

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES

October 1, 2024

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

1.0 Call to Order

President Eklund called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett stated that we have a wonderful student body, and they are off to a really good start noting that this week is Homecoming Week with many activities scheduled on campus. He stated that he hopes that each of the faculty members will find ways to support students and to make them feel welcomed, which is very important to our success, and which helps with our retention numbers. He stated that he wants the faculty to know that he is engaged with the students and will be participating in many of the Homecoming activities this week.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes the semester is off to a fantastic start as demonstrated by our increase in enrollment, which is the first increase since 2021. He pointed out that our enrollment is 23,992, which gave us a 1.7% increase in enrollment, and hopefully we can increase our enrollment to about 28,000 over the next several years. He noted that we obviously want the quality of our student body to increase in terms of preparation for a Big Ten, Research 1, flagship campus and to be able to graduate within four years. He pointed out that we will have to keep up with our recruitment efforts because literature in higher education predicts that there will be a significant decrease in the number of high school students in the future. He stated that the faculty members paying attention to enrollment and being actively engaged in the recruitment of students within their college is critical.

Chancellor Bennett reported that our retention rate from first-year students to second-year students is 86% this fall which is an excellent number for us and noted that there is room for us to grow to reach 100% retention rates. He asked that faculty continue to do their part to help the university retain as many students as possible, not just from first to second year, but throughout their college career.

Chancellor Bennett noted that our national ranking in the U.S. News & World Report increased and UNL is now ranked 81 among all public universities which is up from where we were from the previous rankings. He stated that the College of Business is now ranked at 53 and the College of Engineering improved its ranking and now sits at number 71. He stated that everyone here at UNL should be proud of these improvements and should know that their efforts have contributed to these higher rankings.

Chancellor Bennett reported that our research portfolio also grew. He noted that from 2023 we experienced growth in the research area to \$194 million in sponsored research, which is an all time high for us and shows an increase of 12% from the previous year. In addition, our externally sponsored federal research funding increased from \$115 million in 2021 to \$163 million in 2023.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he wanted to speak about our efforts related to diversity as we are changing the ways we go about ensuring that every person and every interaction matters on our campus. He noted that the closure of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) has created a sense of loss for some members of our community and reported that the Office was an important symbol of our institutional commitment for many of our community members, a fact that is not lost on him. He stated that moving forward, he has charged the Executive Vice Chancellor's office with leading efforts to create a sense of community and belonging among our faculty members. The

same charge has been given to the Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance for our staff, and the Vice Chancellor of the Office of Student Life for our students. He stated that these are the three primary areas for which we should direct individuals for assistance. He wanted to make clear that the resources that were available to students before will continue to exist and that we will remain committed to their success. He reported that the Chancellor's Commissions continue to operate and will be important channels for feedback, and the existing external advisory boards will continue to operate but will be engaged directly with him going forward. He noted that he hopes to meet with the members of the external advisory board this week. He stated that he is confident that we can do the important work that needs to be done, and as Chancellor, he wants to assure everyone that he intends to do everything he can to continue to recruit a diverse workforce of faculty and staff, to recruit a diverse student body, and ensure that everyone feels welcome here.

Chancellor Bennett noted that he wants us to get to a time when we no longer need to talk about our budget and our structural deficit, but we are not at that point yet. Consequently, we will have to spend this year thinking about our budget, although he does not yet have the specific number for which we will need to reduce our budget, but he stated that we have a little more than \$14 million budget deficit from last year that we will need to address. Chancellor Bennett reported that he has had very productive and transparent conversations with President Gold which has allowed them the opportunity to be creative and innovative. He pointed out that he has raised his concerns with President Gold about UNL's budget and asked if the System office can help us get through our current budget situation. He stated that if we also need to absorb part of the system's budget reductions, he does not anticipate that we will try to tackle the entire amount of budget reductions this academic year. He noted that the Executive Vice Chancellor will be meeting with the academic deans tomorrow to let them know where we are with the budget and to ask them to begin the process of thinking how they might absorb expected budget reductions. He stated that the single greatest thing we can do is to think about enrollment, noting that prior to Covid we had about 3,000 international students but now we have approximately 1500, and pointed out that we have a lot of work to do to recruit more international students. He reported that he has received approval from the Board of Regents to work with agents around the world in an effort to increase our international student enrollment and stated that while we are committed to recruiting in-state students, we also need to think about non-resident students since we had a decrease in this category this year. He reminded the Senate that each person must continue to make sure that our students have a wonderful experience at UNL.

Chancellor Bennett reported that his investiture will occur on December 21 as part of the undergraduate commencement ceremony and doing it this way will help limit the expenditure. He encouraged faculty members to attend noting that it means a lot to the students and their family when there is good representation from the faculty in attendance. He announced that the State of the University address will probably be done on Charter Day in February 2025.

Chancellor Bennett noted that there have been many questions about the UNL Athletic Director reporting to the President instead of the Chancellor. He reported that he does meet regularly with Athletic Director Dannen, and they have a good, healthy relationship. He stated that both Athletics and the academic side of UNL are working to maintain our momentum as a Big Ten institution and R1 university.

Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theater and Film, pointed out that most everyone agrees with how important recruiting is but noted that since the pandemic, there have been difficulties with international students obtaining visas. He stated that any assistance with this problem would be really helpful to our international student enrollment. Chancellor Bennett reported that our Admissions team feels the weight of the lower international student enrollment. He noted that the problems with FAFSA impacted our ability to recruit students and we lost some of our out-of-state recruiters due to IRS issues with out-of-state employees. He stated that we will be much more on top of this issue for next year and that we will hopefully be able to turn the corner with our out-of-state student enrollment.

Professor PeeksMease, Sociology, reported that he and many other faculty members voiced their disappointment of the closing of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and how the process to eliminate the office was navigated. He stated that he is concerned that the recent letter from AFIRE about the elimination of the ODI, as well as a letter on December 7, 2023, signed by over 200 people last fall in regard to cutting the ODI's budget nearly in half, never received a response from the Chancellor. He noted that many people are already invested in doing the work of diversity and inclusion on campus and asked how the Chancellor plans to address the alienation that many of these people are currently feeling. Chancellor Bennett stated that he will pull out those communications and reread them and will perhaps re-engage with the groups in a different way because people feeling alienated is not a way for us to move forward. He pointed out that he feels strongly in the diversity and inclusion model that he proposed with each of us recommitting ourselves to doing all that we can to ensure that each of our students has a successful experience and that every interaction matters. He stated that he also believes in what EVC Ankerson of Academic Affairs, VC Anderson of the Office of Student Life, and VC Zeleny in Business and Finance are doing to address issues of diversity and inclusion. He stated that he apologizes for Professor PeeksMease's feeling of being alienated and noted that it is not a position or a demeanor that he believes in and that he will check himself to ensure that he is doing a better job of not alienating anyone. He thanked Professor PeeksMease for raising the issue.

Professor Reimer, Glenn Korff School of Music, noted that the Chancellor's commitment to recruiting undergraduate students is very clear and appreciated, but she asked if the Chancellor would speak about his commitment to graduate student recruitment. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that he does not know of a recruitment model that doesn't also include graduate student recruitment and he noted that our graduate student enrollment was up slightly by 1.3%. He reported that Dean Deb Hope, Graduate Studies, is doing a great job to make sure we have things in place to help graduate students be successful and we know that assistantships are critical. He stated that affordable housing is an issue that needs to be addressed and there are many issues with information technology that we as a university need to think about. He noted that mentorship is important, and we need to offer programs in a format and in a cycle that allows students to take advantage of our programs.

Professor Gay, Physics and Astronomy, asked how the decision was made to suspend in-person classes on Friday, September 27th due to the evening football game. He noted that many faculty members' morale was made lower because athletics was being put ahead of academics. Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes we should have in-person classes every day and noted that he is hesitant to even close the campus for inclement weather. He stated that our success with instructional continuity days during the pandemic, and the consideration of the sheer volume of people in the city of Lincoln both on the campus and in the city for football games led to the decision to have an instructional continuity day. He stated that the decision was not a unilateral decision and was made in consultation with the other campus leaders. He pointed out that he and Athletics Director Dannen have written to the Big Ten commissioner about the concerns with having a mid-week game and the disruption it causes for the campus, and he believes the commissioner has received our concerns. Professor Gay asked why UNL acquiesced to the Big Ten conference's desire to hold a mid-week evening game. Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes all football games should be held on Saturday. He noted that being a member in a major athletic conference does not always mean that things will go your way. He stated that some members of the Big Ten conference felt that there should be some mid-week games.

Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, noted that he is a member of AFIRE and asked what the reason was for closing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, how it was determined that the centralized approach wasn't working, and who helped the Chancellor to make the decision. Chancellor Bennett stated that there were two major factors, one being the budget deficit that needed to be addressed. He pointed out that the previous Chancellor left recommendations about how to reduce the budget and one of them included the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. He stated

that he consulted on two occasions with each of the academic deans on whether they supported the closure of the ODI and whether a different model could be used. He noted that he had complete support from the deans who said that they thought the colleges could provide opportunities for students, faculty and staff through a decentralized model. He noted that he felt more comfortable with the decision to close the Office after speaking with the deans and the EVC.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he appreciates everyone and enjoys working here. He stated that he tries to address the challenges in a non-reckless manner and goes through numerous processes to think things through, including engaging with people on campus, before making any decisions. He pointed out that if you look at where we are, he believes we are moving in the right direction and making improvements. He noted that President Gold has asked us to think of our odyssey towards being extraordinary and he believes that our work is being done against the backdrop of excellence, prominence, and impact.

4.0 Senior AVC Goodburn and VC Anderson

4.1 Undergraduates' Academic Performance from 2023-2024

AVC Goodburn noted that she and VC Anderson will focus on retention, increasing student degree completion, closing equity gaps, and embed experiential learning and career development within the curriculum. She pointed out that we want to make sure the experiences our students have here are transformative, especially through experiential learning and through career development so that they are ready for post-graduation living here in Nebraska and within their communities. She reported that to achieve these goals we will prioritize proactive, integrated, and identity strengths-based support across college and university units. In addition, data will be used to identify and then outreach to students in need of support and resources. She stated that efforts are being made to collaborate with campus stakeholders to identify and eliminate barriers in processes, policies, and practices.

AVC Goodburn pointed out that the traditional model of campus student support was done in a silo fashion where a student had to go to each of the different student support resources. She stated that for the past three years she and others have been working on the Higher Learning Commission's Quality Initiative to create what is being called an ecological validation model of student success where the offices are integrated, and the student hopefully can work with one person rather than having to go to multiple people and offices for help. She stated that to further assist students, faculty members, and advisors can use a new student referral guide card that enables referrals when students need assistance in the areas of personal or life issues, academic issues, or mental health issues. She noted that since the cards have been launched, there has been a 200% increase in faculty and staff referrals to Academic Navigators and by July of this year there were over 700 referrals that took place because of this coordinated effort.

AVC Goodburn reported that as part of our Quality Initiative, forums and symposiums have been held to help support the students and during these symposiums best practices are communicated and relationships across the campus units are developed to assist the students. She pointed out that when we work together, we have the greatest success and our retention rate for first-year students was 86%, which is a historical high for the university, and is a 5.9% increase from 2020. She stated that this increase is indicative of the fantastic job that faculty and staff are doing and noted that the retention rates for second-year students was 75.4% (an increase of 3.3% from 2023), and third-year students was 67.6% (an increase of 2.95 from 2023).

AVC Goodburn noted that we want all students to succeed, and a review was conducted showing what our retention rates are for every demographic. She noted that in all but three demographics, there was some increase in retention rates and pointed out that we are still seeing an upward trend. She stated that the average earned credit is now 13.014 which broke the 13-credit hour barrier we had for many years, and this is important because it takes 15-credit hours per semester for 8 semesters for a student to graduate on a 4-year plan. She reported that we also had a historical high in the percentage of first-year students who earned at least 15-credit hours by the end of their first

semester.

AVC Goodburn reported that there was a slight decline in the 4-year graduation rate, but this was expected due to the retention rate decline during the pandemic. She pointed out that this year 92% of the students stated that they plan to graduate in four years while just several years ago only 53% planned to graduate in four years. She stated that this is a testament to our academic advising units and the number of communications they had with the students.

4.2 Husker Student POWER Framework

VC Anderson noted that when she came to UNL last fall she and her team in the Student Life office looked at all of the things that were being done to help students and a decision was made that they needed to coordinate more with their academic partners because we know that students who participate inside the classroom and are really actively engaged both inside the classroom and outside of it are more likely to be successful. She reported that she worked with AVC Goodburn to make the student experience more applicable to both classroom and out-of-classroom experiences.

VC Anderson reported that the Husker Student Power acronym uses POWER for the framework we want all students to experience. Purpose stands for what the student is here for and what they are trying to accomplish; ownership for taking advantage of all of the resources available to them; well-being is to be healthy mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially; engagement in various campus events, and establishing strong relationships on campus with other students, faculty, and with the community locally and throughout the state. She stated that the message to the students is that if they do these five things in the POWER framework, they will be successful.

VC Anderson noted that each fall the Husker Power Survey is sent out to first-year freshman and transfer students and there was a 66.4% response rate this year. She stated that the survey gauges where students are developmentally, where they are on the success continuum, and what issues they are having. She reported that the top five issues across all colleges for students were struggling in classes, financial distress, campus involvement, wellbeing and having unanswered questions. She reported that people in the Office of Student Life were then assigned to help students in the area(s) they were struggling with to get them connected to assistance.

VC Anderson reported that one of the things OSL is doing is to try and track students' experiences in attending different campus events such as lectures, activities such as Homecoming events, attending athletic games, going to the dining halls, all things that provide a robust campus experience. She noted that a significant amount of data has been collected and her team reviewed the data and within the first two weeks of classes OSL reached out to over 600 students just to check in with them to ask how they are doing and whether they are engaging in activities and meeting new people. She pointed out that this effort allows OSL to contact students earlier. She stated that she feels very strongly that the partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Life to create initiatives that help our students succeed will lead us to an even higher retention rate than 86%.

AVC Goodburn noted that faculty members are asking what they can do for their classes to make improvements such as retention rates, and she noted that there is a symposium coming up on November 1 with Professor Brassil, Faculty Director for Undergraduate Analytics, who has created a suite of dashboards that help instructors see equity gaps in their courses. She stated that faculty members can sign up for the symposium and invitation reminders will be sent out. She noted that improving our retention rates takes place not only in the co-curricular experience, but also at the course experience.

Professor Pierobon, School of Computing, asked if there are ways to identify courses where students are struggling. AVC Goodburn stated that embedded in each college is an Academic Navigator and they look at data to identify students who might be in need of support or resources. She noted that there is data from 1400 courses in the Performance Outlet Report which allows the

Navigators to see which students are performing below 50% of their peers. She stated that once a student is identified, Navigators reach out to them to connect them with resources that the students need in order to be successful in the course and stated that faculty members can also make referrals to Academic Navigators. She reported that there is also the Click Engagement Report which shows how often the student clicks into Canvas. She pointed out that this report can identify if a student has no clicks into Canvas which can result in the student not even being aware that they were enrolled in a course. Professor Pierobon asked if there was a way for faculty to use the data in the reports for research purposes. AVC Goodburn stated that it is usable data through Unizin and suggested that Professor Pierobon contact Professor Brassil to gain access to the data.

Past President Kopocis pointed out that there are students coming in with 20 credit hours of AP classes, but they often cannot be applied to their engineering program because they took the wrong math class, or they took too many other classes but only one fits into the schedule. She asked if AVC Goodburn can reach out to the high school and community college advisors to help the students navigate the correct courses for the college program the students are interested in. AVC Goodburn reported that she was just in a meeting with Associate Deans where there was discussion about how we can communicate better with the community colleges and high school advisors because students entering the university with prior dual and AP credit think they have sophomore or junior standing in a degree program when they don't. She stated that Undergraduate Education Director Sollars will be reaching out to the community colleges to have conversations on this issue. Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, stated that the problem comes from the high school advisors who aren't explaining to the students that while some math courses may be okay for some programs, they may not apply to other programs and often high school students don't know which program they are interested in until they start taking classes at the University. He stated that this information also needs to be provided to the parents. AVC Goodburn noted that her three children went through college with a lot of prior AP and dual credits and while these credits allow students the freedom to take different courses, it does not mean that these AP credits will work for a particular program. She stated that 60% of the honors students entered with more than 20 hours of AP and dual credit. She noted that departments need to think about their curriculum to address students with increased prior credit and we need to be honest with students about how their credit will count for degree programs.

5.0 Approval of September 3, 2024 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the September 3rd minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics moved for approval. Motion seconded by Professor VanderPlas and approved by the Faculty Senate.

6.0 Committees

6.1 Academic Standards Committee (Director Lynch, Academic Navigators)

Director Lynch, University Advising and Explore Center, noted that he serves on the Academic Standards Committee as the EVC's representative. He pointed out that all students have a chance to appeal their academic dismissal from the University and they do this by submitting a written appeal to the Academic Standards Committee. He stated that the Committee met 20 times throughout the year, but only three committee members met are needed for each meeting. He reported that 411 students were academically dismissed, 90 of them appealed the dismissal and 67 were reinstated after presenting documentation. He noted that 23 appeals were denied by the Academic Standards Committee and none of these students made an additional appeal to the EVC. He pointed out that colleges have the opportunity to make recommendations on whether the appeal should be approved or denied and there is not much differentiation between the college recommendations and the Committees decision.

6.2 Academic Rights & Responsibilities Committee (Professor Peterson)

Professor Peterson noted that Professor Lewis is serving as the new chair of the ARRC this year and she will present the Committee's report next year. He reported that the ARRC was approved by the Board of Regents to hear faculty complaints and to adjudicate across the campus. He stated

that if the Committee decides that a case needs to be investigated, a Special Hearing Committee is formed. This Committee investigates the complaint, holds hearings, and makes a report which includes recommendations which then go to the Chancellor.

Professor Peterson noted that a few years ago the ARRC received a large number of complaints but from August 2023 until now, there have not been any complaints that led to a formal investigation. He reported that the ARRC was contacted five times by AVC Judy Walker concerning administration efforts to handle cases of apparent faculty misconduct through administrative leave in anticipation of termination or resignation. He pointed out that the Board of Regents Bylaws requires that an appropriate faculty committee, for UNL it is the ARRC, which must be contacted for consultation before placing a person on administrative leave or taking other disciplinary action, but he noted that the administration usually wants to avoid going through the ARRC special hearing committee. As a result, the ARRC feels that the committee, and the Faculty Senate, need to make sure that the ARRC process is not bypassed in these cases.

Professor Peterson noted that the Faculty Senate approved revisions to the ARRC procedures which are still awaiting approval by the Board of Regents. He stated that we need to make sure that the revisions are on the Board's agenda.

6.3 Executive Committee Summer 2024 Report (President Eklund)

President Eklund noted that the report is in the Senate packet, and it includes a list of the activities that the Executive Committee did over the summer.

7.0 Unfinished Business

7.1 Faculty Budget Committee Update

President Eklund reported that the Executive Committee met with VC Zeleny on August 6th to discuss the Faculty Budget Committee and how the Committee could work and whether it could get the budget information that was outlined in the motion to create the committee. He noted that the Executive Committee also met with faculty members of the Academic Planning Committee to discuss how the APC could possibly work with the Faculty Budget Committee.

8.0 New Business

8.1 Open Mic

Professor Zuckerman, Educational Administration, stated that she wanted to touch base to see what has been occurring with the Faculty Budget Committee which was approved by a majority of the Senate. She pointed out that the Chancellor just reported that UNL may need to cut another \$14 million, and the Senate needs to pay careful attention to shared governance. She reported that she looked at other Big Ten universities to see if they have committees or processes for the faculty to be involved in shared governance on budget matters. She stated that the University of Maryland, Rutgers University, Illinois, Michigan have a faculty budget engagement committee. The Ohio State University has a fiscal committee that meets weekly, and Purdue has a budget interpretation committee. She pointed out that these budget committees go far beyond academic planning, noting that our peers have far more transparency with their budgets than we do. She reported that she is happy to continue to work on establishing the Faculty Budget Committee.

Professor McElravy, Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications, stated that one of the elements of the Faculty Budget Committee wasn't simply budget oversight but also thinking about how faculty can be empowered to get involved with budget planning at the department, college, and campus level. He noted that a number of courses in his department were recently eliminated without input from the faculty in the department. He stated that it is critical to have faculty input pointing out that there is no transparency from the administration at all levels.

8.2 Travel Reimbursement Problems

President Eklund stated that we need to keep pressure on both the local administration and Varner Hall, especially with the budget. He stated that when the Executive Committee met with President

Gold on July 22nd, the Committee tried to make it clear to him that the centralization of services has not been good, and he thinks that President Gold was listening to the concerns that were raised and was aware of the frustrations that were being voiced. He thinks that once a replacement for the Vice President for Business and Finance has been found that we might see some changes.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:22 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, November 5, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.