

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES
April 1, 2025
Presidents Pete Eklund, John Shrader, and Kelli Kopocis, Presiding

1.0 Call to Order

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

2.0 Announcements

2.1 Senators Whose Terms are Ending on the Faculty Senate

President Eklund stated that the following Senators' terms are ending on the Faculty Senate: Steven Hardy, College of Architecture; Sonya Turkman, College of Architecture; Clay Cressler, School of Biological Sciences; David Harwood, Earth & Atmospheric Sciences; Erica Shauer, Modern Languages & Literature; Kevin Smith, Political Science; Federico Zencenko, Finance; Elina Ibrayeva, Management; Justin Olmanson, Teaching, Learning & Teacher Education; Zhigang Shen, Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction; David Dunigan Plant Pathology; Joe Dauer, School of Natural Resources; Tsegaye Tadese School of Natural Resources; David Steffen, School of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences; Ed Harris, Biochemistry.

President Eklund reported that the following Senators have been re-elected: Pascha Stevenson, English; Xavier Perez Gimenez, Mathematics; Aaron PeekMease, Sociology; Sunil Singh, Marketing; Megan Paul, Center for Children, Families and The Law; Kelli Kopocis, Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction; David Lott, Nebraska Extension, Engagement Zone 3.

2.2 Faculty Senate Executive Committee Elections

President Eklund reminded the Faculty Senate that Senators were needed to run for election to the Executive Committee. He stated that those interested should contact either himself or Coordinator Griffin.

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett noted that these are challenging times for higher education, but he believes we have the ability to distinguish ourselves. He stated that the administration is working every day to keep aware of the changes being made by the federal government and how they are impacting the work we do at the university which impacts the state. He pointed out that work and innovation are critical to our flagship campus designation.

Chancellor Bennett reported that we are continuing to figure out how to support all the members of our community because every interaction and every person matters. He stated that it was very troubling to learn of the recent assault to one of our students which will be classified as a hate crime as it was motivated bias against the LGBTQA+ community. He pointed out that parents send their children here thinking they are safe, and we need to ensure everyone's safety on our campus.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he has been working every day with members of the unicameral discussing the university budget and how devastating it would be if the university received a 2.5% budget reduction. He reported that some progress has been made to reduce or eliminate the reduction, but he noted that we are not where we need to be to maintain our forward progress. He pointed out that UNL is still working with a structural deficit which has existed for several years, and we will need to continue to look at our budget between now and the fall semester to address the deficit.

Chancellor Bennett reported that on Saturday, March 29th, we hosted 3,440 students and their guests for

Admitted Student Day, and 22 Presidential Scholars attended a breakfast that morning. He stated that he is cautiously optimistic about enrollment and reminded faculty that anything they can do to help with recruitment of undergraduate, graduate, and transfer students would help us and our budget.

Chancellor Bennett reported that the College of Law will hold its commencement on May 3rd, the graduate commencement ceremony will be held on May 16th and the undergraduate commencement ceremony will be held on May 17th in the Pinnacle Bank Arena. He stated that he thinks we are in good stead with the number of Marshals that are needed but to please let him know if more are needed and he will work with Interim EVC Button to find more people willing to serve as a Marshal.

Chancellor Bennett introduced VC Zeleny to discuss the budget. VC Zeleny noted that the Chancellor sent out a message recently regarding the \$5 million budget reduction that will be made during this fiscal year to address the structural deficit. He stated that phase two of the reduction will need to be considered over the summer. He pointed out that the loss of F&A funds due to the regulations coming from the federal government will have a significant impact on our budget.

Chancellor Bennett asked the Associate to the Chancellor Pearce of Institutional Equity and Compliance (IEC) to speak. AC Pearce reported that the IEC is our civil rights office at UNL, and a major part of the office's responsibility is to enforce non-discrimination policy. He noted that this is an interesting time in terms of civil rights compliance. He pointed out that we have federal executive orders issued, although many of these orders are being heard in the courts so things are continually fluctuating. He reported that the IEC's focus is to stick to our fundamentals noting that we do not discriminate under Title 6, and state law. He noted that the Dear Colleague Letter suggests that diversity, equity and inclusion policies run afoul of Title 6, and he stated that we will look in good faith to see if anyone is doing anything that might raise compliance issues that might run afoul of state and federal law. He stated that the IEC is to consult with the leadership as needed if there are activities that there might be concerns about.

Chancellor Bennett noted that students have high levels of anxiety about what all these changes and regulations mean to them. He asked the Senators to help students understand that the university is looking to help them, and we will work to the best of our ability to effectively answer questions they may have with the knowledge that we currently have about the regulations. AC Pearce stated that IEC is working on providing some training for the faculty, staff, and students about Title 6, and he encourages anyone to reach out to his office to get information about things that would impact civil rights. He encouraged anyone who experience discrimination or harassment to report it to the IEC. He noted that resources are available, and the office very much wants to support and help those who seek help.

Chancellor Bennett stated that the university has started to look at our communication strategies and to tailor our messages for the different audiences. He stated that students might need some different information than faculty and staff and their goal is to not send messages out late at night. He reported that the administration is willing to change the frequency and messaging of the communications based on the needs.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he continues to be vocal on promotion and tenure, and academic freedom, and noted that our focus and commitment to the student experience is important. He asked VC Anderson to speak about the work of the Office of Student Life.

VC Anderson reported that the Office of Student Life has a very robust portfolio of services for students. She pointed out that the Office is engaged with activities outside of the classroom that will help the students to be successful. She stated that ASUN elections are currently taking place and noted that this is the first time in several years that there has been a contested election. She reported that the Associate Vice Chancellor position has just recently been filled by TJ McDowell, and he will be the go-to person for students. She pointed out that the faculty and staff can also reach out to him if they should have any questions.

VC Anderson noted that this is an incredibly stressful time for students and faculty can help by making

students aware of several services for students: Center for Advocacy, Response & Education, CAPS, and Student Legal Services to name a few. She stated that a list of these services can be found at <https://studentlife.unl.edu/get-help/>. She reported that there has been an increase in these services and the three main concerns for students are mental health, academic issues, and physical health.

VC Davis reported that he is working on strategic planning noting that messages have come out from President Gold regarding the strategic planning for the university system and he hopes that people have taken advantage of the opportunity to provide input on the system strategic plan. He stated that he believes there will be a lot more opportunities at the campus level to provide input. He noted that everyone is well aware that the N2025 strategic plan is coming to an end, and a review is being made to see what progress we have made with the aims in the plan, and what has worked for us. Chancellor Bennett stated that if anyone sees areas where we are underperforming, or if they see areas where there is waste, duplication, and/or fraud to please bring it to the administrations' attention. He noted that the university is a large operation, and we need everyone pulling in the same direction to continue our forward progress.

Professor Leiter, College of Law, asked if anyone has come up with a strategy to ensure that our foreign students, or people on different kinds of visas, are safe and have available resources to help them if needed. Chancellor Bennett noted that the Senate Executive Committee has been asking this question repeatedly and reported that General Counsel is working on it and the answer he has received is that they are trying to figure out the university's strategy. AC Pearce wanted to remind everyone that the International Student and Scholar Office is at the forefront of guiding our students through this challenging time and the office has great resources available.

President-Elect Shrader noted that there is a great opportunity for the Chancellor and the administration to reiterate our free speech rights on this campus. He stated that it would be helpful to the campus community to know that the Chancellor has their back, and noted that the faculty has his back as well. Chancellor Bennett noted that several people in the room attended the recent meetings that President Gold had to learn what was happening on campus. He stated that there is the system response, but he believes that the UNL community wants to hear from their Chancellor, and only those people who are in charge, the President, Chancellor, and Deans can deliver the kind of message Professor Shrader is speaking of.

Professor Barrett, Psychology, asked if the university is keeping records on all the things that are being impacted by the federal mandates coming from Washington DC. He pointed out that this information is important to show how the university has been impacted. Chancellor Bennett reported that he believes Interim Vice Chancellor Nelson and the staff of the Office of Research and Innovation have been keeping track of the impacts, but he will convey this message to her.

Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film, noted that for UNL to move forward we need to hire the very best to teach, but under the current federal administration and the policies that are being put forth, potential international faculty members are pulling their applications because they do not think they will be safe here. He stated that this harms our students and asked if we can give them any assurance, so we can hire the best candidates. Chancellor Bennett stated that other universities are grappling with these same issues, and he is working on these fundamental questions every day.

Professor Lott, Nebraska Extension, stated that in the meeting with President Gold last Monday he raised the question of how we are going to retain and recruit good faculty given the current budget situation of the university. Chancellor Bennett stated that he thinks the greater threat to us is with the unresolved issues around the structure of the university, pointing out that the funding model is based on the structure. He stated that UNL, as the land-grant and flagship campus of the University system, needs to advocate for itself so that it is funded appropriately. President-Elect Shrader stated that the faculty would demand to be part of the process of restructuring the university system. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that the process of restructuring is already underway and moving rapidly. He noted that it is going to be important to know what questions to ask and to follow those questions through to the end. He stated that if you aren't asking the questions then you are behind in the process. He stated that there is no better

place for the questions to be raised than the Faculty Senate and pointed out that the Faculty Senate carries much more weight than other bodies.

4.0 Approval of March 4, 2025 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the March 4, 2025, minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Tschetter, History moved for approval. Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics, seconded the motion which was then approved by the Faculty Senate.

5.0 Committees

5.1 Information Technologies and Services Committee (Professor Wetzel)

Professor Wetzel, Chair of the ITSC, reported that the Committee meets monthly and noted that the report was distributed to the Senators prior to the meeting. He stated that the university is actively exploring AI research, instruction, and administration and there is a taskforce addressing policy implications. He stated that efforts to improve IT security training completion are ongoing and currently around 60% of employees have received training. He stated that a major transition to unify cloud accounts under a single Microsoft 365 tenant is underway. He noted that this transition will make sharing and collaborating easier, but the process is rolling out slowly. He stated that data classification for research continues to evolve. He reported that there is a proposal to increase student technology fees, but pointed out that this would need to be approved by ASUN. He noted that the last increase was in 2016.

Professor Wetzel stated that there is uncertainty about the renewal of Adobe Creative Cloud subscription due to unclear usage data. He noted that ASUN appears to have opposition to the renewal of it. Secretary Boudreau reported that there was a question in chat about what committee will decide whether faculty will have access to the full Adobe Creative Cloud. Professor Wetzel stated that ITSC provides recommendations, and he believes the funding comes from the Business and Finance office. Professor Stevenson, English, asked if Title 2 compliance is being taken into consideration with the idea of not renewing the Adobe Creative Cloud subscription. She pointed out that she deals with a lot of scanned documents converting them into PDFs and is not sure how she would be able to do this without Adobe. Professor Kolbe stated that students in his department heavily use Adobe Creative Cloud and President-Elect Shrader noted that losing Adobe would tremendously impact Journalism students. Professor Wetzel noted that the decision would be campus-wide, but departments or colleges could purchase a license for it. He stated that he would bring these concerns up to the ITSC.

Professor Wetzel pointed out that there is growing disparity between the technology in departmental classrooms and general-purpose classrooms with outdated technology in department classrooms not following a regular refresh schedule. He noted that ITS does regular updating in the general-purpose classrooms.

6.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Proposed Revisions to Faculty Senate Class Attendance Policy

President Eklund reported that the EVC office contacted the Executive Committee to discuss revisions to the class attendance policy and the proposed revisions are a result of the discussion. He noted that the motion was coming from the Executive Committee and therefore does not need a second.

Professor Peterson stated that he has concerns about some of the proposed revisions. He reported that he has a colleague that had a situation with a student who told him two days before an exam that she was going to miss the exam due to having to go to National Guard duty. The Professor reminded her that he does not provide make-up exams, but he does drop the lowest score of three exams, and she could drop the exam score for the one she was missing. Professor Peterson pointed out that there was no discrimination toward the student at all, and the Professor claimed that the Director of Military/Veteran Success Center told him that he would be sorry for not providing a make-up exam. Shortly thereafter, a Title IX investigation was filed against the Professor, but it was later dropped.

Professor Peterson stated that the language in section 2C sounds different from the tone of the policy. He noted that the language states that the professor does not control the absences of certain situations which could create difficulties for the instructor to provide different accommodations. He noted that the proposed language leaves little room for the faculty members to contest the situation. He said that in the end the instructor was forced to give a make-up exam. President-Elect Shrader asked who forced the instructor to provide the make-up exam. Professor Peterson stated that it was the IEC office.

Professor Meikeljohn, School of Biological Sciences, reported that he had a similar situation. He noted that the instructor ultimately should have the right to say how much time a student can miss classes. He stated that the 20% of classes listed in the current policy seems arbitrary, pointing out that certain classes and labs require the student to be there. He stated that the proposed language restricts faculty in a way that he would not support, and the proposed revisions seem very problematic to him. He pointed out that the Registrar's Office appeals process states that the student first speaks with the instructor and then goes to the department chair if there is a problem, but the proposed revisions states that the student go directly to the department chair first.

Professor Peterson stated that allowing 20% of classes to be missed came from the need for student athletes and some members of student organizations to miss classes due to traveling schedules. He stated that he thinks 20% of missed classes is too much. He noted that the university needs to remind students that while we are a great university and there are many wonderful things you can participate in, you are still expected to attend classes and take exams.

President-Elect Shrader reported that the revisions were clearly driven by those that want to make sure military service is respected. He noted that Athletics is very well organized and communications for student-athlete absences are done well. He stated that the Executive Committee asked the Director of Military/Veteran Success Center whether there could be better communication about when military students may need to be absent from a class, but no assurances were given, due to the limited staff in the Center. He pointed out that it is then up to the student to communicate with the faculty members when they are absent from class, but this does not always happen. He noted that we are trying to revise the policy, so it is fair to everybody.

Professor McElravy, Agricultural Communications and Education, stated that as long as a faculty member is operating within the required rule, it has long been the rule that the faculty member ultimately has the final say of how many classes a student can miss. He noted that when he was a student one of the reasons to be excused from jury duty was if you were a student and this is still listed on the jury duty notification form, so he is unclear why jury duty is highlighted in the policy.

Professor Menon, Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education, noted that in the syllabus policy it states that students needing to observe religious holidays during the semester need to notify the instructor by the second week of the semester that they will be missing class on the religious holiday. She pointed out that this rarely happens, and a student often takes an extended weekend for religious observance. She asked if there are any suggestions on how to better handle absences. Professor Kolbe said that he states in his syllabus that students can have two unexcused absences for no particular reason, and they do not need to tell him why and he encourages the students to not use these absences early in the semester unless really necessary. He stated that it is ultimately up to the faculty member as to how many absences a student can have to be successful in a course. He pointed out that in his courses, different topics are covered quickly throughout the entire semester.

A comment from chat questioned whether faculty and staff are excused for religious holidays. Also, it was pointed out that some religious holidays are based on a lunar calendar so the date of the holiday may not be known at the start of the semester.

Past President Kopocis reported that she knew of several students in the National Guard, and they were in a class where the unit exams were scheduled on a Friday afternoon which impacted their Guard

requirements. She stated that the students had to drop the course because the professor did not allow make-up exams. She noted that we want to make sure that we are sensitive to students that may have other requirements outside of classes, such as military duty. She pointed out that we want to be supportive of these students because it is important to our government and our country as a whole that they be able to continue to serve.

7.2 Resolution Defending Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom, and the Rule of Law in Response to the Department of Education's February 14, 2025 "Dear Colleague Letter" (Professor Rumann)

Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, presented the resolution noting that the heart of the resolution was to defend academic freedom pointing out that it the responsibility of the Faculty Senate to protect it. The motion was seconded by Professor PeeksMease. President Eklund asked if there was debate on the resolution.

Professor Powers, Chemistry, stated that he believed the resolution was an over reaction and complete misrepresentation of the Dear Colleague Letter. He pointed out that academic freedom should not be an excuse to enable racism. He believes that the resolution raising concern about discrimination puts the Faculty Senate in an abhorrent position. He requested that a confidential electronic ballot be initiated when the motion is voted on at the May meeting.

President-Elect Shrader asked Professor Rumann if he considers the resolution to be an alternative to racism. Professor Rumann stated absolutely not. He pointed out that there is intimidation and threats to federal funding and there are faculty members who are much more vulnerable because of the subjects they teach. Professor Powers stated that the letter reaffirms preventing racial discrimination at the university level.

Professor Gorman called a point of order. He stated that two members of the Senate cannot debate each other on a motion. They can only speak to the chair. He suggested that everyone read the motion prior to the May 6th meeting.

7.3 Resolution to Establish a Mutual Defense Compact for the Universities of the Big Ten Academic Alliance in Defense of Academic Freedom, Institutional Integrity, and the Research Enterprise (Professor PeeksMease)

Professor PeeksMease presented the motion and called for it to be an emergency motion. Professor VanderPlas seconded the motion. The Faculty Senate voted in favor by a two-thirds majority to declare the resolution as an emergency motion.

Professor PeeksMease stated that the Faculty Senate of Rutgers University has passed a resolution calling for their President to lead the charge to put together a Mutual Defense Compact for the universities of the Big Ten. He stated that the motion he is presenting supports Rutgers' resolutions and urges President Gold to fully support the Mutual Defense Compact.

Professor Harris, Biochemistry, asked if the resolution calls for the universities of the Big Ten to donate services instead of providing funding since our campus, and others are facing budget deficits. Professor PeeksMease stated that the Rutgers resolution says that universities can provide legal counsel. He stated that the idea is that an attack against one of the Big Ten universities, is an attack against all of us and that we would be stronger together if we had a compact.

Professor Harris, Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences, noted that there is a lot of open language in the motion, and he has questions as to who would be in charge of the fund and how much would go to each university. He stated that the motion is difficult to support unless these things are defined. Professor PeeksMease agreed that having more concrete details would allow people to make their decision. He stated that how the fund would be managed would be determined by the Presidents of the universities. He noted that our resolution would support the Rutgers' resolution and would encourage President Gold to join the compact in good faith to create a united front. He pointed out that many people feel that higher

education is under attack by the federal administration. President-Elect Shrader questioned what the biggest downside would be if the resolution was approved.

President Eklund stated that the Faculty Senate leaders of the Big Ten were writing a statement to support higher education, although he noted that it has been taking some time to get 18 faculty leaders to agree to the language. He stated that he believes we must do something to support higher education.

Professor Leiter stated that although the language is broad, he generally supports it because we need our academic leaders to do something to show support for our university and this document is well worded and encourages the administration to do something meaningful. Professor Spangler, Animal Science, stated that the emergency motion nature of the motion precludes Senators from consulting with their colleagues in their department. Professor Schauer, Modern Languages & Literature, noted that we do not want to get hung up on word smithing. She pointed out that this is a statement that identifies an outcome that the Senate would like to see and shows solidarity with our peers in the Big Ten. She supports the resolution and said that it is of an emergency nature because timing is of the essence given what has been occurring across the country.

Professor Bourke, School of Computing, called the question. Motion seconded by Professor Peterson.

The Faculty Senate approved the resolution with a majority in favor of the resolution.

7.4 Open Mic

Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee (Professor Lewis)

Professor Lewis, Chair of the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee (ARRC), wanted to provide information on the Committee and what it does. She noted that the UNL Bylaws state that “All professional staff (including administrators and faculty members) of the University of Nebraska are entitled to enjoy and to exercise, without penalty, all the rights of an American citizen and the rights of academic freedom as specified in Regents Bylaws 4.2. It is essential to the University that all administrators and professional staff exercise these rights and respect their exercise by others and uphold the attendant responsibilities outlined in Regents Bylaws 4.1”.

Professor Lewis reported that the [ARRC](#) is a faculty-led body established by the Faculty Senate and the structure of it is described in the [UNL Bylaws](#) and was approved by the Board of Regents. She stated that the ARRC has both informational and quasi-judicial responsibilities to ensure that faculty and administrators understand their rights and responsibilities and professional relationship procedures. She noted that the ARRC oversees the process of fielding specific issues that arise concerning faculty members’ workplace and employment. She stated that the ARRC also organizes the special hearing committees, which investigates complaints that the ARRC feels warrant further investigation. She stated that the special hearing committees are made up of members of the Academic Rights & Responsibilities Panel.

Professor Lewis noted that ARRC is working on a comprehensive reference brochure that describes the different categories of complaints. The complaint categories are: Special Academic Freedom & Tenure – A; Special Academic Freedom & Tenure – B; Grievance; and Professional Conduct. She pointed out that the ARRC does not become involved if there is a criminal act involved in a case. She reported that another resource for faculty members would be the [Ombuds Office](#) which is a resource for faculty seeking to resolve difficulties within a unit that would interfere with their work. She stated that a list of faculty resources can be found on the EVC website.

Professor Lewis stated that if a faculty member has any questions, they can contact her or Professor Peterson who is a long-standing member of the ARRC. She reported that when the brochures are ready, they will be made available to the faculty.

LB551 and LB552

Professor Harris asked if there was any news about LB551 and LB552. President Eklund stated that

neither bill came out of committee, and they appeared to have died in the process for this year.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at 2:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union, Platte River Room, and via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.