michelle Waite, Assistant to the Chancellor Government and Military Relations and Director Deb Fiddelke, Office of University Communication

Buan stated that the State Legislature will begin working on the next biennial budget in January and this is a time when faculty members are more frequently contacted by Legislators and others to provide input on their area of expertise and she thought it would be good to get advice from Waite and Fiddelke on how best to respond.

Waite stated that she handles government relations, mostly state relations, on behalf of the Chancellor. She noted that the Chancellor's office is in the process of hiring someone to handle federal government relations and pointed out that this is a crucial position for UNL. Buan asked if this person would work exclusively with UNL. Waite stated that they would. She noted that currently someone from President Carter's office is helping us with federal government relations and although the person is very good and careful, it is vital that we have someone at UNL who will focus on the federal government. She pointed out that when she attends Big Ten meetings many of our peers have at least ten people working on government relations. She stated that UNL does have a contract with a person in D.C., but this person does not handle the day-to-day things that occur on campus which creates a real disconnection for us. Weissling asked how the federal position will be funded. Waite stated that it is her understanding it will be state funding, but she noted that it is crucial that we have a strong presence in D.C.

Waite reported that the 90-day legislative session begins January 6th and noted that the University's primary focus will be on the budget. She stated that currently the State Forecasting Board's reports have been good showing that the tax receipts coming in are higher than had been anticipated. She noted that the President's agenda is set by the President's Council which includes the Chancellors from each of the campuses and she reported that one of the things the University will be asking for is a slight increase in our budget and an extension of our deferred maintenance which has direct implications for

UNL since most of the older buildings in the University system are at UNL. She believes that currently things look positive for the University and she believes that with the recent elections there will be a good number of legislators that are supportive of the University. She reported that she believes that the membership of the Appropriations Committee will mostly remain the same. Hanrahan recommended that the Senate President and President-Elect attend the University's hearings with the Appropriations Committee. Waite pointed out that the hearings are streamed and can be viewed at any time.

Buan asked how the Appropriations Committee thinks about earmarking funding for faculty salaries. Waite pointed out that the University always makes this request, but it is not always funded, however the Appropriations Committee does not criticize the request. Billesbach asked if the University will be competing for additional funding now that we have expanded Medicare. Waite stated that she does not see the University competing for funding, but there will be less funding to go around to the many state agencies that need to be funded.

Waite stated that members of the UNL community should see her as a resource and she can assist people in what they should expect if they are to testify before the Legislature or if a Senator reaches out to them to for their expertise.

Buan ask Fiddelke what faculty members should do if they are contacted by the media. Fiddelke stated that faculty members should always feel free to respond to the media if they want to, but if they are asked for the official view of the university they should refer to Leslie Reed, University Communications, because only a few people are considered the official spokesperson. She pointed out that 99% of faculty members are contacted because of their area of expertise and she noted, we want to promote the expertise of our faculty and their research or creative activity. She stated that University Communications keeps a database of who has expertise in particular areas and the media is provided with this information.

Fiddelke stated that Leslie Reed, Public Affairs Director, who offers media training for faculty members and she can provide a one-on-one session or do a media training session for a group such as the Senate Executive Committee. She noted that the training focuses on how to deal with a reporter and how to stay on your own message when speaking with the media. She stated that if a faculty member is unsure of who a reporter is or who they are associated with, the faculty member can always contact University Communications who will find out who the reporter is associated with.

Woodman asked if there is a message for faculty on how to be discreet while speaking about their personal opinions. Fiddelke stated that we don't want to infringe on people speaking their minds or their personal opinions, but people need to be aware that once they make a public statement they become a public figure and people will react. She stated that there could be repercussions not just for you, but for the institution. Franco Cruz asked if there should be some training for faculty members if they make a comment in class that ends up on social media. Fiddelke stated that when she taught a class, she had a contract with the students that they would not take what she said and post it in

social media. She pointed out that the media often get story ideas by looking at social media. Billesbach suggested that people may want to put a tighter control on their social media formats. Fiddelke stated that this is a personal decision and people can put strong parameters around Facebook, but Twitter is more limited.

Eklund stated that he has found when speaking with the media that what you said is not always reported accurately in the media. Fiddelke stated that if a faculty member is wondering what a reporter's angle is, Reed and her team can be a helpful resource. She noted that some reporters are trying to get educated on a subject but sometimes they will take things out of context to fit the story they are writing about. She pointed out that sending an email rather than talking to a reporter can sometimes ensure that the reporter will get the information accurately.

Woodman asked what kinds of emails are subject to a FOIA inquiry. Fiddelke stated that this would be better addressed by an attorney. She noted that anything that is in an email on university equipment can be subject to a FOIA request. Waite stated that she always errs on the side of caution and often just calls people instead of sending an email.

Franco Cruz asked if University Communications helps faculty members to contact the media if they want to discuss their research. Fiddelke stated that her office can help make these connections and get publicity out for the faculty member. Waite noted that she often promotes the work of the faculty and reaches out to different departments and deans to get answers for Legislators if they have questions on a particular subject. She stated that it is helpful if faculty members let her know that they are speaking with a Legislator just in case the Legislator contacts her to ask further questions, but she in no way wants to interfere or limit conversations between faculty members and a Legislator. She stated that if a faculty member is speaking about their professional expertise, they should tell the person their title and area of expertise, but they should not say that their statements represent the University. She stated that a faculty member needs to make the same clarification if they are speaking on an issue that is of personal interest and when making their personal opinions known they should not use University resources. She noted that if you are expressing a personal concern to a Legislator you should provide your home address which tells them that you are one of their constituents.

Krehbiel pointed out that it is easy to twist facts into opinions these days. She asked how a person would navigate things that could easily be misconstrued. Waite stated that providing sound bites with statistics and data can help. She stated that faculty members should be factual and objective. She pointed out that another thing that can be done is to say that the comments are off the record and to ask the reporter to read back what they have written down. She noted that creating an outline of what to say prior to speaking can help a person stay on focus.

Weissling asked if using University resources for other things such as writing a letter of recommendation for a student can be subject to a FOIA search. Waite stated that these kinds of things would more than likely not be a problem. She noted that the issue is

when you enter the political arena. She suggested people use some discretion and common sense when they want to make public statements.

Waite stated that people can reach out to her by contacting her at mwaite1@unl.edu.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Proposed Changes to Regents Bylaws Regarding Extension Educators

Buan reported that the proposed changes to the Regents Bylaws pertaining to notification of termination dates for Extension Educators and the interlocal agreements with the counties have been moved forward to Central Administration. She pointed out that these proposed changes do not need to be ratified by the other campuses because it does not apply to them. She noted that the other proposed changes will be voted on by UNK in December and UNMC appears to be on a similar timeline. She stated that the next meeting the proposed changes would be presented to the Board is the February meeting.

4.0 Approval of November 10, 2020 Minutes

Buan asked if there were any further revisions for the minutes. Hearing none she asked for approval. The Executive Committee approved the minutes.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Testing or Reading Days Proposal

Buan noted that ASUN previously brought a request to the Executive Committee about providing students with a few days when tests or projects would not be due similar to the 15th week policy. She reported that the Teaching Council reviewed the request and suggested that there could be a menu of options of how these days could be determined, but ultimately the instructor would be the one to make the decision of what would fit best with their particular curriculum. Kolbe stated that it should be optional if an instructor wants to participate because some courses may not be able to accommodate the designated days due to the compressed semester. Billesbach agreed and noted that the faculty have tried to address the needs of the students as much as possible during the pandemic.

Minter noted that the Teaching Council suggested that it be optional but were suggesting that these days should happen within a particular week giving students a lighter load for that week. She questioned whether having the days spread out during the semester would have as great an impact for the students. Dawes pointed out that the request from the students was not to have a break from going to class, but to have a few days of lighter workloads. She noted that to make this accommodation in one week could be difficult for some courses. Minter stated that a suggestion could be made to instructors to have these lighter days within the same week if the course allows.

Franco Cruz stated that he would be against having a specific time period in the semester for these lighter days because some students may take advantage and decide to go on a quick trip during the semester. He noted that the reason for the compressed semester is to keep students on campus to minimize the risk of having them travel and return to campus with the virus. He stated that he would support a recommendation to let the faculty

member choose when to have the days and to discuss this with the students in the beginning of the semester. Eklund noted that some of his course projects require certain facilities, but he does not have control over when these rooms are available. He stated that he thinks it is important that we give students some lightness in their workload, but it should be at the instructor's discretion.

Buan asked if the Executive Committee wanted to do something for the spring semester or not. Billesbach stated that the Senate needs to make a statement suggesting to faculty that they have a few days of a light workload for students. Buan asked for a vote, 10 were in favor, one against. She asked if the statement should include a timeframe when the lighter days could be offered. Hanrahan suggested providing a statement with example of lighter workdays, but the instructor needs to decide which days would work best into their schedule. Buan stated that she liked the idea of including these days in the course syllabus. Krehbiel suggested that the statement also encourage students to use available resources on campus if they are feeling stressed or anxious during the semester.

Buan stated that she would draft a statement and share it with the Executive Committee to edit. She asked if the statement should be on the December 1 Faculty Senate agenda. Hanrahan stated that the statement should be presented as an emergency motion and for the Senate to accept as presented without amendments being allowed.

5.2 Continuity of Instruction

Buan stated that she received a request from EVC Spiller for the Executive Committee to consider a continuity of instruction policy which would be not to have any snow days. She asked if the Lincoln Public Schools have a snow day, do we still expect everyone on campus to go to remote instruction. Kolbe pointed out that there could be some cases where power is out in areas which could impact remote learning.

Hanrahan stated that the decision to close campus needs to be made independent of other considerations. He stated that if the City wants the University to shut down to limit the number of drivers on the road than we should shut down. He noted that classes could be moved to remote instruction, but no one should have to come to campus.

Buan asked what the Executive Committee wants to advocate for the faculty. Hanrahan suggested that there be a snow day policy where the campus is shut down, but an individual instructor can choose whether to have classes remotely. He pointed out that we need to protect people from coming into campus when the weather is severe enough to have a snow day.

Weissling pointed out that requiring faculty to teach remotely on snow days can put pressure on instructors who must take care of children if LPS has a snow day. She stated that this would disproportionately affect women and minorities.

Buan stated that she will communicate with EVC Spiller to encourage faculty to prepare a plan for bad weather since there are no snow days this year, but if the campus shuts down it should be optional if the instructor wants to cancel a class or move to remote.

6.0 New Business

No new business was discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, December 1, 2020 at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be conducted via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Lorna Dawes, Secretary.