

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES

November 5, 2024

Presidents Pete Eklund, John Shrader, and Kelli Kopocis, Presiding

1.0 Call to Order

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

2.0 Announcements

2.1 Executive Committee Nominees Needed

President Eklund reported that Professor Dawes, Universities Libraries, will be leaving the university and her seat on the Executive Committee will need to be filled. He stated that any Senator interested in running for election to this seat should contact either himself or Coordinator Griffin. He noted that the term would begin in January and continue through April 2026. He reminded the Senate that Executive Committee meetings are held on Tuesday afternoons from 2:30-5:00.

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett stated that he was happy to meet with the Faculty Senate and wanted to thank everyone for what they are doing for the university every day. He noted that today's election is important because it will have a significant impact on the country.

Chancellor Bennett reported that a tremendous number of outstanding things were going on at the University outside of the budget situation. He noted that the 2024 Stanford/Elsevier Top 2% Scientists List identified 180 UNL faculty members as some of the most influential researchers in the world. In addition, we have had a record 9 UNL faculty members who have earned NSF early career development awards which amounts to about \$6.2 million in funding.

Chancellor Bennett stated that preliminary FY 23 research expenditures show a combined total for UNL and UNMC research expenditures at \$617 million which is an increase of 53% over the past ten years. He pointed out that UNL contributed \$366 million to this total, and early estimates for FY 24 show that we are up even further with research expenditures. He noted that these are benchmarks that we should all be proud of.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he is very encouraged with where we are with enrollment and retention, which are both very important to our success. He stated that Monique Snowden is the Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Services and Enrollment Management, and she has a great deal of experience and is already doing an outstanding job. He noted that she will serve as the Interim for 18 months after which we will launch a search. He reported that Dean Hope of Graduate Studies is also doing a very good job with graduate enrollment, and it appears that our international graduate enrollment is increasing.

Chancellor Bennett reported that we are still facing some budget challenges and that we need to work on our structural deficit. He noted that he had a good conversation with President Gold recently and believes that the President has a deep understanding and appreciation of where UNL's budget situation is and he is realizing the impact of the loss of \$10 million from Athletics on our budget. He pointed out that this transfer of funds from Athletics has occurred for many years and \$5 million of it was used for the Husker Power Scholarships.

Chancellor Bennett noted that at the last Faculty Senate meeting a question was asked about his lack of response to the AFIRE letter which was sent after the closing of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. He reported that he went back to his office and reread the letter and then contacted the co-chairs of the group and on October 16th they had a very productive conversation. He noted that he has since scheduled an additional meeting with them, and he is very interested in working with

them. He pointed out that they are very interested in being at the forefront of making sure that every person and every interaction matters. He stated that engagement is vitally important to a land grant institution like us, not just in the agricultural sector but in many other areas as well.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that at the end of the month we will have the Thanksgiving break and just a few weeks later we will have the winter break. He stated that he hoped faculty members would be part of the graduate and undergraduate commencement ceremonies on December 20th and December 21st. He noted that the university needs 10 or 12 Marshals to assist with graduation and stated that he has had conversations with the deans about the need to recruit faculty members as Marshals. He stated that he is hopeful that the Deans will either recommend or nominate people to serve as Marshals.

Professor McElravy, Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications, asked what kind of timeline we are working with regarding dealing with our structural budget deficit. He stated that he is sensing in his own department that the need for budget reductions is being used as a reason for increasing the faculty workload beyond what it has ever been in the past and pointed out that faculty members are already working beyond a 1.00 FTE. Chancellor Bennett stated that he is very sensitive to not operating and leading the university in a reckless way. He noted that there are still some unknowns with the budget that we are still trying to work through, but he shared with President Gold that it is critical that we have a sense of what the structure of the university system will look like, and we will need to determine how we will organize ourselves. He noted that President Gold is very interested in productivity and how faculty members show their productivity in the different categories of their apportionment. He suggested that this could be the reason why Professor McElravy is hearing about productivity and FTE.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he thinks everybody should be really encouraged by some of the accomplishments we have recently achieved and the things that we are doing to be relevant and sustainable. He noted that there is a lot of uncertainty in public education these days, but he is more encouraged about our university administration than he has been in the past ten years that he has worked in higher education. He stated that the evidence is in the people who want to be here and their commitment to the university. He pointed out that people need to continue to ask hard questions and to continue to work hard to maintain our momentum. He thanked everyone for what they do every day for the university.

4.0 Approval of October 1, 2024 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the October 1st minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics, moved for approval. Motion was seconded by Professor Tschetter, History, and approved by the Faculty Senate.

5.0 Committee Reports

5.1 Research Council (Professor Katz)

Professor Katz reported that she chairs the Research Council and noted that the main task of the Council is to review applications and award internal grants. She noted that for FY 2023-2024 the Council had \$315,000 to distribute in grants pointing out that most of the funding is provided through several NU Foundation accounts. She stated that there are several categories of grants: interdisciplinary grants, faculty seed grants, grants-in-aid, visiting scholars, symposia/distinguished lecturers, and special opportunity fund requests. She reported that a total of 43 grant applications were received and 31 of these were awarded funds for a total of \$256,364. She stated that the number of proposals received this fall, which are currently under review, is 24.

Professor Katz noted that another task of the Research Council is to select speakers for the Nebraska Lectures: Chancellor's Distinguished Lecture Series. She stated that in spring 2024 Professor Adam Houston of the Earth and Atmospheric Sciences Department was the distinguished speaker and this fall, Professor Jessica Shoemaker of the College of Law is the distinguished

speaker. She recommended that any department that wishes to propose speakers for the next round of distinguished lectures should submit applications that are pointed towards topicality because the Council is looking for talks that will engage wide, popular interests such as the use of drones and if they can be used to improve weather forecasting or sovereignty cases.

5.2 University Commencement and Recognition Committee (Professor Tschetter)

Professor Tschetter noted that she serves as the Associate Head Marshal and reported that the Chair of the Committee, Professor Vanessa Gorman and Head Marshal Bob Gorman are on leave this semester. She reported that the Committee arranged, planned, and executed five commencement ceremonies this year and each one went flawlessly. She stated that she wanted to echo the Chancellor's comment for the need of Marshals and pointed out that the commencement ceremonies are the happiest time on campus. She stated that anyone with questions about serving as a Marshal should contact either Professors Vanessa or Bob Gorman. She reported that the major commencement ceremony is the May undergraduate ceremony, which was held in Memorial Stadium this year, however, she stated that at this time it is unknown whether it will be held there next May.

6.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Concerns with Husker Athletics no longer providing \$10 million to UNL to cover Husker Power Scholarships and to cover the operational costs of Athletics.

President Eklund noted that for many years Huskers Athletics gave \$10 million to UNL to help support scholarships and cover the operational costs of Athletics. He stated that we are all proud of the number of student-athletes that have achieved Academic All-American status, and Nebraskans are proud that Husker Athletics lead the nation in the amount of funds it provided to the campus. However, last year Athletics decided not to give the \$10 million to UNL. As a result, UNL's budget is now subsidizing some of the cost of Athletics, and in addition we have a structural deficit from last year that we will need to deal with. He reported that the Executive Committee has been thinking about a formal proposal from the Faculty Senate to request that the \$10 million be returned to help UNL's budget.

Professor Spangler, Animal Science, asked if the proposal or recommendation would include the cost of services that UNL provides to Athletics. He suggested reviewing the actual cost of these services noting that the costs could exceed \$10 million or could be less. President Eklund pointed out that this was a very good suggestion that needs to be considered. He stated that he did get a short list of some of the services provided to Athletics, but a more comprehensive review of the costs should be done. He noted that when he hosts an event on campus, 5% of the revenue must be returned to UNL and this is true for auxiliary units at UNL. President-Elect Shrader pointed out that there does not seem to be any public accounting of the Athletics' budget. Professor Gay, Physics and Astronomy, stated that he suspects the \$10 million is being kept in order to pay the student-athletes to remain here which will be required due to the class action lawsuit.

Professor PeeksMease, Sociology, pointed out that Athletics' budget has been separated from UNL's budget for a long time and there are only ten other universities where this budget model occurs. He noted that our athletics department is the only one that has no debt and makes a profit each year. He wondered how long gifting from Athletics has been going on and whether there are stipulations on how these funds can be used. He stated that he believed at one time Athletics did not have a separate budget and asked when the split with the budget occurred. President Eklund stated this would be good information to know and President-Elect Shrader stated that it would be good to know how much of a budget surplus Athletics has.

Professor McElravy stated that his unit is looking at comparing what the cost is for providing courses to students from other departments. He noted that the Buffett Scholarship hires staff that

work at the university and wondered if this is a model that could be used for Athletics. President Eklund stated that if the student-athletes start being paid to play, would that make them employees. If so, would they be obligated to pay tuition if they are making a million dollars? He wondered if these questions have been raised both here and at other universities.

Professor Lahey, Classics and Religious Studies, noted that he once chaired the Academic Planning Committee and during that time the Committee suggested to then Chancellor Perlman that the university should add a tax of \$10 to every sporting event ticket. He suggested that this recommendation should be made again, particularly if Athletics refuses to give us back the \$10 million, and pointed out that President Gold has the purview to do this. President Eklund stated that this is worthy of pursuing.

Professor Dunigan, Plant Pathology, asked who owns Memorial Stadium. President Eklund reported that the Executive Committee recently investigated this and said it is technically owned by the Board of Regents.

7.2 Open Mic

Faculty Budget Committee

President Eklund stated he knows that there are faculty who are passionate about forming a faculty senate budget oversight committee and he personally voted in favor of it, and it passed by one vote. Also, he stated that he is 100% behind the faculty holding administration accountable for budget cuts and he genuinely wanted to see where the faculty budget committee could lead and see it to its full potential.

When unpacking the original passed proposal, he hopes that we are all understanding that there is a slight lack of enthusiasm from faculty members to serve and to give up chunks of their time for this right now (John, please correct me if I'm wrong after your small-group discussions). He stated that he believes what he voted for was not clearly 100% spelled out and as we proceeded in trying to craft a solution (which is TOTALLY understandable), we have encountered an expected lack of enthusiasm from administration (much as it was the last time this new body was proposed—Ronnie Green was chancellor then), lack of bona fide 'teeth' requiring that Deans must open their financial books for this new committee at their timely request. He stated that we need to fully understand the interfacing of the FBC with the APC and their prescribed tasks, mutually trying to get our arms wrapped around what would be the most effective and potent gathering of non-administration university leaders to counter the admin (more on that at the Exec meeting as we have informally for now, put together a new monthly gathering of the Presidents of the faculty, staff, graduate students, and ASUN), and we are trying to understand the processes of moving this new-formed potential body forward and gaining approval of the BOR. Simultaneously, he personally hopes none of us have given up. He stated that UNL has had to cut \$70 million from its budget in the last few years and he has seen the number of staff in his department go from six to three. He stated that many Senators have complained about the lack of support from ITS since it has been centralized and pointed out that these are troublesome problems that impact the faculty's ability to perform the work they do.

Professor Turkman, College of Architecture, stated that she echoes some of the things that have been said. She noted that the budget deficit and the budget reductions seem to be used to justify new rules and policies, and there is not a clear sense of why some of these reductions are being made. She pointed out that most faculty members can understand an Excel spreadsheet and stated that the budget information needs to be available and transparent. Professor Gay stated that Professor Bloom created a spreadsheet which was quite transparent several years ago when the incentive-budget-model was being proposed, but the transparency of the spreadsheet made many administrators uncomfortable, noting that this could be one of the reasons why the incentive budget model was never used.

Professor McElravy pointed out that there are faculty members with expertise in accounting. He

stated that we are trying to operationally run the university budget with teaching but questioned how faculty can grow programs to increase enrollment when there is such a lack of transparency with the budget. He stated that faculty members are feeling paralyzed to do anything productive, especially since there is a lack of resources and faculty are not being engaged with regarding how to generate more revenue. He pointed out that his department has a new graduate certificate program that has 28 students, and it could expand, but there are no extra faculty members to help the program grow.

President-Elect Shrader stated that the administration continues to ask the Executive Committee to help navigate the rough waters we are experiencing. He questioned how far the Faculty Senate wants to go to demand real transparency and to be partners in the budget process and how vocal should we be to advocate for our position. He pointed out that the faculty are going to be asked time and time again to keep giving up more and doing more work.

President Eklund noted that the Executive Committee asked the Chancellor how future budget cuts will move forward. He pointed out that with earlier budget reductions the Deans were asked to come with a 3%, 6%, and 9% budget reduction scenario, and while decisions were made no satisfactory answers were given to the faculty in how these reductions were determined. He reported that the Chancellor has asked President Gold for a full forensic audit of Varner Hall but we have no knowledge whether this is occurring. He noted that we are still waiting to hear confirmation on what the exact budget numbers will be for UNL.

Professor PeeksMease stated that everything he is hearing reinforces the idea of having a Faculty Budget Committee because most of the budget process has been top-down and there is little input from faculty members. He asked if there is not enough interest for people serving on this committee. President Eklund stated that there are a few passionate people, but more would be needed to form the committee.

Professor Harris, Biochemistry, noted he is a new member of the Senate, and he finds it strange that there is this wall where faculty do not know what is going on with administrators. He questioned whether during the hiring process candidates are asked if they would be willing to open the books to provide transparency on the budget. He questioned how we can continue to run the university the way it is currently being run because in the long term it does not seem sustainable.

President-Elect Shrader stated that there needs to be some good input on how the Faculty Budget Committee can be crafted and how it can get access to the budget information. He pointed out that the last time the Executive Committee met with the Chancellor he challenged the Faculty Senate to be more vocal. He stated that the Senate needs to demand access to clearer budget information.

Professor Lahey pointed out that he does not think the administration is secretive, but it is unaware that the faculty are organizing their thoughts on how to get more input into the budget decisions. He suggested that the first thing that should be done is to find out where in state law it says that university employee salaries must be available to the public and after that, it should state that the university budget must be public. He suggested having a Regent side with the faculty's concerns would provide a lot more support. He noted that the committee's responsibilities will need to be clearly articulated, and he suggested contacting VC Zeleny to see if he could help with identifying the responsibilities. He stated that the APC long-range planning committee should also be involved. He stated that he would be happy to help with establishing the committee.

Professor Gay stated that the idea behind the Faculty Budget Committee is good and important but there is a problem with coordinating the committee with the Academic Planning Committee and one of the first steps should be how to coordinate these two committees. He stated that when students have a problem the Regents listen, and the faculty and the students are the two most important groups on campus. He stated that there is a lot of low morale on the campuses and questioned why the Board of Regents is not responding to this concern. Professor Peterson pointed

out that a major problem is that General Counsel in Varner Hall stands between the faculty and the Board of Regents, so faculty often do not get access to the Regents.

Coordinator Griffin reported that she quickly looked at our Big Ten peers that have a faculty budget committee to see what the membership of the committees are like and how they had power to get access to budget information. While there were some that were similar to our APC, most of them focused specifically on budget-related matters and had administrators on the committee and appeared to have buy-in from the administration. She pointed out that in the case of the University of Michigan, the Senior Vice Provost serves as chair. She stated that the University of Maryland budget committee was approved by the President of the University. Secretary Boudreau noted that the development of the Maryland budget committee was the result of a lengthy process which is defined in a 90-page document. President Eklund stated that he would be attending the Big Ten Academic Alliance Faculty Leadership Conference next week and he will ask about their budget committees and how they operate.

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