

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES
December 3, 2024
Nebraska Union, Platte River Room
Presidents Pete Eklund, John Shrader, and Kelli Kopocis, Presiding

1.0 Call to Order

President Eklund called the meeting to order at 2:32 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett thanked the Faculty Senate for having him come to speak with them and noted that he enjoys speaking with the Faculty Senate and particularly with the Senate Executive Committee pointing out that it makes a big difference when the administration has a good relationship with the Senate.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he wanted to make sure people were aware of some important academic transitions. He pointed out that he is sorry to see Interim Vice Chancellor Jones, Office of Research and Innovation, easing into her retirement and noted that she has been an important, dedicated and long-term member of UNL having previously served as Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences. He reported that Associate Vice Chancellor Nelson of the Office of Research and Innovation began serving as Interim Vice Chancellor of ORI on November 15th.

Chancellor Bennett noted that Executive Vice Chancellor Ankerson has announced her retirement at the end of December and there will be a reception for her on December 16th at the International Quilt Museum. He pointed out that EVC Ankerson has been an incredible partner to work with since he arrived and noted that she has done exemplary work for UNL and the university serving previously as a faculty member and then Dean of the College of Architecture. He wanted to highlight some of the work that Academic Affairs, under the direction of EVC Ankerson, has taken. He reported that EVC Ankerson's strong commitment to supporting faculty through professorships, fellowships, and mentoring resulted in 68 distinguished faculty members being celebrated earlier this year at our annual promotion and tenure event and 49 Faculty Development Fellowships being awarded. He reported that he is looking forward to working with Dean Button of the College of Arts and Sciences who will become Interim EVC on January 1.

Chancellor Bennett announced that combined with UNMC, we have exceeded \$617 million dollars in combined research expenditures which ranks 55th nationally, and he noted that we are still having tremendous momentum with our research across the enterprise. He stated that two awards of note are the \$1.5 million dollar grant from the Mellon Foundation, and a \$11.6 million dollar grant from NIH which will address public health in rural communities. He stated that faculty members earned 9 NSF Career Awards in 2024, placing us among the nation's top institutions for obtaining this award. He pointed out that we can never lose sight that we are a tier 1 research university and the land-grant, flagship campus of the university and member of the Big Ten. He stated that we have been able to enhance teaching and student engagement through innovative tools such as Canvas and providing dashboard information and Academic Navigator systems. He reported that not long ago we celebrated Professor Sheridan, George Holmes University Professor of Educational Psychology, for being elected to the National Academy of Education. He noted that she has been a dedicated faculty member for over 20 years and is the founding director of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he has been meeting with a number of people on campus to continue our conversation around changes in our approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion. He noted that on November 13th, he along with EVC Ankerson, VC Zeleny, and VC Anderson met with the African and African American Leadership Caucus for nearly two hours to discuss DEI these efforts. He noted that he also met with Professor Bondi and Garcia of the AFIRE group, and

they had a robust conversation.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he also met with the Graduate Student Assembly to discuss a number of items, including DEI efforts. He pointed out that there was considerable discussion about where UNL stands in the Big Ten with the amount of funding provided to graduate student assistantships noting that we are falling behind our peers. He noted that our budget situation has led to some difficult decisions that have impacted graduate assistantships, but he is very interested in working collaboratively with our graduate students and VC Hope of Graduate Studies to ensure that we do not lose good graduate students because our stipends are not keeping up with our peers.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he has had discussions with President Gold about the possibility of an early retirement program for tenured faculty members. He noted that this is a possible tool for us to use as we address our budget shortfall. He pointed out that he cannot currently provide details of the program and noted that there is specific criteria that would need to be met in order to qualify for the Voluntary Separation Incentive Program (VSIP). He stated that more information will be available in the spring semester.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that we are continuing to look for faculty members to serve as Marshals noting that it is very important for us to have enough of them. He noted that he has been speaking to the Deans about this and has a list from Head Marshal Bob Gorman about how we stand with the number of Marshals from each college. He stated that some colleges are leading the way, but other colleges have work to do in terms of doing their fair share of serving. He stated that anyone interested should contact Professor Bob Gorman. He noted that the December commencement will be held on December 21 in the Pinnacle Bank Arena.

Chancellor Bennett thanked the members of the Faculty Senate for all of the work they do for the University and for the students and wished everyone a good holiday break.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Faculty Senate President's Newsletter

President Eklund reported that he is reinstating the President's newsletter noting that the most recent issue provided information on what offices faculty, staff, and students should contact if they have issues or concerns that were formally handled by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He noted that faculty members should contact the Academic Affairs office, staff should contact Human Resources, and students should contact the Office of Student Life if they are dealing with diversity, equity, or inclusion issues. He asked that anyone who does not receive feedback from one of the offices listed above should let the Faculty Senate know so the Senate can follow up on the issue.

3.2 Update on the Friendly Family Leave Policy

President Eklund stated that the Family Leave Policy which was to be presented to the Board of Regents last year but was then pulled by President Carter has been gaining some ground at the two unionized campuses, UNK and UNO. He reported that Interim Provost Jackson recommended that UNL should get approval from Chancellor Bennett who would then notify the President's office of his approval of the proposed policy, and from there the policy will hopefully get approval from the President and placed on a Board of Regents agenda. He noted that Chancellor Bennett is supportive of the policy and stated that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee will continue to put pressure on the administration to have this policy move forward.

3.3 Faculty Background Checks

President Eklund pointed out that we are the only Big Ten university that does not conduct background checks on new faculty hires. As a result, he has been on a committee that is working on developing a policy that would require a background check on all new faculty hires. He noted that existing faculty members would not have a background check unless they are applying to move into an administrative position. He reported that the Executive Committee has reviewed the draft

several times and has made recommendations and asked many questions as we want a policy that is carefully written. He stated that updates on the progress of the policy will be provided to the Senate.

4.0 Approval of November 5, 2024 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the November 5, 2024, minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics, moved for approval. Motion seconded by Professor Tschetter, History, and then approved by the Faculty Senate.

5.0 Committee Reports

5.1 Faculty Senate Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (Professor PeeksMease)

Professor PeeksMease, Chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee (D&I), reported that throughout the year the committee worked on reimagining itself since the original charge was quite vast and related to anything having to do with diversity. As a result, the committee worked on reimagining itself since there is now a Staff Senate which has its own diversity committee. It was agreed that a staff representative was not needed for the Faculty Senate's committee but that the chairs of the Staff Senate committee and the Faculty Senate committee would have regular contact to discuss common issues. He reported that there was also discussion about the lack of attendance by the ASUN and GSA representatives and the committee felt that they should also be removed from the membership. In addition, the VC of Diversity and Inclusion or designee needs to be removed since this position no longer exists, and UAAD and UNOPA representatives should be removed since we now have a Staff Senate. He noted that the committee is making a motion to amend the committee syllabus to reflect the change in membership. He pointed out that since the motion is coming from a Senate committee, it does not need a second and would be voted on at the February 4 meeting.

Professor PeeksMease reported that the D&I committee served as an advisory to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee advising the Exec to make public statements supporting the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office prior to the Office being eliminated due to budget reductions, and also to make a public statement after the decision to eliminate the office was made public. He stated that the D&I provided extensive feedback on three University-wide D&I related policies/proposals/documents: faculty evaluations for inclusive excellence recommendations document, NU anti-bullying policy, and religious observances policy.

Professor PeeksMease reported that he met with former Vice Chancellor Barker of the DEI office and learned that there was a Council on Inclusive Excellent and Diversity (CIED) which included various UNL stakeholders, and he joined the CIED and let them know of the Senate's D&I committee and how it could help the CIED meet some of its goals. He pointed out that it is unclear at this time whether the CIED will continue or has been dissolved.

Professor PeeksMease stated that the D&I contacted each of the deans to better understand whether each college has a committee addressing diversity and inclusion and he noted that he received feedback from each of the colleges pointing out that they all had something in place to address diversity and inclusion. He pointed out that the D&I committee supported AFIRE's attempts to get a response from the Chancellor after two letters were sent by AFIRE, one with over 200 UNL signatures, indicating opposition to the decision to eliminate the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Professor PeeksMease reported that the University conducted two well-being surveys in 2022, one commissioned by the Chancellor's office and the other conducted by Gallup which was authorized by the President's office. He pointed out that the D&I committee requested the aggregate data from both of the surveys to better understand underrepresented faculty and staff experiences at UNL but both requests were denied. The D&I committee is seeking to partner with the Staff and Faculty Senates, and the Deans to conduct another well-being survey. He noted that the data from this

survey would remain under the control of the faculty.

Professor PeeksMease stated that a goal of the D&I committee is to possibly create an anonymous website for faculty and staff to raise grievances and concerns relating to diversity and inclusion issues. He reported that the D&I plans to work on determining which colleges have a dedicated D&I committee and whether these committees could provide an annual report to the Senate D&I committee which would be shared with the Faculty Senate.

Professor McElravy, Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, asked if the Ombuds Office would be considered a resource place for faculty to go to if they have D&I concerns, and asked if the Senate D&I committee has worked with the Ombuds Office. Professor PeeksMease stated that he believes the Staff Senate may have been in contact with the Ombuds Office.

Professor Cressler, School of Biological Sciences, asked if ASUN and GSA have other outlets where they can express their concerns. Professor PeeksMease noted that repeated emails have been sent to the ASUN and GSA representatives about meetings of the D&I Committee but there have been no replies and there has been a history of poor attendance at the meetings. He stated that the committee has had numerous discussions about whether the student representatives should remain on the committee but pointed out that ASUN and GSA could be asked if they wanted to reimagine their role on the committee.

Professor Gel, Supply Chain Management and Analytics, asked if the Senate D&I committee is charged by the university to handle and manage grievances. She pointed out that these can be sensitive matters involving personnel issues. Professor PeeksMease stated that the committee's charge would be to focus on diversity and inclusion issues from faculty members. He pointed out that having a website where people could anonymously submit concerns is a goal for the committee to consider.

Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, asked if any reasons were given as to why the aggregate data would not be available to the committee. Professor PeeksMease reported that no reason was given. He noted that the Chancellor's office and the President's office own the data since they commissioned the surveys. He pointed out that others have asked for the aggregate data and received the same negative response. Professor Harris, Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences, wondered if the data could be obtained through FOIA. Professor PeeksMease stated that this was a good question, but he is unsure who to ask about submitting a FOIA request.

GSA President Jemkur suggested that it would be best to contact the GSA and ASUN Presidents if the assigned representatives are not responding to emails. Professor McElravy questioned whether the student representatives should be on the CIED which is a broader group. He noted that GSA and ASUN have different initiatives and wondered whether the Senate D&I committee was the right place for them. He suggested instead that the Presidents of GSA and ASUN attend the meeting of the chairs from the Faculty Senate and Staff Senate diversity committees. Professor PeeksMease stated that the D&I committee would more than likely be willing to keep the student representatives on the committee if they begin to attend the meetings.

5.2 Faculty Compensation Advisory Committee (Professor Kopocis)

Past President Kopocis reported that the FCAC is an advisory committee to the Chancellor. She noted that a problem for the committee is that the salary data information the committee receives comes in very late in the spring pointing out that at the last meeting on May 24, data from The Ohio State University was still missing. As a result, the committee decided to push its report back a year to make sure it had time to analyze all of the data.

Past President Kopocis stated that the FCAC decided to review what has been done over the past few years. Increases in salaries were provided for Professors of Practice and Lecturers and former President Carter gave a total of \$10 million over a two-year period to increase the salaries of

tenured faculty members to bring them closer to the salaries of our peer institutions. She pointed out that it is hard to do salary comparisons for Lecturers because it varies considerably across our peers. A similar challenge is with Library faculty members because some of our peers consider them to be faculty while others do not. She noted that one finding is that UNL still consistently lags behind our peers in salaries, and this has typically been the result of freezing faculty salaries to address budget shortfalls. She reported that the FCAC will continue to study the data and should receive updated data in the spring.

Professor Gel pointed out that a significant part of the salary and benefits discussion should relate to family leave and sick leave for academic faculty on a nine-month appointment. She noted that faculty members on a nine-month appointment do not accumulate sick leave and if they are temporarily disabled due to illness or an accident, the supervising administrator would need to approve whether the individual would get paid their regular salary during the period of the disability. She pointed out that this leaves approval on an ad hoc basis. She stated that the Faculty Senate should push to address the lack of sick leave for nine-month faculty members noting that the staff have this benefit, and the faculty should have it too. Past President Kopocis reported that the FCAC has not addressed this issue, but she will put it on the agenda for the next meeting of the committee. Professor Shen, Construction Engineering Management, pointed out that post docs receive sick leave. He suggested that the FCAC look at our peer universities to see what their sick leave policy is for academic faculty members. Past President Kopocis reported that this is currently being reviewed at the system level and if the policy is adjusted, it should be system wide.

Professor Yan, Child, Youth and Family Studies, noted that several years ago the university addressed the salary gap for minority faculty members, and while the outcome was addressed the root of how this happened was not addressed and over the years these faculty members' salary inequities resulted in lost wages and less contribution to retirement. She stated that this is an issue that the FCAC should address. Professor Peterson reported that historically UNL has had a salary model that showed gender and minority status which was used for many years by the FCAC. He pointed out that when he was a member of the FCAC the committee found there was little difference in salary equity but there would occasionally be some outlier cases. He suggested that it would be helpful to look at that salary model again. Past President Kopocis reported that the FCAC is still using the salary model, but the data came in so late that the committee did not have a chance to review it in May.

Professor Rumann asked if there was a plan to continue having discussions about salary increases for Professors of Practice given the difficulty of trying to compare salaries with our peer institutions. Past President Kopocis reported that the data spreadsheet the FCAC receives is gigantic because it lists every faculty line at every peer institution, and the difficulty comes in how to relate other universities' faculty lines to ours. She stated that the real challenge comes with the non-tenure track faculty lines, and she is unsure how the comparison process could be made better but the discussion about Professors of Practices salaries will continue.

6.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Election to Executive Committee

President Eklund stated that an election was needed to replace Professor Dawes, University Libraries, who is leaving UNL to go to Brown University. He noted that when Professor Dawes spoke, everyone listened because she always gave careful, professional, and thoughtful comments.

President Eklund noted that Professor Jamie Reimer, Glenn Korff School of Music, and Professor Zhigang Shen, Construction Engineering Management, were running for election. He stated that a ballot would be sent to the Senators for voting tomorrow and the Senate will be notified of the results of the election.

7.2 Proposed Revisions to the UNL Syllabus Policy

President Eklund reported that revisions to the UNL Syllabus Policy were being proposed by the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and since the UUCC is a Faculty Senate committee, it does not need a second. He noted that the revisions call for requiring a “course letter grading scale” and total “course letter” grade in the required documentation section of the policy. He stated that the motion to revise the Syllabus Policy will be conducted at the February 4, 2025, meeting.

Professor McElravy asked if ASUN must vote on the proposed revisions. President Eklund pointed out that the Syllabus Policy is a Faculty Senate policy and therefore does not require ASUN approval.

President Eklund reported that ASUN President Herbin is very interested in wanting trigger warning language included in the Senate’s Syllabus policy, however, the Executive Committee discussed this idea and was strongly against it because they felt that it could infringe on academic freedom. He stated that the Executive Committee will try to meet with ASUN President Herbin during the spring semester to discuss the issue further.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, February 4, 2025, at 2:30 p.m. in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A and via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.