

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES

September 3, 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.

2.0 Announcements

2.1 Update on Faculty Budget Committee

President Eklund reported that the Executive Committee met with VC Zeleny on August 6th to discuss how the Faculty Budget Committee could work with the VC's office and the Academic Planning Committee. He pointed out that we want to establish a good process where the faculty would be provided with more information on the budget planning process.

3.0 President Gold

President Gold first wanted to thank and recognize Professor Van Etten, this year's recipient of the Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award, for his work and service to the University noting that this was a well-deserved award.

President Gold reported that this Thursday his investiture as the ninth President of the University of Nebraska will occur in the State Capitol rotunda. He pointed out that on Thursday it will be exactly 10 years ago that he was invested as the Chancellor of UNMC and that 5 years ago he was invested as the Chancellor of UNO. He stated that he plans on telling the story of how great and important the University is to the state.

President Gold reported that he has spent most of his time since he became President on July 1 meeting and talking to people throughout the state and went to Washington DC to speak with our state delegation. He noted that during his travel across the state, whether it was in urban or rural areas, that the people of the state expressed how they loved the University and that they hold it in very high esteem. He stated that while there was a wide spectrum of opinions about things that the University should do and how we can do things differently, it was all in the context of this being a great university system.

President Gold noted that we are still in the quest for rejoining the AAU and he recently had a good meeting with AAU President Barbara Snyder to discuss our chances of being readmitted. He pointed out that there are certain structural requirements and metrics that we need to achieve, and all of the parameters are divided by the number of faculty we have. He noted that we have 7 different classifications of faculty members, but the AAU only considers 5 and we need to consider how we classify faculty members while ensuring that we classify people into the correct category. He pointed out that reaching the necessary metrics will probably be a 10-year process but reported that when speaking with Dr. Snyder he made it clear that we are focused on the same things that AAU values because they are also our values.

President Gold pointed out that our job is to take care of every student and to get them through to graduation and for us to bring out the very best in our research and sponsored programs and to compete for faculty awards. He noted that we need to get as many of our faculty members recognized by national organizations as possible and stated that when you receive email messages asking you to nominate someone to a national organization, faculty members should consider their colleagues and nominate some of them. He noted that there is a lot of pride here in Nebraska but also a lot of humility and sometimes that humility can interfere with someone being justly recognized for the work they do.

President Gold pointed out that he has said on occasions that the faculty is clearly the core of the

university. These are the people who are educating the next generation and pushing the frontiers of research and discovery and involved in community engagement through Nebraska Extension. He stated that he, and the other administrators, are part of the overhead of the university, they are not the engine, but we are all on the quest to enhance our academic excellence.

President Gold reported that a question he is frequently asked is whether there will be structural changes at the university and what it means for UNL and UNMC and will the changes involve UNO and UNK. He stated that, at this time, he did not know what changes would occur and what they would involve. He noted that we have combined the National Science Foundation research reporting for UNL, UNMC, and the President's office, which amounts to about \$640 million, and which catapulted us from the mid-120's number to about the 50th or 60th in the country in terms of the highest amount of NSF funding.

President Gold stated that an additional restructuring question is about the elimination of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UNL. He pointed out that Chancellor Bennett is continuing his commitment to taking care of all of our students, faculty, and staff and he is making sure that we have programmatic support for each of these groups. He stated that we have to make sure that we provide our students with opportunities to succeed, and this requires us to surround these students with the best and brightest faculty members, advisors, and counselors and to have support teams that can shepherd and guide them through the educational process so that all students can have a fulfilling life. He reported that another message he received while touring the state was about the workforce need whether it is for a farm, ranch, factory, business, insurance company, bank, or a hospital. He stated that we must meet this need but noted that attendance at a great university is more than just joining the workforce, it is about teaching individuals to be critical thinkers which is needed now with all of the issues going on across the country and around the world.

President Gold noted that he received some questions from the Faculty Senate Executive Committee that he wanted to address. He stated that the first was about the lack of IT support in some of the colleges at UNL, particularly the lack of classroom IT support. He reported that he contacted Vice President Blackman to discuss this concern. He noted that VP Blackman wrote that ITS supports 150 general purpose classrooms and on the UNL campus there are an additional 449 classrooms with technology that are not supported by the NU ITS system. The 449 classrooms and labs are distributed across the campus and are generally supported by the colleges. He noted that there are 150 IT staff across the campus that work for the colleges and for the campus, but they do not report to VP Blackman. He suggested that there should be discussions with the Interim CIO at UNL about the problems being encountered. Professor Vakilzadian noted that since IT has become centralized the support for the campus has become very bad and it is detrimental to both research and teaching. He stated that the College of Engineering had three IT support staff, but it is now down to just one person. President Gold asked that Professor Vakilzadian send him an email message about this and stated that he would contact VP Blackman, head of ITS, about it. He pointed out that he is aware of some of the challenges with IT having worked both at UNMC and UNO and noted that the system changes required to improve our cyber security and dealing with other security issues have been costly and slowed network resources. Professor Vakilzadian pointed out that we need IT staff expertise in UNIX, Mac, and Windows as well as audio visual support and network support.

President Gold stated that another question was about the syncing of UNL's calendar with LPS' calendar. He pointed out that several years ago President Carter wanted to synchronize the calendars of all four campuses, so they had the same start and stop dates. Having this would facilitate students being able to cross register for classes across the campuses and it has resulted in enhanced amounts of cross registration and matriculation of students. He noted that the problem is the LPS and OPS schedules are not synchronized with each other. He stated that he would take the issue back to Interim Provost David Jackson, who knows the problem very well, to see if the issue can be revisited. Professor Vakilzadian pointed out that the start time for classes on UNL and UNO are different and asked if these could be synchronized. President Gold noted that this is a legitimate

concern and asked Professor Vakilzadian to include it in his email. He stated that he tries to not tell the campuses what they should do, but this is a topic for a healthy discussion.

President Gold reported that the next question has to do with UNL Athletics and who it reports to. He pointed out that the change to have the UNL Athletics Director report to the President rather than the Chancellor was a Board of Regents action taken in June 2023. He stated that he believes this action was taken due to the Name, Image, and Likeness opportunities for student athletes and revenue sharing. He noted that right now it is good that he is sitting on the Council of Presidents and Chancellors of the Big Ten because of the many changes occurring with college athletics. He reported that the Board of Regents will vote on creating a Board Athletics Committee which will work with the athletics programs on each of the campuses to ensure that our athletic programs are as well protected and efficiently run as possible. He pointed out that the Chancellor's office and the Athletics Director need to work closely together because the student athletes after all, are students and each of the faculty play a critical role in their academic journey, because many of the student athletes will not become professional athletes. He pointed out that the issues of revenue sharing, NCAA compliance, NIL, are pervasive and the legal judgement to be handed down this week is going to change collegiate athletics. He noted that we have some of the strongest athletic programs in the country and they are well supported, we also have no debt, and we actually have some reserve funds while other universities are heavily in debt.

President Gold reported that he is looking carefully at returning some of the rescission funding that was taken from the campuses. He noted that 5 or 6 years ago the university had less than 20 days of liquid cash, but we now have 38 days which is an improvement but not much of a cushion. He pointed out that the state has about 60 days of cash. He stated that the role of Varner Hall is not to reserve cash but to make sure the campuses have the needed resources.

Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, stated that he is wondering how he should respond to people who question how some administrators can voice how they are so optimistic about our future when we are facing further budget reductions and the elimination of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). He wondered what he should tell colleagues and students that are being recruited when decisions like closing ODI are made, noting that research shows that these kinds of decisions negatively impact retention rates. He asked how faculty are involved in these kinds of decisions. President Gold stated that he cannot speak as to whether faculty were involved in the decision making, but he can state that in his conversations with Chancellor Bennett it was clear Chancellor Bennett's commitment to having an inclusive and welcoming environment. He stated that the decision to eliminate ODI was a tactical decision, and he did not know who counseled the Chancellor, but the centralized program was not showing effectiveness. He stated that there needs to be discussion about the best way the campus can make investments to ensure that we are successful in supporting all of our students and what we can do for them financially, academically, and programmatically.

Professor McElvray, Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, asked if metrics are tracked when services are centralized to see if they are effective and efficient. President Gold stated that they are, but probably not across all of the centralized services. He pointed out that One ITS does periodic surveys and he could ask VP Blackman to speak to the Senate about it. He reported that we will be looking at a strategic planning system that will look at strategies and goals across the university system on down to the department level and the plan will be associated with metrics which will include every aspect of what goes on in the President's office. He noted that the metrics will show centralized services that are working well, and others that aren't. He pointed out that there have been a lot of discussions around procurement and turnaround time for reimbursement of travel. He stated that President Carter led with reducing staff in Varner Hall which reduced central administration's staff by 25%, but it came at a cost. He noted that if we spend funds to improve ITS it will result in reductions elsewhere.

President-Elect Shrader reported that the campus hears that the Athletics department is self-

sufficient and has no debt, but the rest of the campus never sees Athletics' budget numbers. President Gold stated that he did not know why this information cannot be made available to the Faculty Senate and said he would check to confirm this.

President-Elect Shrader pointed out that the Huskers have always been based at UNL, the faculty educate the student-athletes, and we work with people who are employed in athletics. He asked how it is not in the best interests of our faculty and students to not have UNL athletics within the campus' purview. President Gold stated that the Board of Regents made the decision to change the UNL Athletics Director's reporting to the President and he believes it will probably remain that way for the foreseeable future given the complexities of the Big Ten conference. He pointed out that the organizational chart is not as significant as the collaboration that occurs between the campus and athletics and he believes the faculty will do their best to have all students succeed. He reported that he asked for an accounting of what he calls cross subsidies meaning that there are certain things that the academic side of the campus does to support athletics, and there are certain things that athletics does to support academics, and he has asked to get that balanced. He stated that if there are specific things that are not happening but should, he would like to hear about it. He noted that the class-action lawsuit is going to have significant impacts, particularly for the four major conferences. He pointed out that never before have our student-athletes been treated as employees but that is going to change and along with NIL, university athletics across the country are going to have significant changes. He stated that he is not concerned with the organizational chart, rather he is more focused on the structure and how it works. He noted that he has brought Chancellor Bennett and AD Dannen together to make sure that the relationship is solid.

Professor Gel, Supply Chain Management, stated that she joined UNL three years ago and she appreciates President Gold's comments about joining the AAU and asked if he can talk about what the faculty can do to support the effort. President Gold stated that the AAU website (<https://www.aau.edu/>) shows the metrics needed to be a member of the organization. He reported that the combined reporting being compiled by Academic Analytics will help but we need to remember that the existing members of the AAU are also continuing to make improvements in their metrics. He stated that one of the metrics we need to improve is faculty awards and recognition.

The question was asked what happens when we combine our metrics with UNMC's. President Gold noted that UNMC has a different type of model with many of the faculty delivering clinical care. He stated that UNMC reviews and updates its strategic plan each year and each department develops its goals and their own strategic plan which is then blended into the campus plan. He stated that there is a strong sense of purpose and what excellence means to people. He pointed out that 10 years ago UNMC's clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, was ranked 93 out of 155 academic teaching hospitals for quality and safety, but in the past years has been ranked in the top 10 and was just ranked 6th. He stated that UNMC and Nebraska Medicine deeply believe that creating an energy and strong sense of belonging gives people a sense of pride and purpose which makes a significant difference. He noted that the nursing program is number 10 out of 600 and the pharmacy program is highly ranked as well. He stated that wanting to become a member of the AAU keeps us on an aspirational pathway towards excellence.

Professor Duncan, Communication Studies, asked how we track the next Dr. Van Etten and how we recruit these top faculty, asking what President Gold's plans are for recruiting and retaining faculty. President Gold stated that we must be good stewards of putting our funding into retaining top-notch faculty members. He pointed out that we cannot be everything to everybody, but we need to pursue top talent and noted that we are always going to have centers of excellence and to continue to make sure our students have a solid pathway to success. He stated that excellence is a journey, not a destination. He reported that every two weeks each of the Chancellors sends his office 2-3 areas of pride that they would like the outside world to know about and all of these positive things are sent out to the Regents, the Legislature, and media. He pointed out that this is a job of working together.

Professor Cressler, School of Biological Sciences, stated that he has heard it said a number of times

that we can't try to be all things to all people. He noted that President Gold talked about a strategic plan for the whole university and asked how the priorities for the plan will be set up. President Gold reported that he is reading all of the campus strategic plans, and he wants to pull together people from extension, research, and teaching to determine where some of these pinnacles might be. He noted that some decisions will need to be made but we will have to do this if we are going to use our precious amounts of resources to invest in the future. He reported that he spends a lot of time in front of the donors, and it helps if he can tell them where the university is going and the same is true for when he speaks with the legislators. He noted that our federal delegation is very interested in tagging federal dollars to bring back to the state. He pointed out that the university strategic plan will not occur with just a few people, it will be widely vented and discussed.

President Gold thanked the Faculty Senate for inviting him to speak. He pointed out that he wants to meet with each of the Faculty Senates across the university system on a quarterly basis.

4.0 Approval of May 7, 2024 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the May 7th minutes. He then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Tschetter, History, moved to approve the minutes. Motion seconded by Professor Baesu, Mechanical and Materials Engineering and then approved by the Faculty Senate.

5.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Presentation of the Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award

President Eklund noted that this year's recipient of the Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award was Professor James Van Etten. He stated that Professor Van Etten is the William Allington Distinguished Professor in the Department of Plant Pathology. Over the past 58 years at UNL, Dr. Van Etten has had a distinguished career filled with significant scientific achievement and service. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Inventors.

Dr. Van Etten's willingness to share and collaborate with others is evident with his publicly making available the sequence he did of the gargantuan 330kb genome of the prototype cholovirus. As a result of his scientific generosity, he was inundated with requests from scientists around the world to collaborate on projects. These international collaborations resulted in four publications in *Science*, 15 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, directly reflected in the laudable publication output of 271 journal articles and 52 invited review articles. He has been invited to 166 talks and seminars at many prominent universities world-wide (99) and scientific conferences.

Dr. Van Etten holds courtesy appointments in both the Chemistry department and the School of Biological Sciences. His leadership in the development of three existing research centers on Campus has made tremendous contributions to the research capacity at UNL, and to the overall impact on research structure and capacity. He has been a leader in creating ventures for conversations and research engagement, has hosted the UNL Biotechnology seminar series and the Nebraska Center for Virology annual symposium for 25 years. He consistently engages in all areas of science and encourages young scientists in their development.

President Eklund stated that it was his privilege to present this year's Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Award to Dr. James Van Etten.

A reception was held immediately following the meeting to honor Dr. Van Etten.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, October 1, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.

