

**UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES**  
**February 6, 2024**  
**Presidents Kelli Kopocis, Pete Eklund, and Deb Minter, Presiding**  
**East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A**

**1.0 Call to Order**

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

**2.0 Announcements**

**2.1 Resuming In-Person Faculty Senate Meetings**

President Kopocis stated that the Executive Committee agreed that beginning in August, the Faculty Senate meetings will be held in-person. Only those people living 50 miles or more outside of Lincoln will be able to Zoom into the meetings.

**2.2 Chancellor's Presentation on the Importance of UNL Rejoining the AAU**

President Kopocis reported that there will be a presentation by Chancellor Bennett at the March 5 Faculty Senate meeting about the benefits for UNL rejoining the AAU.

**2.3 Upcoming Faculty Senate Executive Committee Elections**

President Kopocis noted that elections for a President-Elect, Secretary, and two Executive Committee members will occur during the May 7 meeting. She urged Senators to consider running for election to the Executive Committee pointing out that it is a great opportunity to learn more about the university, to interact with administrators, and to network with faculty members from across the campus. She stated that the Executive Committee meets every Tuesday afternoon during the academic year and only every other week during the summer. She asked that anyone interested contact either her or Coordinator Griffin.

**3.0 Chancellor Bennett**

President Kopocis reported that the Chancellor was in Arizona attending the NU Foundation's annual fundraising event.

**4.0 Approval of December 5, 2023 Minutes**

President Kopocis asked if there was a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Vakilzadian, Computing and Electrical Engineering, moved to approve the minutes. Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics seconded the motion. President Kopocis asked the Faculty Senate if there were any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none she asked for a vote to approve the minutes. Motion approved.

**5.0 Committee Reports**

**5.1 Academic Planning Committee (Professor Vuran)**

Professor Vuran noted that he is Chair of the APC and wanted to express his deepest thanks to each of the members of the APC for all their hard work last year. He reported that the Committee met in the spring and fall of 2023 and, in addition to its regular work of reviewing program proposals and participating in academic program reviews, the Committee dealt with budget reductions in both the spring and fall semesters. He pointed out that more details of the activities can be found on the APC website <https://www.unl.edu/apc/minutes>.

Professor Vuran reported that in 2023 the APC approved revisions to the Guidelines for Academic Program Reviews and drafted guidelines for new APC members when reviewing proposals for new academic programs. He noted that EVC Ankerson, a member of the APC, stated that she will bring suggestions for improving the proposal process to her office for consideration.

Professor Vuran stated that the APC met with Chancellor Green in the spring who enacted the

Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reallocations and Reductions and the Committee then worked on reviewing the proposed reductions totaling \$10.8 million. The APC finalized its recommendations and notified Chancellor Green in mid-May. He stated that in the fall semester the Committee met with Chancellor Bennett who invoked the Procedures to address an additional \$12 million budget reduction due to UNL's budget deficit. During the review of the proposed reductions, the Committee met with Vice Chancellor Barker to discuss the impacts the proposed \$800,000 budget reduction would have on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The Committee finalized its review of the proposed reductions and notified Chancellor Bennett in mid-December of the Committee's recommendations.

Professor Vuran reported that other activities of the APC included regular reports from EVC Ankerson, VC Boehm, VC Wilhelm and then Interim VC Jones. He stated that the Committee recommended approval of a number of proposals including undergraduate and graduate certificates, name changes to programs, and deletion of programs. He pointed out that this information was included in the APC report.

Professor Vakilzadian noted that the campus is expecting another phase of budget reductions and asked if the cuts will be vertical or horizontal and how the APC is being proactive addressing these reductions. Professor Vuran reported that UNL has not been informed of its share of the system's budget reductions and believes that there are discussions taking place at the system level. He pointed out that the APC has talked about making strategic budget reductions rather than making horizontal reductions and stated that the budget reduction process this fall was unique because Chancellor Bennett wanted the APC involved earlier in the process. He stated that the Committee also received more detailed information on UNL's budget structure. He noted that the APC has not received any proposals for Phase II of the budget cuts.

Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, asked Professor Vuran if he felt that the information the APC received from the administration was sufficient and whether the Committee received complete information detailing what would be cut. Professor Vuran stated that information was received throughout the process but some of the information was not complete. He pointed out that there was no information about the zero-based budgeting exercise that the campuses had to do so the APC could not comment on any proposed reductions falling under this category. He noted that the APC recommended not to reduce the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's budget by \$800,000 and not to reduce the Instructional Efficiency budget by \$2,014,733. He stated that one of the processes he has started with the APC is to understand why the Chancellor did not accept the Committee's recommendations. Professor VanderPlas asked if the APC was allowed to provide alternative suggestions to the proposed reductions. Professor Vuran stated that the APC as a whole was not asked but some individual members could have been asked.

## **5.2 Intercollegiate Athletics Committee (Professor Barber)**

Professor Barber noted that she has been on and off the IAC since she first became a member in 2012 and this is the second time she has chaired the Committee. She reported that the IAC is working very well and smoothly and meets monthly during the academic year. She stated that the Committee makes recommendations on all Athletics' policies and makes sure that the student athletes are well supported.

Professor Barber stated that the IAC has subcommittees, one of which is the Subcommittee to Assess Academic Support Services which is charged annually to conduct a review of an academic program supported by the Athletics Department. The Subcommittee's report documented the process of managing the intake and outflow of student athletes transferring into and out of UNL via the transfer portal. She stated that the committee is also working on a policy regarding student-athletes enrolled in classes where the teaching or grading is being done by those with an association with the Athletic Department or its staff.

Professor Barber reported that the other subcommittee is the Scheduling Oversight Subcommittee

which reviews all athletics schedules for the academic year to assure that teams are in compliance with the IAC's Missed Class Days Policy. She pointed out that there are significant challenges with scheduling: UNL's spring semester final exam week is currently a week later in May due to the January pre-session, but this will be resolved after the 2025-2026 academic year. She stated that another concern is with the expansion of the Big Ten Conference to include USC, UCLA, Oregon and Washington noting that the scheduling of these games with these members of the conference will require longer travel time and greater travel costs.

Professor Barber wanted to give a shout out to Executive Associate Athletic Director Dennis Leblanc who oversees the academic side of Athletics, and Executive Associate Athletic Director of Life Skills Keith Zimmer noting that together they have built a system that is the envy of the Big Ten. As a result, other Big Ten Athletics departments look to us to view our policies. She noted that Professor Fuess, who is UNL's Faculty Athletics Representative to the Big Ten, is very proactive in the various committees working with other Big Ten schools to ensure that the ethics of Nebraska are carried forward.

Professor Olmanson, Teaching, Learning & Teacher Education, asked who oversees intermural sports. Professor Barber stated that it was not the Athletics department and suggested that it might fall under the Office of Student Affairs.

Past President Minter asked if Professor Barber could speak as to how the IAC has integrated the new structure that Athletics is located at the Central Administration level. Also, what is the communication like between Central Administration and the IAC. Professor Barber reported that at first it was confusing in terms of the relationship between Athletics Director Alberts and the IAC but basically nothing has changed. She stated that the Athletics representatives on the IAC still report to the Committee and attend meetings. She pointed out that reporting to the system level has largely been about Athletics budgeting and she noted that the IAC exclusively deals with the academic component. Professor Shrader, College of Journalism, stated that if Athletics Director Alberts is a Vice Chancellor of UNL he should report to the Chancellor. Professor Barber stated that she does not have an answer to this. She stated that her understanding is that this is a temporary situation. Professor Shrader pointed out that the Board of Regents approved the change and President Kopocis stated that the job description for the new President includes overseeing Athletics.

Professor Vuran, APC Chair, asked if the IAC was involved in the planning to renovate the stadium noting that the renovation is impacting the School of Computing and the Schorr Computing Center. Professor Barber reported that she has heard that these units will be moved to the east side of the stadium where there is larger space available. Professor Vuran pointed out that his lab and office are in the Schorr Computing Center, and he has not heard where they are going to be moved to.

#### **4.3 Teaching Council (Professor Fraser Riehle)**

Professor Fraser Riehle stated that she, along with Director Monk from the Center for Transformative Teaching, are here today and they both serve on the Teaching Council. She noted that the Senate received the Council's report and stated that the work of the Council focuses with on-going duties which is recommending candidates for major teaching awards and to discuss issues that are brought forward by the Faculty Senate and others. She stated that the Council met to consider and develop recommendations for the EVC regarding course evaluation concerns raised by the faculty. She noted that members of the Council joined the CTT's Teaching Grant Committee to decide awards. She asked Senators to encourage faculty in their departments to nominate themselves or others for teaching awards and to consider contacting Director Monk about the Century Club.

### **5.0 Unfinished Business**

#### **5.1 Motion to Approve the Professional Code of Conduct**

President Kopocis reported that the motion to approve the Professional Code of Conduct was

introduced at the December meeting and asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, she asked for the Senate to vote on the Code. The Senate overwhelmingly approved the motion.

## **5.2 Motion to Approve the Ballot for Elections to the Academic Planning Committee, Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee, and Academic Rights and Responsibilities Panel**

President Kopocis stated that the ballot comes from the Committee on Committees and therefore does not need a second. She pointed out that two Extension Educators of Associate or full Extension Educators are being sought to complete the ballot. She stated that anyone interested should please let Coordinator Griffin know. She noted that the ballot will be voted on at the March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## **5.3 Motion to Revise the UNL Faculty Senate Syllabus Policy**

President Kopocis reported that she was contacted by Director Monk who noted that the Senate's Syllabus Policy did not include language stating that the instructor needs to include on their syllabus how they will communicate to their students should the university declare an instructional continuity day. She stated that the Executive Committee has proposed adding the following language "Continuity of Instruction (Describe how you will contact students in the event an instructional continuity day is called by the University (i.e., Canvas or email to students)." She noted that language will also be included in the online fillable syllabus template. She stated that the motion will be voted on during the March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## **6.0 New Business**

### **6.1 Ombuds Report (Professor Pytlik Zillig)**

Professor Pytlik Zillig said that she is one of two Ombuds on campus, the other being Professor Rodrigo Franco Cruz, and they report to the EVC and VCIANR. She noted that the Ombuds office was created in 2019 and was designed to provide faculty members access to confidential, informal, independent, and impartial assistance in managing conflicts and solving work-related problems. She pointed out that the Ombuds take a very problem-solving approach and help the faculty member explore what options are available to them. She noted that the Ombuds are impartial and don't advocate for any person or office and they maintain confidentiality.

Professor Pytlik Zillig reported that the number of people who contacted the Ombuds office is lower than the previous year with only 33 separate requests made. She stated that either herself or Professor Franco Cruz would be happy to speak to any group or department about what the Ombuds can do and asked the Senators to help get the word out to their colleagues that the Ombuds are available to help.

Professor Pytlik Zillig stated that the faculty members who contacted the Ombuds office ranged from Assistant Professor on up to full Professor, Lecturers, all levels of Professor of Practice and Research Assistant Professors. She noted that the categories of the cases were typically overlapping and included bullying, contract renewal or changes in contract, annual/merit evaluations of promotion, lack of clarity or not following Bylaws or other policies, compensation, workload and assignments, working environment, conflict with mentor or supervisor, and requested information on the Ombuds or other services around campus. She reported that about 15% of the cases are with people seeking information but 85% of cases require considerable more work. She pointed out that about one-fifth of the cases result in consideration of leaving the university or going to a more formal process of filing a complaint.

Professor Pytlik Zillig stated that in addition to working with faculty members, the Ombuds are involved in outreach activities and attending the International Ombuds Association annual conference and the Big Ten Ombuds meeting. The Ombuds also provided guidance to Texas State University to establish their Ombuds Services, organized and participated in an all-ombuds meeting for the NU system campuses. She stated that she participated in meetings of the IOA Research and Assessment Committee, Professor Franco Cruz participated in the search committee for the new

Director of Faculty Engagement and Well-being, and he provided information for the New Faculty Orientation meeting.

## **6.2 Open Mic**

Professor Stevenson, English, asked for a discussion on the policy to return to in-person meetings noting that some Senators may have good reasons for not being able to attend in person. President Kopocis noted that the Executive Committee has been discussing the issue for some time and pointed out that having a presence in the room makes a powerful statement, especially when the Chancellor is speaking. She noted that it is also an opportunity for the Senators to directly speak to the Chancellor. Professor Stevenson suggested gathering information to see why people attend by Zoom.

Professor Vakilzadian pointed out that optics are very important and when there aren't many people in the room it does not make a good impression of the Faculty Senate to the Chancellor and other guests attending the meeting. President Kopocis noted that when the Chancellor spoke to the Senate in November not many Senators were in the room.

Professor Zuckerman stated that she appreciates having the option to attend the meeting by Zoom and suggested that another option might be to go to a Zoom only format. She noted that the Faculty Senate should think about what the most accessible option is. Professor Gel, Supply Chain Management & Analytics, agreed with the comment and pointed out that she is unable to attend in person because she teaches a class that is scheduled so close to the Senate meeting time that she can not make the meetings in person.

Past President Minter noted that when she was President it was difficult managing the Senate meeting with some in person and many on Zoom. She stated that consideration needs to be given to things like dealing with the equipment, taking the minutes, and those speaking at the lectern and at the head table not being able to view the screen. Professor Olmanson, Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, suggested changing the room arrangement and getting a second screen so those attending by Zoom would be visible.

Professor Baesu, Mechanical and Materials Engineering, suggested having a minimum number of meetings that Senators who have offices on either City or East Campus must attend in person. Professor Shen, Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction, pointed out that having a Zoom option increases participation. Professor Paisley, Extension Engagement Zone 1, stated that she would like to attend the meetings in person, but she is six hours away from Lincoln. President Kopocis pointed out that Extension members and those that are more than 50 miles outside of Lincoln have had the option of joining by Zoom well before the pandemic occurred and that this would not change.

President Kopocis stated that the conversation will continue, and the Executive Committee will explore options and will report back to the Faculty Senate.

### Statements from AAUP Faculty Members:

Professor VanderPlas noted that she was in attendance not only as a Senator, but also as a member of AAUP and wanted to address the Faculty Senate regarding shared governance.

Many faculty are concerned about the overall decline in shared governance across the NU system. Faculty have the primary responsibility for all decisions that involve curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, and hiring/evaluating faculty, Faculty should also have a role in decision-making outside of these primary responsibility areas, including long-term planning, budgeting, and the selection, evaluation and retention of administrators. And yet, last year, a new data policy about computers and information technology was created without **ANY** input from faculty, including faculty with expertise in this area. Last fall, faculty gave vigorous and responsible

input on the proposed budget cuts, and it was completely ignored by the administration. UNL administration has also changed the academic calendar for next year without any input from faculty. The administrators making these decisions do not engage with the day-to-day execution of our research, teaching, and extension mission; as a result, they cannot predict the impact that these policies will have on the faculty, students, and staff. Similarly, individual faculty do not have the institution-wide view that some administrators have. This is why it is imperative for faculty and administrators to work together to make this place stronger. Faculty are already stretched too thin (and are increasingly burnt out) - any future budget cuts (and other important decisions) must go through the faculty to be evaluated for what can reasonably be done from the perspective of BOTH administration and faculty. ***If the administration is unwilling to take our voices and experience into account, we need to be louder, not concede.*** The UNL Faculty Senate needs to be more proactive in matters of shared governance and fight to ensure that it remains the standard for running this institution.

**Alex Vazansky, Associate Professor of History speaking about the NE Legislative Bill to End Tenure in Nebraska Colleges and Universities.**

Senator Loren Lippincott's bill, to eliminate tenure at Nebraska's colleges and universities, displays a complete failure to understand the centrality of tenure to academic freedom and therefore to quality education and research in the state. Since its establishment in the early 20th century, tenure has served to protect faculty whose innovative research and teaching pushes the boundaries of our society. Merit and promotion reward our professional successes; but tenure protects our basic freedom to seek, to fail, to pursue hard truths and elusive facts wherever they might lead. It is a necessary precondition of faculty work and should be extended to all faculty who teach and research at our institution, not rolled back or eliminated. While we understand that there are legal reasons that the bill is less likely to succeed than one might think, considering the shockingly high number of co-sponsors and the derogatory way in which they discuss faculty work, the profound silence on this matter from the administration is deeply disturbing. In press articles covering the introduction of the bill, administrators from across the state college and university system spoke out against it, with only UNL's administration replying instead that they would carefully consider the bill. We are not naive about the politics at play in the state, but if the Chancellor cannot issue a ringing public defense of this basic guarantor of academic freedom, then something is deeply wrong here. Just a handful of years back in 2021, President Carter and the chancellors of all four system universities issued such a strong defense of the importance of academic freedom to higher education in the state when the Board of Regents was considering a motion to restrict the teaching of critical race theory on our campuses. If the politics in the state have changed so dramatically since then that we must tread quietly around the issue of tenure, faculty can be forgiven for asking why they should come here, or why they should stay. We ask the Senate to show vocal public leadership on this matter internally, and to carefully consider doing the same more publicly, in order to avoid further demoralization and attrition among the faculty.

**Christina Falci, Associate Professor of Sociology speaking about the Problem with the Substantial Cuts to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion**

When deciding on the \$800,000 cut to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) this past fall, Chancellor Bennet did not give under-represented faculty, staff, and students across the university the common courtesy to ask how those cuts would impact them. The cut has dismantled the formal DEI infrastructure at UNL, without acknowledging how much DEI work remains to be done at the university. For example, we are failing to retain faculty of color, and there are clear gaps in student achievement and attainment across race and first-gen status. The recent cuts to ODI suggest that the work being done by that office is no longer needed, but nothing could be further from the truth. Under-represented students, staff, and faculty are going to have to find ways to exist and subsist with less support from ODI. Without fully funding ODI, the work may get done but it will happen in a less systematic and more informal way. This will underserve our students and put an even

bigger service burden on our under-represented faculty. Moreover, this additional DEI work done informally by faculty will not be rewarded in merit reviews, it will take time away from their scholarship, and it may take an emotional toll. Yet, if a faculty member decides NOT to engage in this informal DEI work, then it will only cause them, and others like them, more harm in the long run. ***Administration needs to fix this error and should fully fund ODI so they can take the lead on meeting the numerous challenges faced by under-represented faculty, staff and students at UNL.*** The \$800,000 cut from ODI reaffirms that leadership views appropriate diversity work as expendable. The UNL Faculty Senate needs to make clear that it is not!

**Regina Werum, Professor of Sociology speaking about the NE Legislative Bill to Prohibit Teaching about DEI Nebraska Colleges and Universities.**

LB1330 - Prohibits public educational institutions from taking certain actions relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This undermines virtually every strategic goal the university and the state has, as they relate to recruitment and retention of young adults. Moreover, a DEI component is required for federal research funding, a key source of revenue for the university and a prime factor in whether we will ever get back into the AAU's graces. The severe cuts recently enacted that have gutted the ODI will already limit support for drafting proposals and implementing programs – and that already puts us at a competitive disadvantage.

If NE becomes the next Florida, we have every reason to expect email searches of staff and faculty involved in DEI efforts, as well as limits on general education courses in the arts and humanities, as well as many sciences. Such irreparable damage to the academic freedom of faculty would severely impact the credibility of the institution and the faculty's ability to do our jobs, never mind recruit others to join us in the effort. It doesn't even make sense pedagogically. Reams of research show that DEI initiatives help ALL faculty, staff and students - not just those from minoritized groups. And even though the current bill seems to be directed primarily at limiting the inclusion of racialized and gender minorities, the logic applies far more broadly. DEI helps us integrate students/staff with disabilities, first-gen students, veterans, women in physics and engineering, men in elementary education, you name it. The UNL Faculty Senate needs to take a strong stance on this issue.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:49 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union, Platte River Room and via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.