

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

**Absent:**

**Date:** Tuesday, March 16, 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.

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### 1.0 Call (*Buan*)

Buan called the meeting to order at 2:31 p.m.

### 2.0 Announcements

#### 2.1 COVID Taskforce and Vaccinations

Buan reported that she is still attending the COVID Taskforce twice a week and noted that communications about the vaccinations have been going out to the University faculty and staff. She stated that the first phase of the education sector for vaccines is closing at the end of the week.

Eklund asked if keeping a three-foot distance is now acceptable. Buan reported that the CDC has stated those fully vaccinated can gather in groups with each other and the three-foot distance mostly referenced K-12 schools. She noted that if the recommendation is made for higher education, it will adjust our density on campus this fall. Billesbach asked if the new distance guideline is dependent on a percentage of the population being vaccinated. Buan stated that she did not know, but the CDC considers transmission rates.

Woodman asked if there have been any changes proposed for summer yet. Buan pointed out that while it is good that people are getting vaccinated, we are still several weeks away from making any changes to our policies and practices. She noted that the federal government is looking at the variant strains of the virus to see if the vaccinations show some resistance to them.

Woodman asked if there are any discussions about requiring COVID vaccinations for students. He noted that students are required to have other kinds of vaccinations before coming to the University. Buan stated that if there are no federal requirements the University is hesitant to require the COVID vaccine. She stated that the vaccine may be required for nursing students due to the nature of their job. Weissling reported that she was informed that the University cannot require the COVID vaccine because the vaccine is placed on an emergency certificate, but once it no longer has this status the University can require it.

Billesbach asked what happens for those faculty or staff members that do not want to be around people who haven't been vaccinated. Buan pointed out that she has not heard of any other university requiring COVID vaccinations and there is no movement about this at either the federal or local level.

Franco Cruz asked whether the randomized mitigation testing will continue now that the education sector is being vaccinated. He pointed out that if people could show proof that they received the vaccine it could help the University save money by reducing the number of COVID tests. Buan reported that data is still being collected on the University's COVID testing and the positivity rate continues to drop but the random mitigation testing will probably continue through the end of this semester and there will probably be still some testing for summer programs and other activities.

## **2.2 Summer Activities**

Eklund asked if there has been any formal notice about summer activities yet. Buan stated that she raised the issue several times and Academic Affairs was supposed to reach out to Eklund about summer activities. She noted that as long as the safety protocols are being followed people should be able to hold their activities. Krehbiel reported that there is a form that needs to be filled out if anyone plans to have any event or activity on campus this summer. Minter stated that information can be found at <https://covid19.unl.edu/facilities-events>. Dam noted that Extension Educators are starting to receive information on Big Red Summer Camps.

## **3.0 Approval of March 9, 2021 Minutes**

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

## **4.0 Unfinished Business**

### **4.1 Faculty Senate Handbook**

Buan noted that it has been on the Executive Committee's agenda for a couple of years to create a Senate Handbook and finally a draft has been developed. The Committee then reviewed the draft and made some suggestions. Franco Cruz suggested that it be put up in Box for the Committee members to edit.

## **5.0 New Business**

### **5.1 Next Steps for AAUP Censure Removal – Professor Schleck, Professor Werum, Associate to the Chancellor Zeleny**

Buan noted that the proposed Bylaw changes are moving forward and will hopefully be approved by the Board of Regents on April 9. She stated that the Executive Committee wants to start planning on what other things the Faculty Senate needs to be involved in to get the AAUP censure removed and whether the local AAUP chapter had any discussions about the next steps the University needs to take. Werum pointed out that the matter is really between the administration and the national AAUP chapter, but the local chapter is happy to consult with the Executive Committee.

Schleck stated that the AAUP national staff will reach out to the administration but reported that the local chapter has been keeping the national staff apprised of the Bylaw developments. She stated that the national staff is waiting for the Board to officially approve the changes and following a successful vote the Chancellor will probably be contacted by Mark Criley, a staff consultant with the national AAUP. She pointed out that the national staff will negotiate with the Chancellors office so there is no official role for either the Faculty Senate or the local AAUP chapter. However, the Senate Executive Committee and the local chapter could help generate ideas of what else could be done in terms of redress to remove the censure. She noted that the national AAUP will want to assess the campus climate for academic freedom to see if there has been improvement and they will want to speak to the current and recent past Senate leaders. She reported that it is Committee A of the national AAUP that has the authority to recommend removal of the censure. The AAUP Council will vote on whether to follow the recommendation of Committee A.

Buan asked if Criley is the case manager for UNL's censure. Schleck stated that he is and one of his roles is to keep the Committee A members, who are volunteer faculty members from different universities, informed about whether the campus is moving towards a successful removal of the censure. Werum pointed out that Committee A only meets sporadically.

Woodman noted that much of the consideration of the proposed Bylaw changes would occur in the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents and he asked if the Committee has reviewed the changes. Zeleny stated that the Committee discussed the revisions at their last meeting. He noted that the Board agenda will be finalized no later than April 2 and there is no reason at this point to believe that it would not be on the agenda for April 9.

Buan asked if the assessment of the campus climate would be based solely on interviews or would the AAUP want a survey of the faculty conducted. Schleck stated that once the Bylaws are approved the national staff will start the next process and the climate assessment would be conducted by someone outside of Nebraska. She stated that they will contact the local AAUP chapter to see who should be interviewed and the local chapter will do most of the organizing of the meetings. She noted that if the Senate wanted to conduct a survey that would be helpful and would be considered in the assessment, but it is not required. Werum stated that it would be better to move forward as one voice with consultation occurring with the Senate.

Hanrahan stated that he believes that most people will think the assessment of the climate is fine, but his concern is with the issue of redress. He asked if improvements for lecturers such as a clear path to promotion or an award or bonus for outstanding lecturers would meet the redress issue. Schleck noted that this would need to be considered by Committee A, but she does know they have considered things like this in the past. She stated that some efforts that improve the status of lecturers, whether it is improvements for the position or monetary would be considered. Werum suggested that professional development funds, or research funds, could be considered for redress. Hanrahan pointed

out that the Faculty Senate has been seeking improvements for the non-tenure track faculty members for more than five years.

Schleck noted that the goal of an AAUP censure is to make improvements in terms of academic freedom for all faculty members. She pointed out that having academic freedom allows faculty to educate and conduct research without the risk of being punished which ultimately leads to improving education for the students. Minter stated that if the administration would follow through with having more secure teaching positions for non-tenure track faculty members and with better pay, this would help us retain good teachers which impacts the students. Schleck stated that she thinks the national AAUP will be more interested in forms of redress for lecturers that have a clear link to academic freedom issues. She noted that anything we can do to make them feel more secure and security in knowing that a violation of their academic freedom would be considered by faculty peers would be helpful to getting the censure removed.

Werum pointed out that improvement for graduate students could be considered as well. She stated that their work should be recognized for their contribution to the university and noted that they are often considered the lowest rank of instructional and research-related employees, and they sometimes encounter situations involving faculty members in which matters related to conflict of interest or student welfare arise, which comes with a risk of exploitation as well as risk to their academic freedom. She noted that it is unclear who should be consulted when there are issues with a graduate student worker. Buan reported that MIT just announced a more centralized system for their graduate students so if there is conflict of interest with their advisor or principal investigator, they can find a new mentor. She stated that this would be a low to no-cost program that could be implemented, and it could improve the status of graduate students and incorporate them into the university system. Weissling stated that excellence in teaching and research comes out of security and being able to do your job freely. She questioned whether the issues for lecturers and graduate students need to be considered at a systematic level.

Woodman pointed out that a little over a year ago there was a CAS taskforce that submitted a plan on how to improve the status of lecturers. He noted that the Dean was making some headway with it but then the plan went to EVC Spiller for review. He stated that EVC Spiller was to give an update about improving the lecturer status in January, but the Executive Committee has not heard anything. Buan reported that EVC Spiller has tentatively agreed to come and speak to the full Senate on April 6<sup>th</sup> to provide an update.

Schleck stated that the AAUP Committee A meets twice a year with the next meeting in May, but she stated that she does not think we can have the necessary interviews and work on the redress completed in time for the May meeting so it would have to be the November meeting. Zeleny stated that it is helpful to have a timeline and pointed out that the Chancellor is eager to engage the AAUP.

Buan stated that now would be a good time to work on a laundry list of issues to address because it would align with our N2025 plan. She suggested that we ask the Graduate College to do some oversight to avoid the exploitation of graduate students.

Schleck reported that two events are occurring that relate to the academic freedom issue. She stated that the Ethics Center has invited her to speak about whether lecturers have academic freedom and the AAUP is doing a national webinar on tenure looking at the history of it and how it relates today. She stated that this will occur in April.

Gay stated that he always thought tenure came about to protect academic freedom and therefore only those with tenure have academic freedom. Schleck noted that academic freedom is a mindset that needs to be cultivated in the faculty. She pointed out that faculty members can do their best work if they don't have the fear of retaliation. She reported that many years ago most faculty worked on annual contracts and were frequently dismissed so the AAUP joined with other national organizations advocating for tenure to protect faculty members. She stated that rank was achieved in a separate process from receiving tenure. She reported that higher education expanded greatly with the GI bill in the 1940's and tenure became a standard benefit that the best universities offered. Franco Cruz asked if faculty members who don't have tenure really have academic freedom. Schleck stated that if faculty members do not have tenure, they usually don't have the freedom and mindset that they are protected. However, she pointed out that the inverse is also true that there are faculty members that have tenure, but they do not think they have academic freedom.

Buan stated that the Executive Committee would work on a list and share it with the local AAUP chapter so the two groups can work together.

Schleck stated that she appreciates all of the work the Faculty Senate has done, particularly with the Bylaw revisions and pointed out that this was an enormous task. She noted that most of the work the Executive Committee does is not seen or appreciated by the faculty.

Buan thanked Schleck and Werum for meeting with the Executive Committee. She stated that she will begin drafting a list based on the suggestions previously stated.

## **5.2 Executive Committee Elections**

The Executive Committee discussed the upcoming elections to the Executive Committee and brainstormed about Senators who might be willing to run for election since no one has come forward indicating interest.

## **5.3 Agenda Items for EVC Spiller and VC Boehm**

The Executive Committee identified the following agenda items for EVC Spiller and VC Boehm:

- Contract faculty proposal
- Clarification of salaries for newly appointed part-time IANR administrators

Discussion of faculty statements on the impact of COVID on their work and how it will be used in their evaluations.

Tenure clock extension update

Update on graduate student health insurance

New teaching evaluation guidelines and reducing the impact of teaching evaluations by students. How will personal statements be compared and how will the data from DFW grades be used? What evidence needs to be submitted to demonstrate excellence in teaching?

Why must the delivery of courses revert to how it was done before the pandemic occurred? Are there best practices that we can learn from how courses were delivered during the pandemic?

The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, March 23, 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.