

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES

March 5, 2024

Presidents Kelli Kopocis, Pete Eklund, and Deb Minter, Presiding
Zoom Meeting

1.0 Call to Order

President Kopocis called the meeting to order at 2:33 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

President Kopocis thanked all of the Senators who were attending the meeting in person and those on Zoom. She noted that the Senate would be having a special presentation from the Chancellor and the consultants of Academic Analytics about UNL rejoining the AAU. She pointed out that the presentation will be focused on the benefits of being a member of the AAU, but the plan on how we get there will not be discussed.

2.1 Upcoming Faculty Senate Elections

President Kopocis remained the Faculty Senate that elections will be held in May for the President-Elect, Secretary, and two Executive Committee members. She asked that any Senator interested in running for election contact her or Coordinator Griffin.

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

3.1 The Importance of UNL Becoming a Member of the AAU (AVC Zavala, Academic Analytics Consultants: Naeem Thompson, Jeff Neel, Alica Murillo, Robert Berdahl)

Chancellor Bennett thanked everyone for being present and noted that during the November 7 Faculty Senate meeting, Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, asked the valid question of why the university set a goal to be readmitted to the AAU and he wanted to have a conversation with the Senate about this topic. He stated that he respects shared governance and if anyone has any concerns that need to be addressed, they should let the Senate Executive Committee know so they can bring the issue forward.

Chancellor Bennett noted that these are challenging times to be in higher education with the attacks on academic freedom and tenure, and to exacerbate the situation, we still do not have a System President. He stated that while he has a deep appreciation for those who want us to be more aggressive in moving forward, he urged patience so we do not get too far ahead because things could change when we have new leadership.

Chancellor Bennett reported that there is a significant strategy to get us eligible for readmission into the AAU and he stated that during the summer we will probably begin looking at our strategic plan to decide what we want our student experience to be and where our resources should be focused. He noted that on February 15th he met with approximately 100 academic and administrative leaders during which time he brought them up to speed on some initiatives that are being considered. He acknowledged that there is a lot of frustration about the budget process and pointed out that when he arrived much of the work for the \$12 million budget cuts were already in place due to the work of the budget reduction committee that former Chancellor Green established last spring.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he is not inclined to implement any further budget reductions until we know who the next NU President will be, but we do need to work on our strategic plan and that the best way for people to be involved in helping us update our strategic plan is to nominate yourself to be involved. He noted that feedback will be needed from everyone for us to be relevant and pulling all in the same direction. He stated that he does not think we will be able to work this spring or over the summer to address further budget reductions but pointed out that in visiting with alumni and citizens around the state, most people feel that the University needs to make sure that we have a return of investment with our programs.

Chancellor Bennett reported that Dr. Bob Berdahl is Senior Academic Advisor with Academic Analytics and previously has served as President of University of Texas at Austin, Chancellor at University of California-Berkeley, President of the Association of American Universities, and President at the University of Oregon. He noted that Dr. Berdahl was President of the AAU when UNL lost its membership, and he spent some time talking to Dr. Berdahl about what we might need to do to gain readmission into the Association. He reported that Dr. Berdahl is going to try and join the meeting via Zoom.

Chancellor Bennett stated that we need to think about why it is important for us to regain membership, and at some point, we will have to ask ourselves if we are prepared to do the things that will be needed to be readmitted pointing out that this will require considerable effort. He stated that it will take an institutional commitment to doing the necessary work to gain readmittance. He stated that the effort will have to go beyond reporting mechanisms and we might decide after a vetting period that it might not be in our best interest for us to do this. He noted that the process could take ten years to complete.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he has a list of reasons why it would be good for us to rejoin the AAU. He noted that we are the only Big Ten university that is not a member of the AAU and there has been discussion in the public domain that we don't want to lose our position in the Big Ten. He stated that while placement in the athletic conference is important, his interest is not routed exclusively in terms of athletic affiliation. He pointed out that being in AAU provides exposure, credibility, and allows us to compete for some of the greatest talent, noting that the AAU defines its members as being on the leading edge in scientific developments and helps to shape science and innovation.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that rejoining the AAU will require a tremendous commitment, not just financially, and we need to embrace this commitment against the backdrop of not having a system president and budget uncertainties. He noted that a strategic plan needs to be developed and all this work has to be done as a flagship, R1, Big Ten institution. He stated that all parties need to be involved and we need to decide to what extent we are willing to invest in making a stake in our claim to be considered for membership. He pointed out that there is no guarantee, even after all our efforts, that we will be readmitted into the AAU although he believes going through the process will make us a better university due to the improvement in the metrics that we would need to make to be reconsidered for admittance. He stated that if we want to be the most competitive institution for big innovation and policy decisions, we will have a steep road to climb, but if people say they don't want us to pursue the goal of being an AAU member again they have to accept that they won't be as competitive and influential.

AVC Zavala stated that she will provide information on how the AAU makes membership decisions, what the indicators are, and where we rank amongst the other institutions. She stated that the [AAU website](#) provides the membership policy, defines what the membership indicators are and what data sources are used when looking at the data. She noted that her presentation also includes how our metrics compare when we are combined with UNMC. She noted that the membership indicators are presented in two phases. Phase 1 indicators are used as the primary indicators of institutional breadth and quality of research and education. Phase 2 indicators are used to provide additional and important calibrations of institutional research and education programs. She pointed out that most of the metrics are looked at for a ten-year average and then reviewed by the AAU membership committee which recently revised some of their indicators. She noted that it is important to keep in mind that the data will be reviewed at the AAU membership meeting in both total values and normalized values and will be based on tenured and tenure track faculty head counts. She stated that the AAU recently revised the membership indicators and the changes that they made combined national academies memberships into their award fellowships and memberships indicators and books were added as a Phase 1 indicator.

AVC Zavala reported that IPEDS data will be used for tenure and tenure track headcount and UNMC will use AAMC data set. She stated that we will use Academic Analytics' license to gather the necessary data when we start looking at it on a more granular level but will use the Academic Analytics citation data when needed. She pointed out that UNMC and the President's office have just signed on with Academic Analytics.

(See attached PowerPoint presentation.)

Professor Cupp, Animal Science, asked if the headcount is just tenure-track faculty research appointments or are all tenure-track faculty included in the data when it is collected. AVC Zavala stated that it is for all tenure and tenure-track faculty reported to IPEDS, she believes that the only ones that would be excluded are the University Libraries faculty. Professor Cupp asked if their major appointment is teaching or Extension, if they would still be used in the normalized data. AVC Zavala stated that this is correct.

Professor Cupp pointed out that when looking at the graduation rates our lines on the graph were starting to merge with other members of the AAU in 2019, but then there was a decline when the pandemic occurred. She asked if this is the assumption on the graphs. AVC Zavala stated that she cannot say for certain that the pandemic was the reason for the decline but pointed out that our research expenditures decreased as well during the pandemic.

Professor Zuckerman, Educational Administration, noted that with the AAU normalizing the data across tenure and tenure track lines, how do you resist the sort of perverse incentive of reducing tenure line faculty to make the metrics better, noting that this is happening across the country. Chancellor Bennett stated this will be part of what we have to discuss. He reported that he will be meeting with each of the deans in the colleges and thinks that this is an issue that needs to be part of the conversation and whether we are willing to do this. Professor Zuckerman pointed out that getting rid of tenured faculty is damaging universities across the country. Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes we need to get input from many different groups, and he wants the Faculty Senate to be a part of that conversation.

Professor VanderPlas stated that given all these metrics and their importance to the AAU, it does not seem like these are a good fit for UNL because we have a huge Extension program which doesn't count for anything by AAU metrics, and we have great education programs that don't get counted for anything. She asked if we shouldn't embrace our own niche even if that means that we aren't a member of the AAU. She stated that the purpose of the university is to educate students and to make sure that the knowledge they gain transfers to the people of our state. She pointed out that athletics is a side show relative to the goal of the university. Chancellor Bennett stated he is here today to say that we need to have a conversation about whether or not this is a road we want to take. He noted that he does not want people to think that we are absolutely going to do everything that needs to be done to get us into the AAU. He noted that his responsibility as the Chancellor is to present what the opportunities and benefits may be to joining the AAU and then we need to decide as a community whether we want to pursue that goal. Professor VanderPlas stated that the risk is that the university spends a year or more deciding if this is a risk we want to pursue instead of focusing on working to make the university more functional.

Professor Burton, Textiles, Merchandising & Fashion Design, noted that he personally does not feel like his work fits into the way things are measured for the metrics, but the roadmap seems like a strategic plan that we could use to improve ourselves.

Professor Singh, Marketing, pointed out that most of the metrics presented are output measures and asked if there are input metrics such as where our students come from. He stated that looking at the members in the AAU there is a big shift from where they are and where we are. He pointed out that other things like compensation plans and research funding need to be taken into consideration. He stated that achieving the defined metrics would take a tremendous investment noting that to get a

paper published in a journal in his field can cost anywhere from at least \$3-\$5,000 because of the amount of experiments that have to be run with participants.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that if we choose to go down this road there needs to be tremendous investment from the Central office, the legislature, governor's office, and from our alumni and other donors.

President-Elect Eklund stated after recently attending the Big Ten Academic Alliance conference there was discussion about the AAU membership, and it was pointed out that we are the only university not in the AAU. He noted that athletics is a part of being in the Big Ten and stated that when we do well in athletics it does impact our ability to recruit students, and while the stadium only gets filled eight days a year, the Susan Buffett Cancer Center serves people in the entire region 365 days a year and we are able to provide services to these people because of the knowledge and experiences that we share with other Big Ten universities. He stated that we have to take a look at ourselves in important ways noting that the average graduation rate for AAU members is 85% while we are still lingering somewhere in the 60th percentile. He pointed out that parents are more likely to send their child to a university that has a higher percentage rate. He stated that we need to take a good firm look at ourselves in order for us to become a better university.

Academic Analytics Consultant Thompson apologized for Dr. Bergdahl not being able to attend the meeting but noted that he has attended meetings at other institutions with Dr. Bergdahl and he has heard the same conversations that are being raised here today. He pointed out that now is a better time to try to rejoin the AAU because the membership criteria have recently changed and the inclusion of the number of books written and published is a very helpful step. He noted there are 23 APLU universities in the AAU who have very similar missions to Nebraska. He reported that Dr. Bergdahl says it is helpful for universities to look at what success looks like and the AAU's focus on what quality looks like and the domains they measure can be beneficial to any university wanting to better itself. He pointed out that it does take time and resources, but he can't think of one state that does not want to have one of the best universities in the country.

4.0 Approval of February 6, 2024 Minutes

President Kopocis asked for approval of the minutes. Professor Tschetter, History, moved to approve the minutes. Motion seconded by Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theatre & Film. President Kopocis asked if there were any revisions. Hearing none she asked the Senate to vote on the minutes. The minutes were approved.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Motion to Approve the Ballot for Elections to the Academic Planning Committee, the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee, and the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Panel

President Kopocis reported that there has been a change with one of the candidates running for election to the Academic Planning Committee. She noted that the motion was presented last month and asked for a motion to approve the ballot. Professor Tschetter moved to approve and Professor Vakilzadian, Electrical and Computer Engineering, seconded the motion. The motion was approved by the Faculty Senate. President Kopocis stated that a ballot will be sent out to all faculty members as defined in the Academic Assembly.

5.2 Motion to Revise the Faculty Senate Syllabus Policy

President Kopocis noted that the motion to revise the Syllabus Policy requiring language that would indicate how the instructor will notify students in case of an Instructional Continuity Day was presented at the February 6th meeting. Professor Schauer, Modern Languages & Literature, moved to approve. Motion seconded by Professor Kiambi, College of Journalism and Mass Communications. Motion was approved.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Open Mic

Professor Zuckerman presented the following motion:

The Faculty Senate shall create a Faculty Budget Committee (FBC) to advise the administration on all budget-related matters. In addition to its ongoing advisory role, the FBC would be charged with working with the APC in all matters related to budget reductions that affect the academic mission directly or indirectly, as well as with working with administrators to provide access to and knowledge of campus budgeting processes.

The committee shall have five elected members from the faculty senate, representatives from other faculty senate and faculty committees as relevant (e.g. Faculty Compensation Advisory; Diversity & Inclusion; Libraries; Undergraduate Curriculum; Research Council) and three administrators – the EVC the VC of IANR, and a representative from Office of the Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance – who are nonvoting members of the committee. This committee shall elect a chair for a one-year term. The chair will serve an additional term as the past chair. A chair elect will be elected to serve as the next chair and following that term as the past chair.

In collaboration with the EVC, VC of IANR, and Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance, the FBC shall hold annual budget meetings during the spring semester with each college, school, center or other academic unit in which leaders from each unit will present detailed budget information for that unit. This information shall include an update on their budget from the past year, strategic goals for the next 3-5 years, and how those goals connect to budget projections.

This committee shall host, with the Senate Executive Committee, an annual fall semester budget and finance academy with the Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance open to all members of the faculty and staff to learn about the university budget and its current financial status.

The committee shall advocate for college, school, center, and other academic level faculty budget committees, as well as annual meetings at this level with each dean or unit leader. This committee shall work with the Faculty Executive Committee to promote the importance and value of faculty service for every faculty member on campus.

President-Elect Eklund seconded the motion.

Professor Kolbe asked how the proposed committee would interact and work with the Academic Planning Committee (APC) and noted that the membership would be similar to the APC. Professor Zuckerman noted that the APC has other responsibilities aside from dealing with budget reallocations and reductions. She stated that how the committees would work together would need to be determined. She noted that the idea behind the motion is to have the faculty play a better role in budget decisions and for more transparency in the budget process.

Professor Katz, Art, Art History and Design, reported that her department met with the Dean of her college who stated that he is already making decisions to cut under-performing programs because of the University budget situation. As a result, her program was being cut even though it is the top producer of student credit hours, books, and citations in the department. The Dean then recommended that the department should adopt a different degree drawing on engineering faculty and natural sciences stating that this would help the metrics be better. She pointed out that this is a very different scenario than what the Chancellor has outlined where he says that faculty have lots of input. She noted that the only way these budget cuts will save money is by eliminating four tenure-track faculty members. She stated that it is her understanding that the APC receives the budget reductions and then her department would have to plead to the APC to save the program. She stated that she would like there to be a way for budget reductions to be made of faculty opinions, not on metrics produced by the administration.

Professor Zuckerman wondered if there are ways the faculty can be more proactive rather than reactive. She noted that the Faculty Senate did call for every college to create a budget committee when the incentive-based budget model was shadowing the existing budget model.

Professor McElvray, Agriculture Leadership, Education and Communication, pointed out that the monitoring of information is different from what it has ever been, and faculty should be engaged and be more proactive. He stated that he thinks the APC process is a very passive process and suggested that we need to think how to be more creative and engaged from a faculty perspective.

Professor Cupp stated that she is not sure that the administration is going to let a committee look at every single unit's budget. She also asked how the work of the committee would get implemented.

Professor Peterson stated that he is troubled with the motion wanting each academic unit to present detailed budget information. He pointed out that takes a lot of work that would more than likely fall on an already overloaded department chair. He suggested that a task force be set up to investigate what a faculty budget committee could sensibly do. He stated that VC Zeleny and Professor Bloom, who was co-chair of the Budget Model Advisory Committee, would be good people to discuss the idea with. He questioned how the committee would be implemented and enforced and noted that a more focused proposal is needed. Professor Cupp stated that the proposal needs to be better refined and should define how such a committee could be implemented. Professor Guevara, Modern Languages & Literature, noted that the committee would be non-binding and implementation would be difficult. President Kopocis suggested tabling the motion.

Professor Barrett, Psychology, pointed out that decisions are being made now about budget reductions and there is a sense of urgency and cautioned about putting off this decision until the next month, although he agreed that specifics about the committee need to be worked out.

Professor VanderPlas stated that the fundamental idea of the motion is sound but suggested a friendly amendment to only retain the first paragraph. She stated that in the next month the proposal could be more fully developed.

Professor Peterson called for a point of order. He noted that the motion is not an emergency motion and therefore would be voted on at the next meeting according to the Faculty Senate rules.

Professor Dunigan, Plant Pathology, pointed out that this is a serious motion that needs to be considered carefully and it was not stated clearly nor distributed electronically for those attending via Zoom.

Professor Katz stated that the faculty do not have control over the budget, but transparency is the key to creating this committee. Professor Singh stated that consideration needs to be given on whether the committee would advocate for the faculty and the educational impacts of budget reductions.

Professor Tschetter pointed out that the APC has asked for greater transparency a number of times throughout the fall semester while working on the \$12 million budget reductions. She stated that to get the information that this motion is calling for would be difficult to obtain. She stated that how this committee would work with the APC is very critical. Professor Kolbe stated that the way the motion is written, it will more than likely fail.

Professor Zuckerman accepted Professor VanderPlas' friendly amendment.

President Kopocis stated that the motion would be considered at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:24 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, April 2, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A and by Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.