

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Present:** Baesu, Bearnese, Boudreau, Dawes, Eklund, Lott, Minter, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, Zuckerman

**Absent:** Kopocis

**Date:** Tuesday, October 24, 2023

**Location:** 203 Alexander Building

**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 (*Kopocis*)

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

### 2.0 Work Expectations of Graduate Assistants (GSA President Katie Mowat, GSA Executive Vice President Venn Jemkur)

Mowat reported that one of the things the GSA is working on is trying to get graduate students to feel a sense of belonging since many of them spend a considerable amount of their time in a lab. She stated that the GSA is finding ways to get these students to socialize and talk to others sharing what they enjoy doing outside of their graduate work. She noted that onboarding for new students is mostly for first time freshmen and questioned how we get graduate students new to UNL acclimated to the campus. She reported that members of GSA meet with Student Affairs and with Graduate Studies once a month to address some of these issues. Zuckerman asked if there is an orientation program for new graduate students. Mowat stated that there is one only for international students.

Mowat stated that GSA is looking at options of what a graduate student can do if they are having difficulties with their graduate advisor. She suggested that having a graduate ombuds person could help to mediate the situation and she noted that GSA has started working with the Office for Student Advocacy if a graduate student is in trouble.

Mowat pointed out that graduate student advisors can sometimes wear three different hats: advisor, supervisor, and mentor. She noted that this can create additional tension in the relationship and make it more difficult for the graduate student to communicate with other faculty if they are having difficulties. She stated that it is important for the faculty to think carefully about assigning more work to graduate students because the student may already be having difficulty keeping up with their course work and work assignment. She noted that for some international students, it takes longer for them to complete some of the work.

Jemkur stated that many international graduate students find it difficult to talk to their faculty advisor because in their culture it is viewed as a sign of respect if they speak to

their advisor. She stated that there are also domestic students who do not feel comfortable speaking to a faculty member. She pointed out that it would be more helpful if the faculty advisor reached out to the students to see if things were going well. Mowat noted that in some departments there is a huge stigma if a graduate student changes their academic advisor.

Minter, who is faculty advisor to the GSA, pointed out that structurally there are some challenges with the graduate program since the Graduate College resides at the system level, but Graduate Studies is at the campus level. She stated that she does not know if there is any clear path for a graduate student to go if they are having difficulties. Zuckerman noted that it can vary by college and departments and really depends on the culture of the unit. Vakilzadian pointed out that if a graduate student works on a grant obtained by a faculty member but then changes advisors it could put the faculty member's grant in jeopardy and set them back because they would have to train another graduate student. Minter noted that many departments have a different structure for what graduate students do. In some units the students are involved in lab work but in her department graduate students teach two classes.

Eklund stated that it is important to make graduate students feel comfortable and no student should have to deal with being in an uncomfortable situation. He asked what the Faculty Senate could do to help. Mowat reported that some departments have a midterm evaluation with the review going both ways and this could help resolve some of the problems. She stated that conversations between the graduate advisor and the students needs to occur and if a student should switch their advisors, there should not be any repercussions. Zuckerman stated that the graduate advisor in the department should have open office hours which could help with having discussions. She noted that she could provide GSA with some research about what solutions work to address the concerns that were raised.

Minter stated that graduate students who feel particularly vulnerable don't feel like they can speak up when being asked to do additional work by a faculty member. She stated that many graduate students work more than the 19.6 hours a week they are supposed to work, and it becomes a real equity issue for those graduate students who are parents and have small children. Eklund asked if graduate students signed a contract that says they are not to work above 19.6 hours. Mowat stated that graduate students do sign a contract and for the graduate student to get funding to pay for their tuition they work 19.6 hours. Minter said she thought this was a requirement of the federal government, not a limit set by UNL. Baesu asked if graduate students at UNL are unionized. Mowat stated that they are not. Baesu said she believes that at some of the Big Ten schools the graduate students are unionized.

Mowat pointed out that another thing that is not well known is that a department/college cannot require that a graduate student get published for their work. They can be advised that if they want to go into academia, they should get published but it is not a requirement for graduation. She suggested that the faculty advisor have a conversation with the graduate student to see if they plan on taking a faculty position.

The Executive Committee agreed that the problems graduate students are encountering should be put on the agenda next week when the Committee meets with EVC Ankerson and VC Boehm. Eklund stated that he hoped that Mowat and Jemkur felt that their concerns have been heard and noted that the Faculty Senate wants a good working environment for everyone.

### **3.0 Announcements**

#### **3.1 Workshop with Professor Flores**

Zuckerman reported that the workshop with Professor Flores, who spoke about what faculty members can do if they are being harassed for their political views, went very well and noted that some plans are being put in place for what occurs next.

### **4.0 Approval of October 10, 2023 Minutes**

Eklund asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Zuckerman moved and Shrader seconded approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

### **5.0 Unfinished Business**

#### **5.1 Update on Faculty Senate Guidance on Public Advocacy**

Griffin reported that AVC Walker carefully reviewed the Faculty Senate Guidance on Public Advocacy and did not have any suggested revisions. AVC Walker also thought the document would be very helpful to the faculty. Griffin noted that the document will be placed on the Faculty Senate website and a copy will be distributed to the Senators.

### **6.0 New Business**

#### **6.1 Agenda Items for EVC Ankerson and VC Boehm**

The Executive Committee identified the following agenda items for EVC Ankerson and VC Boehm for the October 31 committee meeting.

- VC Boehm stated in a previous meeting that he was checking with General Counsel regarding whether it is possible to have green-card sponsorship for non-tenure track Extension Educators. Have you received any feedback yet from General Counsel on this issue?
- The program statement for the stadium renovation calls for \$50,000,000 from the University's Internal Lending Program. Where are these funds coming from? Are they part of the deferred maintenance funds from the State Legislature?
- For many years the Executive Committee met separately to interview candidates for the position of Dean or higher but recently only one Executive Committee member is allowed to attend a joint meeting with a member from the Staff Senate and ASUN. Why was this change made?
- Is there a strategy for online programs that departments are to follow? Department committees approve an online course, but it is being stopped in the EVC office. Why is this occurring?
- If faculty retire next year, will the department lose the faculty line?

- Can there be a centralized website for onboarding which directs students, faculty, and graduate students to sites pertaining to on-boarding information specifically for them?
- Are discussions still occurring around the idea of a 14-week semester?
- There are several categories in UNL's incident reporting system, where do comments/reports about academic issues go? Who addresses concerns raised?
- Can you provide an update on ASEM efforts and changes that have been made since working with Ruffalo Noel Levitz consultants.
- Where is UNL's social media presence? People often hear about UNO and UNK through social media but haven't heard anything about UNL.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, October 31, 2023, at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in 201 Canfield Administration Building. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.