

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Bearnes, Eklund, Gorman, Lewis, Pierobon, Reimer, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas

Absent: Baesu, Gruverman, Leiter

Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2025

Location: 201 Canfield Administration

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 (*Shrader*)

Shrader called the meeting to order 2:44 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett

Shrader made the following remarks: “good afternoon and thanks as always to the chancellor for hosting our executive committee meetings and to answer our questions. Before we start, I have a couple things to say. I’m not speaking here for the entire committee – and I am speaking on the record here.

I remain deeply concerned about not only the massive amount of money that is being cut from our budget but about the truncated timeline. We have known for years that these issues needed to be addressed, and now we’re conducting this process on a timeline of months, and not years. I – and any and all members of this group – reserve the right to speak out when the time comes and the right to speak out in representation of our fellow members of this community, including faculty, staff, extension faculty and staff.

We should not be adversarial **but let’s be frank**, the great majority of the cuts and alterations to programs will be borne by faculty and staff. And let’s not forget about the students. The welfare of our students is paramount. And we will get responses, reactions, critical remarks, questions coming from the **external communities**. In no way should any of our present or future remarks be intended personally, but we will represent. And will do so **earnestly and aggressively**.”

Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes Shrader’s comments are important and valuable, and these kinds of comments should always be entered into the record. He noted that these are very difficult times we are facing, and he is working to be respectful and collegial with the campus community and has struggled with how we can navigate through these budget reductions. He stated that a longer timeline for dealing with the reductions would be more helpful, but it is important that we proceed with the timeline that has been publicly announced.

2.1. What are the plans for a permanent replacement for the Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance position, now that SVP Anne Barnes has been named Interim VC of Business and Finance?

Chancellor Bennett reported that he is looking forward to working with SVP Barnes as she serves as the Interim Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance. He stated that she is a very dedicated worker and has significant experience as a CFO, which will help us with the \$27.5 million budget reduction that we must address this fall. In the spring, the administration will determine the right timeline to permanently fill the position.

VanderPlas asked if SVP Barnes is essentially doing three jobs, since she is still the Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance at UNMC in addition to being SVP at the system level. Chancellor Bennett confirmed this and noted she will have assistance from units at UNMC and the system.

Shrader asked if the position of Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance at UNL could eventually become a combination position with the SVP at the system level. Chancellor Bennett said he thinks UNL will need its own person since it is the largest campus, but that this will have to be decided by the President and Board of Regents. Shrader then asked when this would be considered, and Bennett responded that the decision of the HLC on their joint accreditation could influence the timeline.

Shrader also asked if the application for joint accreditation had to be revised, and Chancellor Bennett confirmed that he believed it was happening now, though he did not know why he was not included in the process.

2.2. What motivated the BoR bylaw changes allowing PoPs on contracts funded externally to be dismissed with 90 days' notice?

Chancellor Bennett stated that he was not informed why this change was being made. Shrader pointed out that at the same time, there was a proposed revision to Bylaw 4.3 specifying that only university service would account for a faculty member's service apportionment and noted that creative activity was not included in the list of apportionment. He stated that he received no response when he questioned Interim Provost Jackson about these changes.

Shrader asked if the Chancellor felt that creative activity should be considered in faculty evaluations. Chancellor Bennett stated that creative activity should "definitely" be considered.

2.3. How have you personally been active in the budget cut process? What leadership have you taken on, and what have you delegated to others?

Chancellor Bennett stated that he has been deeply involved in the process. He had to approve the budget reduction plan presented to the APC, and he briefed the Board of Regents Academic Affairs and Business Affairs committees on the approach UNL was taking to address the structural budget deficit. He asked Interim EVC Button and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) to develop the framework and metrics for the proposed budget reductions. Shrader asked if this was the same plan given to APC, and Chancellor Bennett confirmed that it was.

Eklund stated that during previous budget reductions, the APC had more time, and the administration had listened to their recommendations. Chancellor Bennett replied that the Board of Regents wants to act on the reductions at the December meeting, so UNL must proceed with the announced timeline. He noted that the vertical cuts are strategically based on metrics identified by the ELT and that a "strong argument" would be needed to change the proposed reductions.

Lewis asked what would happen with the proposed budget reduction plan if some of the funding sources came from external entities. Bennett gave the example of trying to fund remissions through alternative sources, such as their capital campaign. Lewis asked if some remissions were unfunded mandates from the Legislature, and Bennett answered yes.

Eklund asked if the 5% tuition increase was immediate and if the revenue from it was included in the budget reduction. Bennett answered yes to both questions.

VanderPlas asked if the metrics would be made public, and VC Davis replied that the plan and information on the metrics would be available, but some of the data is proprietary. Shrader asked if the metrics were based on where they currently are or where they want to be, and Bennett said it was "a little bit of both". Shrader questioned if people would be eliminated based on metrics of where the university would like to be rather than on their job performance.

VanderPlas asked where the funds for reinvestment would come from and whether the fact that faculty are teaching more, which negatively impacts their research, would be considered. Bennett replied that it would be taken into consideration, and that while they don't have a significant amount to reinvest now, he hopes that will change in the future.

2.4. What are your plans to boost morale on campus among faculty and staff, in ways that don't necessarily require a monetary outlay?

Chancellor Bennett stated that he is very interested in people's morale. He noted that the Staff Senate submitted a report with suggestions from town hall meetings, and some of those suggestions are going to be considered. He said that he is doing everything he can to make improvements. He feels good about the hard work of the Executive Leadership Team and how Professor Cressler is leading the APC. Bennett stated that the budget reduction process has been "very thoughtful" and not "reckless."

3.0 Proposal to Allow Faculty Members to Respond to Vicious Comments on Student Evaluations (AVC Goodburn, AVC Marks, AVC Pearce)

AVC Marks noted that this issue was brought to his attention earlier this year and pointed out that we do not have a mechanism for allowing faculty members to request that comments be removed from student course evaluations. He thought that it would need to be a faculty driven effort to develop such a mechanism and that the Faculty Senate would be the correct body to consider this.

AVC Pearce noted that if a professor receives student evaluations that included inappropriate comments that are discriminatory or harassment, they should contact the Institutional Equity and Compliance (IEC) office noting that we have an institutional responsibility to respond to these kinds of comments. He stated that IEC is a resource that faculty, chairs, and deans should be aware of, and stated that if there is speech in a course evaluation that is discriminatory, it is in the scope of the IEC's policy to investigate these comments, and they could possibly be stricken from the evaluation. He noted that contacting the office would be a good, safe approach and the IEC has a process in place to make these kinds of determinations.

Shrader asked what kind of comments would not fall under the IEC's jurisdiction. AVC Pearce stated that false allegations of misconduct would need to go to the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee. He noted that the IEC does not deal with threats, the UNL Police and Threat Assessment Team should be notified if threats are made. AVC Marks reported that sometimes student concerns about faculty behavior arise outside of course evaluations and follow the same pathways. However, if any comments from course evaluations do not fall under the IEC's area of responsibility, Faculty Senate could consider whether a committee should respond to requests to have them removed. He pointed out that Penn State and the University of Oregon both have protocols in place for dealing with discriminatory, obscene, or demeaning comments on course evaluations.

Tschetter stated that unless comments are egregious and they fall under the IEC's purview or the campus police, she does not think we should start policing the evaluations. Gorman stated that we do not want the departments removed from the process and he thinks it is best to keep the student evaluation issue in the departments. He noted that department chairs do not send highly negative evaluations out to other colleges or universities. VanderPlas pointed out that you cannot assume that chairs are willing to police the evaluations. Shrader questioned what would happen if a student's anonymity is jeopardized.

Lewis stated that there are some things that are clearly inappropriate, and she believes it is legitimate to think about the request for a mechanism to deal with inappropriate comments on course evaluations. She noted that people do not have to use the mechanism, but she thinks it is problematic that we don't have a process. She pointed out that research shows that it is women and people of under-represented groups who get the most negative feedback.

AVC Pearce reported that the IEC does sit on the Threat Assessment Committee and if the student is not known, the Police can do security planning. He pointed out that he has concerns about the disciplinary aspect of the proposal and AVC Marks agreed, stating that he does not like the idea of sanctioning students in response to their course evaluations.

Eklund asked if the department or faculty member can present a rebuttal with an explanation if there are egregious comments on an evaluation. AVC Goodburn and Groman stated that this can be done.

Pearce stated that he wants people to know that IEC is there to help when people are experiencing discrimination and they should contact the office. AVC Marks pointed out that on every UNL website there is the report UNL Report link and every report that comes in is dealt with. Faculty and staff can also use that if they experience problems.

4.0 Announcements

4.1 Comments from the Faculty Senate President

Shrader reported that he has been receiving phone calls from the media about the proposed Cornhusker Clink, particularly in regard to the legal use of the word Cornhusker.

4.2 June and Paul Schorr III Center for the School of Computing Moving

Pierobon stated that he was recently told that the Schorr Center would be moving next month as Athletics wants to tear down the building which is on the south side of the stadium.

5.0 Approval of August 5, 2025 Minutes

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

6.0 Unfinished Business

6.0 Proposal to Revise the Faculty Senate Syllabus Policy

Agenda item postponed due to lack of time.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Faculty Senate Executive Committee Summer Report

The Executive Committee reviewed the summer report which will be presented to the Faculty Senate at the September 2nd meeting.

7.2 Faculty Senate Meeting – September 2

The Executive Committee reviewed the agenda for the September 2nd meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:01 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.