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UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES
May 7, 2024
Presidents Kelli Kopocis, Pete Eklund, and Deb Minter, Presiding
Nebraska Union, Regency Room

1.0 Call to Order

President Kopocis called the meeting to order at 2:31 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

President Kopocis noted that this was the last meeting of the 2023-2024 academic year. She reported that Faculty Senate meetings for the 2024-2025 academic year will begin on September 3, 2024 and the schedule can be found on the Faculty Senate website <https://www.unl.edu/facultysenate/senate-meeting-schedule>.

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett noted that we are nearing the end of the semester and that commencements will occur next week with the graduate ceremony on May 17th and the undergraduate ceremony on May 18th. He pointed out that graduation is one of the most exciting times on campus and one of his favorite days. He reported that this evening he will be celebrating with those faculty members who have attained tenure and/or promotion, and he is looking forward to meeting these people. He stated that he wants to congratulate all those who are being promoted and/or have received tenure.

Chancellor Bennett reported that the groundbreaking for the USDA National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture has occurred at Nebraska Innovation Campus. He pointed out that having this USDA center on campus is a significant moment for the University.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he has now completed his listening sessions with each of the colleges and the notes taken from those meetings will be organized and reviewed and he will then share what he has learned from across the campus. He reported that the campus will spend time on refreshing our strategic plan pointing out that he does not foresee us abandoning the N2025 plan.

Chancellor Bennett stated that currently he does not have any clear updates about future budget reductions and noted that he will be meeting with the Chief Financial Officer of the NU system tomorrow where he might gain a little more clarity.

Chancellor Bennett wanted to thank everyone noting that this year has been an interesting time pointing out that we did have a lot of successes and he feels very good about where the university is heading. He stated that he feels good about the sense of community that is being built between his office and the Faculty Senate and the Senate Executive Committee noting that while there is not always agreement on everything, he appreciates it when people speak up and share their opinions.

A question was raised online about whether faculty will receive an annual raise this year. Chancellor Bennett reported that he anticipates that there will be a salary increase pool, but he has not had any significant conversations of how the raises will be allocated.

Professor Bourke, School of Computing, asked if there were any updates about the Schorr Center and the renovation of the Stadium. Chancellor Bennett reported that he has no definitive update on the plans to update the stadium which would require the need to move the Schorr Center, although he expects there will be some announcements coming forward soon once our new Athletics Director is in place.

Past President Minter pointed out that some faculty members have asked about the climate in regard to classroom and research work that could be potentially viewed as political. She noted that in the College of Arts & Sciences there are numerous courses and research work occurring on things like gender equity

and ethnic studies and faculty are wondering whether the state government has shown any interest about asking for course syllabi. Chancellor Bennett noted that many people are asking questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, but pointed out that businesses want students ready for their first day on the job where they may be exposed to great diversity, and we need to determine how we can prepare these students for their future employment. He stated that he is not aware of any requests by a legislator to see a course syllabus, although he would not be surprised if that didn't occur in the future. Professor Shrader, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, asked what the Chancellor will do should a legislator ask for a course syllabus. Chancellor Bennett stated that he would have to look at the request and evaluate it on its merit. He pointed out that there are so many nuances with such a request, and we would need to determine what they are seeking. Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, noted that syllabi are somewhat public but asked if something could be done proactively to make faculty aware that this could occur. Chancellor Bennett stated that he appreciates that thought but he does not want to get ahead of himself in saying that this is going to occur. He stated that he thinks he can assure the faculty that if a request should be made, faculty members would have enough time to organize what approach should be taken with their chair or dean.

Chancellor Bennett wanted to sincerely thank everyone again and noted that people need to remember that there are a lot of good things happening at UNL. He stated that if any of the Senators have additional questions they want to ask, they should direct them to President Kopocis who knows how to get in contact with him.

4.0 Vice Chancellor Zeleny – University Budget

VC Zeleny stated that there were many factors affecting higher education across the country and noted that operating a university is much more complex than ever before. He reported that he was at a Big Ten meeting last week where all of the universities noted that they were struggling with their budgets. He pointed out that expanding the research base and getting external partnerships is good but takes more effort. He noted that administrative effectiveness is hindering our efforts and some of our operating processes make us less efficient. He stated that in the post-pandemic recovery process inflation is at high levels which has increased our costs in utilities and travel, in addition to increased salaries and benefits. He noted that health care costs increased by 16% when we switched to Blue Cross/Blue Shield and our property and liability insurance have increased by double digits as well.

VC Zeleny stated that another factor impacting us is workforce retention which is particularly impacting the staff. He reported that some of our policies are restrictive, and we are losing staff members to private industries. Another factor is enrollment which in 2017 saw our highest enrollment with over 26,000, but since then we have seen a significant decline, particularly with international students. In addition, our state appropriations have continued to decrease. He stated that in 1993 approximately 30% of our budget was from state appropriations but last year it was down to 13%.

VC Zeleny reported that another major challenge is that our net tuition has declined pointing out that if we were at the enrollment levels of 2017 we would not be in a budget crunch. Additionally, our remissions have increased, which impacts our budget. He stated that students coming in now have growing needs, and we are providing more services to them than ever before.

VC Zeleny stated that our budget is just under \$450 million but noted from 2018-2021 we reduced our budget by \$39 million and last spring we cut \$11 million and this January we cut another \$12 million. He noted that lower enrollment and growing inflation are the two biggest factors impacting our budget. He pointed out that President Carter announced that the university system was facing a \$58 million budget deficit, noting that UNL usually must deal with half of the budget deficit. He reported that President Carter created a rescission for the campuses and UNL's amounted to \$11 million which was taken from permanent lines.

VC Zeleny noted that there has been a lot of discussion from the system president about us rejoining the AAU, which he pointed out, will take an investment into the university. He stated that part of the effort will require partnership within the system.

VC Zeleny stated that anything we can do to give support to our ASEM team to increase enrollment is critically important and we need to advocate for a tuition increase. He pointed out that we cannot address our deficit without it. He stated that the Board of Regents will consider another tuition increase at its June meeting, and members of ASUN understand the need for it. He reported that most of the universities within the Big Ten, with the exception of Purdue, will be increasing their tuition.

Professor Shrader, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, asked what Central Administration plans to do with the rescission money. VC Zeleny stated that he thinks it is a hedge against the \$58 million budget deficit. He noted that the hope is that UNL will see some of those funds returned.

Professor Shrader asked where the funds needed for improving our metrics for reentry into the AAU will come from. VC Zeleny asked Professor Gay, Physics and Astronomy, what the cost would be to hire a cluster of high-ranking faculty members in Physics. Professor Gay stated that for the group just described it would be approximately \$100 million and to get a faculty member who is a member of a national academy you would be talking about a minimum of \$7-9 million for a start-up package and a nine-month salary of about \$275,000. VC Zeleny stated that if we are going to meet the metrics of the AAU members, we will need to hire several clusters of faculty members which will be a long recruitment process and would take about \$200-400 million. Professor Gay pointed out that the university should work hard to retain some of our current faculty members who are on a fast track to become a member of a national academy. He suggested that one possible strategy is to eliminate administrators that don't do a lot to hire national academy members.

Professor Zuckerman, Educational Administration, asked why we let an outside organization determine our priorities rather than us making our own priorities. She pointed out that Professor Sue Sheridan from Educational Psychology was recently made a member of the National Academy of Education yet that academy is not recognized by the AAU. VC Zeleny stated that he does not know why the AAU doesn't count this academy because it is a very impressive group and all of Professor Sheridan's research is at a tier one research institution.

The question was asked why is rejoining that AAU the major goal rather than us becoming a better research university. VC Zeleny pointed out that AAU is an organization to reach people who are included in discussion with policy makers and in discussion with funding agencies. He noted that it probably also has to do that all of our peers in the Big Ten are members of the AAU. He stated that the Board of Regents adopted the goal of rejoining the AAU and Provost Gold has spoken about it as a goal as well.

Professor Schauer, Modern Languages and Literature, reported that she recently read how all the campuses were to use the big red N brand logo and that this was mentioned in the discussions about the budget talks. She asked whether this was now a requirement for each of the campuses. VC Zeleny noted that when we became a university system, each campus had their own logo. He pointed out that some universities, such as Penn State and The Ohio State University, use the same brand across the whole system while others do it differently. He stated that hypothetically, if we become one system then it is likely we will have one brand which would be the big red N that UNL currently uses. He stated that the question is whether Nebraska is a large enough state to support the current system that we have. Professor Schauer stated that she thought having the same branding logo was a way to save money and would allow us to combine the campuses' metrics. VC Zeleny pointed out that if we include UNK and UNO into our research metrics our numbers would go down since it is based off on the number of tenure-track faculty members.

Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, asked if there have been any conversations with soon to be President Gold about whether he is supportive of increasing tuition. VC Zeleny stated that he hopes our system president is promoting the need for a tuition increase and why it is critically important for the university's budget.

Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, noted that strategic investments have been part of the budget discussions

and given that certain departments aren't counted in the AAU metrics, she asked if it is right to assume that the strategic budget reductions will mostly target these areas such as the humanities. VC Zeleny pointed out that we are clearly a research university, and we are not dictated by AAU. He stated that book citations and awards are just some of the metrics pointing out that some of the humanities departments contribute significantly to the book citations metrics. He stated that we need more of the arts and pointed out that the College of Law does not fit with the AAU metrics.

Professor Lewis, Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education, noted that there have been numbers floating around that for every \$1 the state gives to the university, \$6 is generated by the university for the state's budget. She asked if these numbers have been updated and if they have been publicized around the state. VC Zeleny stated that the impact surveys show a strong correlation between state appropriations and the return from the university, and he noted that state legislators are aware of this correlation. He pointed out that finding programs that are relevant and are aligned with the need of our workforce for the state is important. He stated that we know that we are a fairly lean institution, and our alliance is very strong throughout the state, but we could always do a better job of telling our story.

Professor Bourke, School of Computing, asked what was the last year that we were in the AAU. VC Zeleny reported that UNL was ousted from the AAU in 2011. He noted that we had the required stature previously, but in 2011 other members of the AAU felt that we were lacking in funded research and the number of faculty members in national academies. He stated that the AAU has changed over time, and they no longer count a lot of formula funding that they once did causing some people to feel that they are not as oriented towards land-grant universities as they previously had been. Professor Bourke stated that this underscores the point of why we are exploring rejoining the AAU when membership does not align with our mission.

5.0 Election of Officers and Executive Committee Members

5.1 Election of President-Elect

President Kopocis noted that Professor Shrader, College of Journalism and Mass Communications and Professor David Lott, Nebraska Extension Engagement Zone 3 were both running for election. She asked if there were any additional nominations from the floor. Hearing none she asked the Senate to vote. Professor Shrader was elected as President-Elect.

5.2 Election of Secretary

President Kopocis noted that Professor Boudreau, University Libraries, was running for election. She asked if there were any nominations from the floor. Hearing none she asked for a vote of acclamation for Professor Boudreau to continue as Secretary. President-Elect Eklund moved and Past President Minter seconded to approve by acclamation. Motion approved by the Faculty Senate.

5.3 Election of Executive Committee Members

President Kopocis reported that Professor Baesu, Mechanical and Materials Engineering, Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, and Professor Leiter, Law were running for election to the Executive Committee to fill three seats. She asked if there were any nominations from the floor. Hearing none she asked for a motion to approve by acclamation. Professor Leiter moved for approval. Motion seconded by Professor Vakilzadian and approved by the Faculty Senate.

President-Elect Eklund presented a plaque and an inscribed gift to President Kopocis thanking her for her service as President this past year. President Kopocis thanked the Executive Committee for their service and help during the year. She noted that it was a wild ride, with the change in leadership and going to the system meetings, but with the relationships that she has developed and seeing the amount of work that occurs behind the scenes, she pointed out that it has been a year of learning for her and said that she is somewhat sad that it is ending. President Kopocis thanked the members of the Faculty Senate for the work that they do and their contribution to shared governance.

6.0 Approval of April 2, 2024 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Schauer, Modern Languages & Literature, moved for approval. Motion seconded by Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics, and was then approved by the Faculty Senate.

7.0 Nominations for Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award

President Eklund noted that the Honorary Degrees Committee reviewed nominations for the Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award and is forwarding the name of one faculty member to the Faculty Senate for approval. He pointed out that the ballot will be sent out tomorrow morning through SurveyMonkey and asked Senators to vote by the indicated deadline date.

8.0 Committee Reports

8.1 Convocations Committee (Professor Bingham)

Professor Bingham, chair of the Convocations Committee, reported that there are eight members from across the campus, including two students. She noted that the committee met in December to review eight applications for funding guest speakers during the spring semester. She stated that all eight applications were approved but noted that there was one cancellation of a visit, and the funds were returned. She stated that an interesting event that occurs annually on campus is the Humanities on the Edge which brings in a nice diverse group of highly recognized guest speakers for faculty and student interactions.

Professor Bingham reported that three applications have been received for funding guest speakers in the fall and the committee approved all three, although if one of the applications receives more than enough funding from the Research Council, they are required to return the \$1,000 awarded by the Convocations Committee.

Professor Bingham stated that the committee has no recommendations for the Faculty Senate.

8.2 Executive Committee Report (Past President Kopocis)

Past President Kopocis noted that shortly after becoming President of the Faculty Senate last year she had to attend the Board of Regents meeting where she had to speak against moving the reporting line of UNL's Athletic Director to the President. She also heard about the five-point plan being proposed by President Carter.

Past President Kopocis noted that the Executive Committee met seven times with Chancellor Bennett and in addition, she met with him monthly. She reported that she also met monthly with EVC Ankerson and served on the University's Calendar Committee. As President she attended the State Legislature's hearing about the proposed tenure removal bill and the diversity, equity, and inclusion bill and also attended the Legislative dinner.

Past President Kopocis pointed out that the entire report was included in the Senate packet.

9.0 Unfinished Business

10.0 New Business

10.0 Open Mic

Professor Gorman, Classics and Religious Studies, and Head Marshal, wanted to encourage people to come help with graduation on May 18th. He stated that additional volunteers are needed and having more faculty members would really help. He noted that it is not a three-year commitment, and anyone interested should email him (rgorman1@unl.edu). He reported that free pizza is available to those that help with the ceremony!

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, September 3, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will be held in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room B & C and Zoom will be available for those that cannot attend in person. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.