

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent:

Date: Tuesday, April 20, 2021

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 2:31 p.m.

2.0 VC Wilhelm

2.1 How has UNL research and creative activity been impacted by COVID?

VC Wilhelm noted that the pandemic certainly changed the work environment and people have had a lot less personal interaction with colleagues which has presented challenges, particularly with engaging colleagues outside of the University. He pointed out that travel can be a large part of a faculty member's activity in conducting research but travel this year has almost been at zero. He stated that his sense is that the effects of the pandemic will be seen for several years, but if you look at the amount of funding, number of proposals and the different kinds of activities that are being done we can see that we are doing fine during a difficult time.

VC Wilhelm reported that there have been more proposals this year, our funding awards are on target, and we have even seen a slight increase. He noted that the number of publications and awards with recognition have been good and we have been able to progress in our research, more so than many other Research One universities.

Billesbach pointed out that he has just been able to do field work that was scheduled to be done last spring. He asked if sponsoring agencies have been supportive during the pandemic. VC Wilhelm stated that there has been consistent support from federal agencies. He noted that while faculty members were able to keep their research moving, they now have to catch up on work they were unable to do during the pandemic. He pointed out that the higher education research community has not been able to obtain catch-up funds to help researchers. Buan stated that having catch-up funds would be helpful because faculty members had to spend some of their grant funding this year, but had much lower productivity and this impacted students who could not get into the labs to get the training they need.

Buan asked if VC Wilhelm has looked to see if women and under-represented faculty members have been disproportionately affected in their ability to conduct research

because of the demands from home placed upon them due to the pandemic. VC Wilhelm stated that ORED has not reviewed this in detail yet but plans to do so. He reported that in the past six months additional funding has been provided for women and under-represented faculty to be used as emergency funding which could be used for research work or even childcare.

2.2 Any news about federal/state/industry partnerships or opportunities for research and creative activity that the faculty should be aware of? Strategies to access increased federal Infrastructure R&D investment?

VC Wilhelm stated that ORED is communicating frequently by email and twitter concerning opportunities for research funding and the Associate Deans for Research are being contacted frequently about research opportunities. He reported that there are a number of different efforts underway to coalesce several different large-scale funding opportunities that would support what IANR is calling the National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture. He stated that we are looking at one or two buildings being constructed which would fall under the Center's umbrella and would include some federal employees working on campus and could provide some good funding opportunities.

VC Wilhelm reported that EPSCOR has been awarded a \$20 million, track one program. He noted that this is a five-year funding package and while some of the money will go to statewide EPSCOR, the majority of it will go for a research project in quantum materials. He reported that the PI on this grant is Professor Binek. He noted that this funding will not only provide opportunities in the STEM fields, but also in areas like engagement, Extension, and in communications.

VC Wilhelm reported that recently ORED hired Jessica Herrmann as Director of Federal Relations and she is already working with faculty on a number of different opportunities with federal agencies. He stated that it looks like there will be some kind of earmarking mechanism that will be used for community-funded projects. He stated that initially the funding for these projects may be about \$500,000, but once it continues the funding would be higher. He noted that good community-funded projects have a good intellectual basis and an opportunity to advance, but for these kinds of projects we need to identify what we anticipate the impacts will be in a five-year period. He suggested that anyone interested should contact Director Herrmann (jherrmann2@unl.edu).

VC Wilhelm reported that ORED is doing more work to support faculty members that are seeking funding from foundations such as the Mellon Foundation. He noted that last fall some work with faculty members was done on this and that work will continue to move forward.

VC Wilhelm stated that ORED will soon finish the first cohort of faculty members from the Research Leaders Program. He noted that the Program is a new initiative to identify and develop the next generation of research leaders among faculty. He stated that one of the things they learned was how to lead a group of researchers that span several different disciplines.

VC Wilhelm reported that the National Science Foundation had a general call for a group of research to conduct long-term planning in terms of engineering research agenda. There is a new program called the Engineering Research Vision Alliance and includes Big Ten universities and other EPSCOR-schools. He noted that while the focus is on the STEM fields, there will still be opportunities across the social sciences, the arts and humanities. He stated that more information will become available about these opportunities.

Buan noted that VC Wilhelm mentioned a number of initiatives which are multi-year commitments. She asked if these are more top-down or bottom-up driven or a mixture of faculty proposing ideas to ORED or are they driven by the needs of federal funding agencies. VC Wilhelm stated that at the end of the day the initiatives are all faculty driven. He reported that ORED can help faculty members to get proposals or funding requests moving, but they are a result of the expertise of faculty and the networks they have created, although some initiatives do reflect national agenda items.

2.3 How will ORED use the Grand Challenges to guide research and creative activity development at UNL? Will faculty and students still be able to pursue projects that don't fit neatly into one of the categories?

VC Wilhelm noted that the university community at large identified the grand challenges and focused on significant issues occurring in our world and the goal is to draw people together to work on these grand challenges. He pointed out that part of the reason that faculty want to come here is because of the universal coverage of knowledge that exists here at the University which helps to incubate ideas for research and enriches people's experiences. He stated that ORED will continue to support teaching, research and service and the plan is to integrate the seven themes in the N2025 plan and connect them to the campus.

2.4 How will classes for fall occur and when is the last date for making this decision?

Buan stated that faculty members are getting anxious about the fall semester and how the campus will operate. VC Wilhelm stated that the plan is to have classes similar to what they were in fall of 2019 and the expectation is that in-person classes will be the norm. He pointed out that the campus continues to monitor the COVID situation, but we need to be ready for other contingencies should there be increases in the spread of the virus.

Weissling stated that faculty members are concerned with distancing in the classrooms, research labs, and clinical labs. She asked if the 6-foot distancing rule will still be in effect and will everyone still be required to wear a mask. VC Wilhelm stated that if we continue to see a decrease in hospitalizations, a reasonable number of vaccinations in our community, and continue to see a decrease in the case count even with the presence of variant strains of the virus, the distance requirement will more than likely change. He noted that our distancing policies have been based on guidance from the CDC and the Lincoln/Lancaster County Health department. He pointed out that the CDC's distance requirement for K-12 students changed, and he anticipates that higher education will see

some changes in the distance guidance sometime in the summer. He stated that until we see a dramatic change in the case counts, we will likely still be asking people to wear masks.

Woodman stated that many universities are being more careful and are requiring students be vaccinated. He asked if the University would require vaccinations. VC Wilhelm pointed out that the case count has increased in Nebraska in the last month, although in Lancaster County and on campus there has not been a dramatic increase in the number of positive cases. He stated that the hospitalizations in Lincoln/Lancaster County have been about a tenth of what they were at the worst levels. He noted that we need to go with the evidence in making any decisions, and if we are faced with rapid increases like in Michigan, things could be dramatically different. He reported that we do not have all of the information in yet about how many people have been vaccinated. He stated that everyone on campus now has been offered the vaccine and he is hoping that our vaccine resources will impact how things will work in the fall. He noted that we continue to meet with LLCHD three times a week to review the situation and plan for the fall.

2.5 What metrics will be needed to decide which courses would be most impacted if they have to revise their plans for their fall courses?

VC Wilhelm stated that a number of things would need to be considered and it may have to be done on a unit-by-unit basis, similar to what was done in the last cycle.

Eklund asked if there has been discussion about herd immunity. He stated that he thinks the University should lead in the efforts to combat the spread of the virus, and he pointed out that people who have a high risk of being seriously impacted by the virus need a different set of rules by which to operate. VC Wilhelm stated that there is still a mask mandate for the campus and good information showing that there is a reduction in transmission when people wear masks. He stated that having more personal contact is better, if possible, and he believes that all academic units will be looking at in-person courses in the fall. He noted that Dr. James Lawler from UNMC provided an update at a recent press conference where he stated that the vaccines have addressed some groups of the population, but we need to consider what comes next. VC Wilhelm stated that we need to think about the public health effort to contain the spread and pointed out that there are agencies within the public health system and the state that restrict our activities and the University does not have control over these decisions.

Eklund asked if we have data that any of our students have passed away from the virus, or that they have long-term effects from having it. VC Wilhelm reported that the University has been assured that there have been no student deaths, but information on long-term effects is not available at this time. Buan stated that it will take a lot of work to conduct the longer-term studies and many of the people who would collect the data are front-line workers who are busy providing care for COVID patients.

2.6 How long will we be doing random mandatory COVID testing?

VC Wilhelm stated that given what we currently know, we will continue random testing through the end of the semester and then provide voluntary testing during the summer.

He stated that the plan is to keep our testing and contact tracing operational and available for now.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 COVID Taskforce

Buan reported that the COVID Taskforce met last week and continued to work on encouraging students to take advantage of the opportunity to get vaccinated. She stated that it is estimated that 25% of the students have already been vaccinated because they are student employees and were included in the employee group for vaccinations. Woodman stated that he would like a survey done to see the actual number of students who have been vaccinated. Buan stated that she did ask about verification of the number of students that have been vaccinated and was told that only the Health department has the data and we have not received it yet. Woodman asked if the health department will get data from surrounding counties and the state. Buan stated that it likely will and noted that the data from LLCHD would be more accurate than data from a student survey. Billesbach wondered about the accuracy of the data from the LLCHD. Buan pointed out that all agencies are doing the best they can to ensure the data they have is accurate.

Buan reported that the Taskforce discussed the fall semester and she stated in the meeting that faculty need to get guidance for the fall. She stated that the VCs confirmed that the plan is for full density in-person instruction and noted that the Attendance and Engagement policies will need to be updated for the summer and fall semesters.

3.2 Johnny Carson School of Theatre & Film

Kolbe reported that the School has just been recognized in a national variety magazine as one of the top 50 theatre and film schools on the planet.

4.0 Approval of April 13, 2021 Minutes

Buan asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none she declared the minutes approved.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Faculty Senate Handbook

The Executive Committee reviewed the revisions to the Handbook. Franco Cruz stated that he would provide a clean version for the Committee to review so it can vote on it at the next meeting.

6.0 New Business

6.1 April 27 Faculty Senate Agenda

The Executive Committee reviewed the agenda for the April 27 Senate meeting which will be the last meeting for the academic year.

6.2 Executive Committee Redress List for AAUP

Hanrahan reported that he was contacted by the local AAUP chapter and was told that we declined to share the redress list the Executive Committee drafted and asked the reason for this. Buan stated that after the Executive Committee met with Professors Werum and

Schleck on March 16 to discuss AAUP censure removal, the Committee then discussed, and generally agreed, that the list should first be shared with the Chancellor. She stated that the list was given to the Chancellor two weeks ago and she will be meeting with him later this week and hopes to get an update about the Chancellor's communication with the national AAUP office. She pointed out that when she was asked by the local AAUP chapter about the list she told them that she was waiting to hear back from the Chancellor before sending the list to them.

Hanrahan moved to share the list with the local AAUP chapter noting that their role is to advocate for the faculty. The motion was seconded by Kolbe. The Executive Committee then discussed if there was any advantage to not sharing the list. Buan pointed out that the list was lengthy and addressed everything that we would like to see as improvements for faculty, but the Chancellor is concerned that some items on the list have been requested and are already in progress, but some of the items the University currently does not have the resources to do. She noted that she has been waiting for the Chancellor's feedback because the list that will be provided to the national AAUP office will more than likely be shorter because it will include items that are feasible. Buan stated that the Chancellor supported the initiatives on the list, but the question is how it could be done in a short timeline given the resources that would be required. He stated that the list is just to provide options for UNL and the national AAUP and together they will pick and choose what they think is compatible for both. He stated that if sharing the list benefits the faculty at UNL, it should be shared.

The Executive Committee voted on the motion. The vote was a tie, 5 in favor, 5 against, resulting in the motion failing due to the lack of a majority.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, April 27, 2021 at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be conducted via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Lorna Dawes, Secretary.