

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent:

Date: Tuesday, March 2, 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 3:53 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

2.1 COVID Taskforce Meetings

Buan reported that the University has not received any clarifications yet about vaccines. She noted that the local and state guidelines about who is eligible for the vaccine are changing rapidly and the University has no control over it. Billesbach asked if the administration could clarify whether faculty/staff should register through the University website portal or the county's portal. Griffin pointed out that the University email received a few weeks ago stated that people should register through the University portal even if they had already registered through the county. Buan noted that the University portal is now closed.

2.2 Meeting with Chancellor Green

Buan reported that she met with Chancellor Green last week and they discussed contract faculty members and the need for improving salaries as well as ensuring that these faculty members are evaluated each year. She noted that Chancellor Green is well-informed of the situation with the contract faculty members and his goal is to bring their salaries up to the level of our peers. She stated that she has sent an invitation to EVC Spiller for her to speak on the issue to the Faculty Senate at the April 6 meeting.

Buan stated that another discussion was on the graduate student health insurance, but the Chancellor stated that he has not heard Central Administration's justification for why it rejected the recommendations made by the University-wide committee looking into the health insurance.

Billesbach asked if the reason that the graduate student health insurance has seen such drastic changes is because the University changed from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to UHC. Buan pointed out that the reason for the change in insurance carriers was because Blue Cross/Blue Shield was going to significantly increase our rates and this change in carriers did not impact the graduate student health insurance. She noted that the University-wide

committee recommended a move to a different contract model for graduate student insurance, but this has been rejected. She pointed out that our Big Ten peers have an insurance model where faculty, staff, and graduate students are in the same insurance pool.

Weissling pointed out that she has been billing health insurance for years and said that UHC is known as one of the most difficult carriers to work with historically. She noted that the University is self-insured and suggested that graduate students be added to our health program. Buan reported that the University is self-insured for faculty and staff but not for students. She stated that the University-wide committee asked if the graduate students could be added to our plan but was told they could not. She pointed out that we are in a contract with UHC for a period of time, but we can do some renegotiating each year. She stated that it is important for people to let Human Resources know if they are having problems with UHC because the information would be helpful during renegotiation.

3.0 Approval of February 23, 2021 Minutes

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

4.0 Unfinished Business

4.1 University Budget Committee Proposal Update

Buan reported that she gave Chancellor Green the Executive Committee's proposal for a University Budget Committee and noted that they had a very positive meeting discussing the proposal. She stated that there was agreement that the Budget Committee should not be a final decision-making committee but would be an advisory committee to the Executive Leadership Team. She pointed out it is the Chancellor's role to make the final decisions on the budget as defined in the Regents Bylaws. She reported that the Chancellor plans on working on developing the Budget Advisory Committee during the month of March and wants the advisory committee fully ready to operate by July 1.

Woodman asked if the Budget Committee would be a Chancellor's committee or a Senate committee and if the work product of the committee will be transparently available to the faculty. Buan stated that it would be a Chancellor's committee, but the Chancellor was very receptive to having 40% of the committee members being faculty. She reported that the Chancellor welcomes significant transparency and accountability with much of the information located on a website. Woodman asked if the committee would be a Chancellor's Commission. Buan stated that the Chancellor felt that the structure defined by the Executive Committee made a lot of sense and showed balance and transparency and it would not be a commission. She noted that the Chancellor would make the final decision on the structure of the committee.

4.2 AAUP Censure

Buan stated that the Executive Committee needs to think about the next steps that need to be taken to get UNL removed from the AAUP censure list. She noted that Hanrahan had suggested that we might want to have a Faculty Senate resolution stating that our

administration has improved academic freedom on campus, but this would need to be done at the last April Senate meeting since the Board of Regents will not approve the proposed Bylaws changes until after the April 6 Senate meeting. She suggested that we could speak to our local AAUP chapter to see what language should be included in the resolution.

Billesbach recalled that the AAUP wanted restitution and some kind of apology in addition to changes to the Bylaws. Woodman asked what the supporting evidence is to show that there is greater protection of academic freedom. Franco Cruz noted that it is too early to make a statement because we need to have solid evidence showing that academic freedom has been improved on campus. Buan suggested the Senate could survey the faculty to see if they feel there is greater protection of academic freedom but without any benchmarks it would be difficult to show that improvements have occurred.

Billesbach stated that he thinks the AAUP wants to see action items that have been made. Buan pointed out that climate assessment could be part of the evidence as well. Woodman suggested that an action item would be the creation of guidelines or processes that chairs need to use to show that all faculty members, including contingent faculty members, have received annual evaluations and they would need to show evidence supporting renewal or non-renewal of contingent faculty members. Dawes pointed out that not every firing or non-renewal of a contract is a violation of academic freedom. She suggested inviting Professor Schleck to meet with the Executive Committee to discuss what other kinds of evidence would be needed to remove us from AAUP censure.

The Executive Committee agreed to invite Professors Schleck and Werum to a meeting to discuss the issue further.

4.3 Update on Proposed Academic Calendar Change

Kolbe reported that he met with EVC Spiller and AVC Walker to discuss the reason for the proposed changes to the calendar for the upcoming 2021-22 academic year. He stated that the University-wide Calendar Committee met and discussed the proposal and possible recommendations for Central Administration. He noted that he brought up the concerns the Executive Committee had regarding the proposed calendar change, particularly the concern that having a two-week interim session would not service the students the way the proposal intends, but he did tell them that the Executive Committee is still open to exploring new calendar visions in the future to make UNL a more unique academic experience.

Kolbe stated that there was discussion about the summer pre-session and how the proposed change would impact track faculty members. He noted that if the proposal is approved, there will be an effort to protect the extra days required at the end of the later-ending semester by adding to time off during the start of January. He reported that EVC Spiller's office will work to ensure that the number of days and times of work remain the same for contract faculty members if the proposed calendar change is approved. He stated that there needs to be continued conversations with the EVC office about the

length of time contract faculty members are working should the schedule be changed further in the future.

Woodman asked if the proposed calendar change with the winter session included, is being pushed due to the COVID related success of the past winter session and whether it was sustainable in anticipated future non-COVID times? Kolbe stated that if the proposed schedule works out, it is sustainable, but the proposal is a kind of trial balloon for now. Buan noted that the three-week sessions we had in December and January allowed students to take courses which sped up their graduation time. She stated that having an interim session would help improve our graduation rates, although she is not in agreement with having to work an extra week without pay.

Kolbe stated that part of the reason for having only a two-week interim session at UNL is due to constraints placed upon Athletics by the Big Ten and NCAA athlete eligibility language. He pointed out that currently, the University is only allowed to offer three semesters (fall, spring, and summer). He stated that he would continue to keep the Executive Committee updated on the proposed calendar change.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:32 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, March 9, 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.