

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Baesu, Bearnese, Boudreau, Bouma, Eklund, Kopocis, Leiter, Reimer, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas

Absent: Lott

Date: Tuesday, April 22, 2025

Location: Nebraska Union, Big Ten Room

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 precisely 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Interim EVC Button

2.1 Update on Enrollment Numbers. Has the political chaos and the revocation of student visas impacted the number of international student applications? How are Summer Session enrollment numbers looking?

Interim EVC Button stated that overall, our undergraduate freshman numbers look very positive and we are up by almost 6.5% from where we were last year. He reported non-resident students are up by 20.6% and we anticipate having one of the largest non-resident enrollments in a very long time. VanderPlas asked if the numbers for this year have been compared to previous years not just last year's numbers. Interim EVC Button stated yes that the comparing points in-time data are from across multiple years.

Interim EVC button stated that international applications were up but our actual number of deposits for international graduate students is lower than last year. He stated that we are hearing from students in India and Vietnam that they are simply taking the United State universities off the table and are pivoting to the United Kingdom or Canada universities instead. He stated that the political climate and incidents of visas being revoked along with difficulty in obtaining visas is having a chilling effect on our recruitment of international students.

Leiter asked if any international student has withdrawn their application and whether students receiving a scholarship would still make a deposit to come to UNL. Interim EVC Button stated that universities across the country are experiencing the same situation with international students and as a result we are all reassessing our budgets. He stated that if we're lucky we would have a flat rate of enrollment for international graduate students, but we are more likely to have a decline. Shrader pointed out that we need to let our government relations team know about the impacts to our international undergraduate and graduate student applications. Interim EVC Button stated that our federal team in Washington DC has been working on this and has been very busy.

Interim EVC Button stated that our applications for graduate students are up, but it is still very early in the process. He reported admissions were also up for domestic students with the total number of acceptances for domestic students up by 7% from last year.

VanderPlas asked what impact an increase in our enrollment would have on our budget. Interim EVC Button noted that we are implementing a \$5,000,000 reduction this year across the university, and he pointed out that we're planning for possibly a \$10 to \$20 million budget reduction next year because of our ongoing structural deficit. Eklund asked how much of an increase in enrollment would help us. Interim EVC Button stated that there are several factors that will impact our budget. The first is what the state chooses to do with our state-aided funds, the second is if the Board decides to increase tuition, and the third is recruitment of students. He noted that one thing under our control is our effort in recruiting new students and retaining them when they are on our campus. He stated that ASEM is working very hard on recruitment and everyone on campus – from Academic Affairs to Student Life – can help with student retention.

Tschetter asked if President Gold was still in negotiations with State Legislators about our budget request. Interim EVC Button stated absolutely President Gold is still in negotiations. He said everyone needs to advocate for the university, but we also need to develop a clear strategic plan to make us extraordinary and to show that we are good stewards with our funding.

Eklund pointed out that some of our colleges have differential tuition and asked if this is helping our budget and will more colleges be requesting differential tuition. Interim EVC Button stated that proposals for differential tuition rates are being reviewed, and he pointed out that if a college is interested in having differential tuition rates, they would need to provide good justification for having it. He noted that some studies have shown that having differential tuition does not negatively impact college enrollment rates. He stated that having an influence on our price is one thing we can do to address our fiscal needs.

Interim EVC Button stated that our summer enrollments are tracking as they have been in the last three years and we plan to have a total of about 8,000 students enrolled over the summer.

2.2 How many student visas have been revoked, and do we know why they were revoked?

Interim EVC Button reported that three students to date have had their visas revoked, but he noted that these are fast moving circumstances, and the students have been notified and provided information to access legal counsel. He pointed out that they should not do anything until they get good legal advice. He reported that no consistent reasoning has been provided as to why their visas were revoked but there does seem to be a connection if they had some kind of interaction with law enforcement which could have been as simple as having a traffic violation. He stated that the International Student and Scholar's Office (ISSO) is monitoring things daily and students are being advised to check their e-mail frequently.

Tschetter asked who would be paying for the lawyers. Interim EVC Button stated the students have free access to Student Legal Services. The ACLU and AILA (American Immigration Lawyers Association) is also providing access to pro bono legal counsel for students impacted. VanderPlas asked what the impact is to keep these students enrolled and would they possibly be able to take classes remotely. Interim EVC Button stated that the change in their visa status does not change their ability to stay in the country. It impacts them if they leave the country because they will not be able to get back in. He said students should not self deport especially if they are staying active and fully enrolled. Baesu pointed out that it could impact students getting paid who are on graduate teaching assistantships or graduate research assistantships. Interim EVC Button stated that this would impact students on an assistantship. VanderPlas asked if the university would be suing on behalf of these students. Interim EVC Button stated that General Counsel is helping with the situation, and he said UNL is being represented in other lawsuits such as the APLU lawsuit pertaining to research facilities and administrative rate cuts.

Vander Plas asked if there have been communications with other international students. Interim EVC Button stated that many communications are going out to our international students, and they are being sent electronic notifications. He reported that there have been multiple forum opportunities for them to attend and open office hours with ISSO. Vakilzadian stated that there are students on campus whose parents are immigrants, and the students are fearful to come to class. Interim EVC Button stated that the students should be encouraged to speak with legal services which could help them adjust their fears. Shrader asked how many international students there are on campus. Interim EVC Button stated that there are approximately 1,600 international students.

Shrader stated that he is worried about the 1,600 hundred international students and the anxiety and fear that they must be experiencing. Interim EVC Button pointed out that it's hard for a student to perform when they have such fear and anxiety, and he said he wanted to make sure that these students are connected to ISSO and Student Legal Services which is free to every student and CAPS is also an important resource available to students. He noted that contacting these offices might help alleviate some of the concerns that students have. He pointed out we don't know of any incidents of ICE being on campus and campus security has assured the administration that only once a number of years ago, did Homeland Security ask about a person who was no longer a student at the university.

Tschetter asked if there's any guidance for faculty members who are traveling, especially our international faculty. Interim EVC Button stated that the administration is just starting to look at this issue and he noted that this is basically a case-by-case basis. He pointed out that faculty members should consider their risk factor before they travel.

2.3 UNL-UNMC Joint Accreditation

Interim EVC Button stated that he is quite supportive of UNL and UNMC having joint accreditation pointing out that it will better align us with other Big Ten institutions and

with AAU institutions. He noted that combining our research expenditures with UNMC's brought our ranking up to 55th in the country. He stated that having joint accreditation would bring all kinds of exciting opportunities and will help facilitate collaborations between the two campuses. He pointed out that it would also help students that start on one campus to transfer and finish their degree at the other campus. He stated that this will help us to retain those student enrollment numbers as well, whereas before we would lose the enrollment number when the student moved to another campus. He stated that having joint accreditation will drive broader engagement across the state in many ways which will be very beneficial. He noted that there will need to be additional layers of shared governance, and he encouraged the Executive Committee to think about what that would be. He stated that a question that needs to be considered is how our institutions will create policy and structure together noting that nothing like this has ever happened before at the University. However, he pointed out that we have strong experts in curriculum and educational administration who could provide assistance in how we create a joint committee with UNMC. VanderPlas stated that it is unclear how this body could create some sort of shared governance body without action by the Board of Regents. Interim EVC Button pointed out that we have a Graduate College across the system, and we will probably need to have some shared governance mechanisms like committees. He noted that the Higher Learning Commission will be interested in what our shared interests are and our shared governance structure when it comes to discussing the application for joint accreditation.

Shrader stated that currently it seems like the shared governance structure is a reporting structure. He questioned when and how it would become one entity. Interim EVC Button stated that people should look at the [frequently asked questions page](#) on the System's webpage which has a link to our application to the Higher Learning Commission requesting that we have joint accreditation. He stated that there will be a site visit on June 2nd and 3rd when members of the HLC come to interview people on campus. Afterwards the HLC Executive Committee will need to consider the application and the full HLC body will conduct a review of our application in the fall. He encouraged the Faculty Senate to be actively involved in the process.

2.4 Do you have concerns about the wording in the proposed revisions to the Board of Regents Bylaws that give the President the ability to make substantial revisions to academic programs in consultation with the various campus Chancellors?

Interim EVC Button stated that many of us have questions regarding the proposed bylaw changes and he said that one of the questions is whether these revisions intend to move us towards restructuring the university. He pointed out that if anybody has questions, they should ask the Board about them. He noted that one of the major changes is with the change of titles such as a campus being defined as an administrative unit. He stated that the question is what is driving the change. He noted that the President has always had the ability to make recommendations on program elimination, mergers, revisions, or approval and the proposed revisions just defines this ability. He stated that in this climate given the challenges to higher education he thinks it makes sense to make structural changes

which would better align the university with the needs of the citizens and the state. He hopes the Board takes the opportunity to engage more people about these revisions.

Shrader asked if Interim EVC Button has been asked for input on the restructuring. Interim EVC Button stated when he was asked for input on strategic planning, he suggested looking at the University of Minnesota's system which is a good model for how we could be structured differently. He stated that what he has been pushing for recently is a shared system-wide public process to engage everyone transparently around the conversation about what that could look like for faculty, staff, and students. He stated that members of the Board of Regents should be involved, and we should have a real public process of engagement to develop recommendations that would align our resources and our opportunities in the state, knowing now what our demographic trends and financial trends are which are currently not favorable. He pointed out that this could be extended beyond the university to higher education in the State. He stated that the Governor's office would need to be partners with us, and we would need to do it in a way that's carefully attuned to the unique challenges, culture, and opportunities for all higher education campuses in the state.

2.5 Is funding for graduate students being removed if they do not complete their degree within a set time frame (two years for Masters, 3 years for Ph.D. students). How will this impact those who are graduate teaching assistants?

Interim EVC Button stated that those decisions always depend on the students' progress, their studies, their adequate performance and achieving milestones. VanderPlas stated that the policy was handed down from IANR to Statistics and it's pushing for most graduate students to achieve the goal of graduating within a specific period of time. She noted that IANR is withholding funds from the state if these students are not performing and are not achieving their goal of graduating within a specific timeframe. Interim EVC Button stated that he would need to look into this as colleges might need to allocate their resources differently.

2.6 What is the status of the 8-week sessions within the fall and spring semesters?

Interim EVC Button reported that they are now on the Registrar's website for the 2025-2026 calendar and people can sign up for these sessions. He noted that the first session begins on August 25th and continues until October 17th. The second session begins on October 27th and continues through December 19th. He pointed out that there is a similar set of sessions in the spring semester.

2.7 Can you provide an update on our federal grants that have been suspended?

Interim EVC Button reported that 25 grants have been suspended to date for a total of \$9.35 million. He noted that NIH grants had the highest number with 9 projects being suspended for a total of \$1.2 million and our National Endowment for Humanities scholars have had 7 grants suspended totaling \$839,000. He pointed out that these are funds that have been committed but are now suspended. Tschetter asked if there is ongoing litigation about the suspension of funds from federal agencies. Interim EVC Buttons stated that there are. He reported that he read that some universities have grants

that were suspended or put on hold while an audit is being conducted. He stated that the USAID grant was the largest grant to be suspended with over \$6 million. He noted that the impacts are huge particularly on the people, the staff and researchers and in some cases students.

2.8 What data is being collected that can help us preserve academic programs?

Interim EVC Button stated that there's a lot of data that we collect relative to how we assess academic programs. The data that helps us to assess all academic programs includes what the total number of majors and degrees are awarded over a certain period of time, what the student credit hour production is, and how many degrees are awarded over a five-year period. He stated that we also look at the first-year retention rates for all programs, and we look at efficiency by assessing what the student credit hour is being generated per work for the total FTE that you have in a unit. He noted that we are interested in these measures both as a question of growth over time as well as total demand. He pointed out that as a research university we also look at research performance metrics looking at AAU phase one indicators which includes external grants, books and citation counts, awards, and we also look at what's called the scholarly research index score from Academic Analytics which is an academic analysis and provides a composite measurement that takes every unit and compares it to its peer units. He noted that we do this relative to the AAU public university comparisons, however, he pointed out that data is only one part because there's a broader story about engagement and extension and other things that a unit does that are also important. He stated that the APC standards for reviewing academic programs in the case of significant budget reductions list a whole set of things that he thinks is very comprehensive and that he uses all the time. These include if the program is unique and the only one of its kind in Nebraska, is it the only PhD program granting institution in the state, does it meet an important unique workforce demand. He pointed out that all these questions matter and they're not all easily defined by metrics but they are important contextual information that we also utilize to think about the review of academic programs so while the question was about that, he also wants to point out that he is very committed to having data informed decisions because it's never going to be just data-driven because there are always so much more that has to be understood about all our academic areas.

2.9 Faculty see redundancy across the university system. In an evolving new scenario, perhaps there is one dean that oversees the college of arts and sciences for all three campuses, would there be elimination of some of this redundancy?

Interim EVC Button stated that there are redundancies but asked how the approach could be balanced with the unique aspect of each campus recognizing that we face resource challenges. He pointed out that he has been pushing this idea for some time now and he believes others have been pushing this as well. He encouraged the Faculty Senate to use its voice to express the need for elimination of redundancy.

Interim EVC Button stated that the Faculty Senate collective voice is very important, and utilizing this is really key with the system office and with the Board of Regents. He noted that if the Faculty Senate wants to engage with other Big Ten universities to

address things like the threats to our research mission, a coordinated effort could be made, and we could get a better approach on how to communicate the universities' concerns.

3.0 Announcements

Griffin reported that Director Barbara Woodhead, Services for Students with Disabilities, would be meeting with the Executive Committee next week to discuss having expanded hours of the SSD office to accommodate students who need additional time for taking exams.

4.0 Approval of Minutes

Eklund asked if there were any further revisions to the April 8th minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Baesu moved and VanderPlas seconded, approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

Eklund asked if there were any further revisions to the April 15th minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Tschetter moved and Vakilzadian seconded, approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Follow-up on Faculty Senate Resolutions

The Executive Committee discussed the various responses received after the two resolutions supporting higher education and requesting a mutual compact of the Big Ten universities was approved by the Faculty Senate. Eklund stated that he received numerous emails about the resolutions. Shrader noted that he received many emails supporting the Senate's action. Griffin said the same and noted that she even heard from a few retired professors who were proud of the Senate for standing up in support of the university and higher education. Tschetter noted that there were various news articles about the Big Ten universities' efforts to create a mutual compact in defense of higher education and it was discussed on the Rachel Maddow Show three nights in a row.

Eklund stated that the administration is concerned that the attention to the resolutions could put a target on our backs which is particularly concerning during this time of budget negotiations. Bearnese reported that as an Extension Educator she has received many phone calls from people in her area of the state and from the Nebraska Cooperative Extension Association, most of which were negative comments about the resolutions. She stated that many Extension employees have done a lot of work speaking with state legislators about the value of the university to the state.

5.2 Executive Committee Membership

Eklund asked who will be leaving the Executive Committee. Griffin reported that Past President Kopocis will be leaving the Executive Committee but will remain on the Faculty Senate. She noted that Secretary Boudreau's term is ending, and she is stepping down from the Senate. She stated that Bouma and Lott's terms are ending. She pointed out that elections for new Executive Committee members, the President-Elect and Secretary will occur at the May 6th meeting.

Griffin noted that the Executive Committee has a meeting scheduled for May 13th but after that we will go to the summer schedule when the Committee meets only every other week.

5.0 New Business

No new business was discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in the Nebraska Union, Big Ten Conference Room. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.