

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Bearnes, Bouma, Boudreau, Dawes, Eklund, Kopocis, Lott, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas

Absent: Baesu, Leiter

Date: Tuesday, September 24, 2024

Location: 201 Alexander Building

Note: These are not verbatim minutes. They are a summary of the discussions at the Executive Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

1.0 Call (*Eklund*)

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

2.0 Chancellor Bennett/VC Boehm

2.1 How do you envision the reimagining of diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts on campus? The students received an informative email explaining what resources will be available to them on campus now that the ODI has been eliminated. Can this please be shared with the faculty since the message provides information that would be good for faculty to know. Faculty advisors now do not know who they should call if racist or anti-Semitic incidents occur on campus.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he is glad to have an opportunity to talk about the issue of reimagining diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts at UNL. He reported that he recently had a very good conversation with EVC Ankerson, VC Zeleny, and VC Anderson, about how they are organizing their units to determine what the next steps will be to ensure that we have a welcoming and safe environment for everyone on our campus. He noted that he has also met with the Chancellor's Commissions and has asked them to play a role in developing programs to further enhance these efforts, pointing out that all of these steps will play a critical role in our success. He stated that there is a role for everyone in these efforts if they are interested.

Chancellor Bennett stated that if there are faculty advisors encountering negative incidents on campus, they should contact either the EVC's office or VC Zeleny's office which oversees Human Resources. He noted that students should contact the Office of Student Life if any racist or anti-Semitic incidents occur on campus. The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance is also a resource that everyone should look to.

Chancellor Bennett noted that there are strong opinions on both sides of the issue and the University is being mindful to provide support for our faculty, staff, and students while also understanding that there are those who do not support the work. Tschetter pointed out that there are some people who seem very hostile to the University, and she asked whether this hostility is still high or if it has lessened. Chancellor Bennett stated that he

believes the University's position has improved overall. He stated that we need to find a balance of how we move forward and noted that we have lost a number of critically important faculty members recently. Shrader asked how the University is going to stem the tide of losing these people. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that retention is a priority for us this year and we need to continue to do our work.

Dawes asked how the Chancellor communicates with the Deans and other administrators when there are controversial topics that they need to be aware of and need to address. Chancellor Bennett reported that the top leaders have received clear communications from him about what we need to think about and what we should be doing to address the issue. He noted that he is willing to take suggestions and feedback from the Executive Committee about how to improve communications. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that prior to the closure of the ODI, he met with each Dean and asked them to share why they believed the ODI should not have been closed. He noted that we also need to give Academic Affairs, the Business & Finance Office, and the Office of Student Life a chance to develop their plans for how they will be supportive of a safe and welcoming campus. He suggested that the VCs could come and speak to the full Senate about their plans once they are established. He noted that having the ODI was a symbol which has now been lost, but if you think of the work that is being done with the students, none of that is being changed.

Chancellor Bennet reported that those who worked in the ODI, and they are all in the process of finding other opportunities at UNL. He noted that Dr. Barker will move over to the College of Education and Human Sciences at the end of the year, and he expected the other individuals to find other roles at UNL. He stated that he is trying to instill in everyone on campus that it is their responsibility to mentor students. VanderPlas asked how the annual evaluations will change to incorporate how it is everyone's responsibility to do this work. Chancellor Bennett stated that there will be a matrix that he hopes the VCs will be able to suggest what questions need to be asked.

Tschetter reported that she has students telling her that they are looking at other places to go because they want to be in a state with a more supportive environment. Chancellor Bennett stated that he thinks we still need to have a level of conversation here at UNL as to where we want to be and how we can make improvements. He pointed out that we need to figure out how we can have rich conversations without them getting taken out of context. Shrader noted that he believes the majority of the people at the university want us to be the best university that we can be, but there are those who feel that not everyone in the state is onboard with this idea. Tschetter stated that she takes great pride in her history classes, telling the students we are a land-grant university and how important this is to the state. She noted that she is proud of the university and the history we have and what we have done, and the work the university does needs to be highlighted.

2.2 What is the process when structural changes are made to the campus or the university?

Chancellor Bennett stated that it depends on the kind of structural change that is being made. For instance, some things, like the reporting of UNL's Athletics Director to the

University President, requires Board of Regents approval. While the renaming of the Office of Research and Economic Development to the Office of Research and Innovation can be made by the Chancellor. He noted that it all depends on what the Regents Bylaws state.

2.3 Budget update. How are your offices promoting increased transparency with the budget and can you articulate what the steps will be to ensure that there is transparency if we need to go through another round of budget reductions.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he hopes to have the budget numbers from VC Zeleny by the end of the week. He pointed out that we are carrying forward over \$14 million in deficit from last year and there are some other costs as well. For example, although our enrollment grew, the number of out-of-state students we had declined, and we were also more reliant on remissions in certain spaces. He pointed out that out-of-state students and international students typically pay full tuition, which increases our tuition revenue. VanderPlas questioned why we are predicting our budget on in-state tuition revenue. Davis noted that we missed our projection of out-of-state students this year.

Tschetter pointed out that a \$14 million, or larger, budget reduction will be catastrophic for the campus and questioned how we will be able to deal with this reduction. Chancellor Bennett reported that he wrote to President Gold pointing out that the budget model being used is not sustainable and that UNL needs some relief because without it the cuts that will be required will significantly change the university and will make us less competitive to rejoin the AAU.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he is working with Central Administration to recover some of the \$10 million Athletics used to give us each year. He noted that a budget reduction will be very hard but noted that we will follow the established procedures for the Academic Planning Committee to review the proposed reductions. Tschetter asked what the time period will be for the APC to work on the reductions. Chancellor Bennett stated that the reductions would need to be made this fiscal year.

Tschetter noted that the Chancellor was to speak with President Gold about the budget and asked how that discussion went. Chancellor Bennett reported that he expected some of the rescission funds to come back to us but pointed out that this is not permanent funds, so it is not a permanent solution. He stated that he also expects some of the Athletics money to be recovered.

VanderPlas noted that UNL has been one of the few universities that have given funds to the academic side of the university. Chancellor Bennett noted that an early review of the Big Ten universities shows that there are only a couple of them where athletics is not making contributions to the institution.

Vakilzadian stated that if UNL was to get \$9 million from the rescission funds along with \$5 million from UNL Athletics, that would amount to \$14 million which should take care of our deficit. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that the \$14 million is a shortfall from last year and noted that it does not include this year's expenses. Davis noted that the deficit is

a structural one, so this solution would not adequately address the problem. Chancellor Bennett stated that he would have VC Zeleny come to the October 29th Executive Committee to explain the budget situation in greater detail.

Kopocis noted that last year there were discussions about redundancies of programs across the system. She asked what has happened from those discussions. Chancellor Bennett reported that at this time, there is no real final plan for restructuring or consolidation and eliminating duplication because the information about all of the programs offered by NU is still being vetted.

2.4 Numerous faculty members have reported problems with getting timely IT support in the classrooms and in their offices to enable them to conduct their research. What can be done to address these problems?

Vakilzadian pointed out that when Information Technology was centralized IT support for the campus plummeted, but classroom technology has increased, as well as research and this requires increased support from IT. In addition, there is not enough expertise in the use of various computer systems and programs. Chancellor Bennett suggested that Interim CIO Haugerud be invited to speak to the Executive Committee about the problem.

2.5 What is the university doing to market our accomplishments and how the university benefits the state?

Chancellor Bennett stated that we are working hard to tell the story of UNL. He noted that our rankings in the U.S. News & World Report show that UNL has made significant strides moving up in both the overall national ranking and also in the ranking among all public institutions in the United States. He reported that he never misses an opportunity to invite members of the Legislature to the university football suite to talk about the great things the university is doing. He pointed out that we need to start contacting students in high schools earlier, but otherwise, he thinks we do a good job about talking about the university and the successes we have.

Vakilzadian noted that when parents visit the College of Engineering and other places on campus, they see empty faculty offices, but they don't get to see the labs where these faculty members are working. He pointed out that people don't see faculty life and stated that we need to educate people about what the faculty do because there is a misconception that the faculty only teach a few classes. Chancellor Bennett stated that this is an ongoing issue and people don't understand what the faculty and staff do at a university. He said it requires ongoing education about university life and noted that this is an issue across the country.

2.6 When will the State of the University address be held?

Chancellor Bennett stated that the state of the University address will more than likely occur on Charter Day in February.

2.7 Concerns have been raised over the Legacy Plaza renovation and design, particularly whether the statutes should be reinstalled. Has the University-

wide Aesthetics Committee considered whether the statutes should be placed on campus again, or perhaps located in other areas?

VC Boehm reported that when Dr. Green was VC of IANR he worked with then Chancellor Perlman to commission and install statues of the four Nebraskans who have served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture – J. Sterling Morton, Clifford Hardin, Clayton Yeutter, and Michael Johanns. When Dr. Green was UNL Chancellor, he approved the installation of a fifth statue on East Campus in recognition of George Beadle, a Nobel Prize winning alumnus of the University. He stated that in 2022 the four Ag Secretary statues were removed and stored for safety to allow for the redevelopment of the Legacy Plaza Meadow – the green space south of the East Campus Union, west of Dinsdale Family Learning Commons, and north of the UNL Diary Store. He reported that Chancellor Green made the decision to return the four Ag Secretary statues repositioned near their original locations upon completion of the Legacy Meadows project. He pointed out that the University Aesthetics Committee reviewed and approved the Legacy Meadows project including the new locations of the four Ag Secretary statues. He noted that the Committee’s role in this review was limited to whether the new locations and the look, feel, material selection of the statue’s new bases made sense architecturally for the campus. He reported that there have been concerns raised over the history surrounding Secretary J. Sterling Morton’s statue because of his views on slavery and race. He indicated that Chancellor Green was aware of and took these concerns and history into consideration when he decided to have the four Ag Secretary statues returned to campus. He shared a map of the Legacy Meadows project and talked through the location of the four Ag Secretary statues.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Meeting with VC Anderson

Griffin reported that the Executive Committee would be meeting with VC Anderson on October 15th after they meet with EVC Ankerson.

3.2 Impacts of the Loss of Inheritance Tax on Nebraska Extension Offices

Lott reported that if the repeal of the inheritance tax is approved in the Legislature it will gravely impact many Nebraska counties. He noted that while some counties have money, others do not and those that don’t will be scraping all non-essential services which includes cutting Extension Boards and Extension offices. Bearnese stated that most of the Extension budgets are to be ratified by mid-September, but this has not yet happened. She pointed out that Extension only exists by the grace of the county commissioners and the loss of the inheritance tax funds will create serious problems if funding for Extension offices gets pulled. Lott reported that Gage County is the last county to sign their interlocal agreement with the University and noted that the county is already in difficult financial straits.

Eklund questioned whether anyone has asked the Governor’s office where the funds will be coming from to support Extension throughout the state. Bouma stated that the Legislature approved an amendment that would provide \$11 million a year in additional revenue counties from the documentary stamp tax charged on sellers of homes and property.

Bearnes stated that if Extension loses funding from the counties and also has to deal with a budget reduction from the university, it will impact the university's presence throughout the state.

3.3 Email Message from Faculty Member Concerned About Micro-Credential Courses

Eklund reported that he received an email message from a faculty member who was concerned that the micro-credential courses that his college was offering stating that they were competing with a master's degree program which already exists and pointed out that the college will wind up losing students to these micro-credential courses. Kopocis stated that certificates and the micro-credential courses should clearly state that they are a non-degree granting course.

Shrader pointed out that President Gold has said that non-traditional students will be the majority of students in the near future and non-credit badging will be the norm. VanderPlas stated that the academic units should be offering micro-credential courses themselves to get the funding from them. Lott reported that Nebraska Extension is putting together some micro-credential course for people in western Nebraska.

4.0 Approval of September 17, 2024, Minutes

Eklund asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Tschetter moved and Boudreau seconded, approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Wellness Survey

Eklund reported that he contacted Professor PeeksMease and told him that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee would be interested in working with the Staff Senate and others to conduct a wellness survey. He noted that Professor PeeksMease stated that the survey would need to be created. Eklund suggested that a subcommittee be formed to work on it. He pointed out that the survey would not be distributed until sometime in the spring semester.

5.2 Executive Committee Goals for 2024-2025 – Implementation Steps

Once again work on the Executive Committee goals was postponed due to lack of time.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Faculty Senate Executive Committee Summer Report

Griffin asked the Executive Committee to review the summer report she had written and asked if there were any revisions. Eklund noted that he attended the New Faculty Orientation in person.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, October 1, 2024, immediately following the Faculty Senate meeting. The meeting will be held in the Nebraska Union, Platte River Room. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.

