

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent: Baesu, Leiter

Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2025

Location: Nebraska Union, Big Ten Conference 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*)

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

2.0 Interim EVC Button/Interim VC Heng-Moss

2.1 What action(s) have you taken in response to the Chancellor's memo on DEI? How are you identifying non-compliant websites?

Interim EVC Button noted that the same day the message came out from Chancellor Bennett requiring deans to "review their programs, initiatives, job titles, signage, and websites for language that is likely to subject the university to further scrutiny or claims of discriminatory treatment" he was able to meet with most of the deans to discuss what actions we should take while balancing our commitment to academic freedom and ensuring that we have a safe campus for everyone. He stated that some things, such as websites and titles, could easily be dealt with, but things such as strategic plans and statements of value need faculty input and he asked the deans to not take any action on these things until the faculty are back on campus.

Interim EVC Button reported that General Counsel, University Communications and the Marketing Team have been helpful in identifying things that we need to rebrand and how we could do this in a more comprehensive way to show support to students, faculty, and staff. He stated that every college and office has been very cooperative in this effort. Interim VC Heng-Moss noted that we are doing our due diligence and pointed out that if you do a Google search you find webpages that are no longer active and need to be archived.

Shrader stated that UNL has not been in violation of any law or policy because we do not discriminate and some people have read into things, simply because it contains words like diversity, equity or inclusion. Interim EVC Button stated that some peoples' perception if they see the key words is that they must be a program that is discriminatory, but the university should be proud because we have actually been doing work to be inclusive, and we would like to continue this valuable work.

Vakilzadian asked if the faculty should remove any of this language from their course syllabi. Interim EVC stated that faculty members need to consider what are the identifiable outcomes for the class and if the concepts are relevant to the course, then they should endure until other guidance is provided. He pointed out that there is no real guidance with course materials and there is the issue of academic freedom and shared governance that needs to be considered so he advises faculty members to not take any action with their curriculum at this time. He stated that the majority of the issue is with public facing websites. Interim VC Heng-Moss suggested that there might be some language in the Senate's syllabus policy that needs to be re-considered. VanderPlas pointed out that Senate syllabus policy mentions diversity and inclusiveness. She questioned whether people are being asked to archive sites. Interim EVC Button reported that departments and colleges are being asked to archive websites that are no longer relevant and units may want to consider having sign-in access to some sites.

2.2 Do you have a clearer timeline for when the budget reduction information will be shared with the APC and with the campus community? Will the reductions be in effect immediately, within a year, or longer?

Interim EVC Button reported that the Academic Planning Committee will be meeting and the proposed framework will be introduced. He stated that the first step was for the Chancellor to Invoke the Procedures for Significant Budget Reallocation and Reductions which he announced in his memo on August 4th, the next step is for the APC to consider and eventually approve the framework, followed by the APC being given the budget reduction plan. He stated that the APC would begin confidential sessions before the end of the month in order to allow the APC to review the recommendations and provide as much time as possible for the public hearings. He noted that the APC needs to complete its work by October 24th in order for the Chancellor to review the Committee's recommendations before the Chancellor's final plan is given to the Academic Affairs and Business and Finance Committees of the Board of Regents in November. He pointed out that the budget reduction plan will be considered by the Board of Regents at the December meeting. He stated that the APC will need to be diligent with the process and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Staff Senate, ASUN, and Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee will need to be engaged.

Interim EVC Button reported that the actual reduction process will take a year, noting that there is commitment to employees and we must follow the Regents Bylaws with regard to contracts and when notification needs to be given to the different types of employees at the university. Shrader asked what would happen if a student started a program in 2025. Interim EVC Button recognized that we have a long commitment to students and stated that a number of considerations will need to be made such as the number of students involved, and what would be the length of time for the students to complete their major in a program.

Shrader noted that confidentiality is vital and asked how confidentiality will be maintained. Interim EVC Button reported that the Executive Leadership Team has been working confidentially for months now. He stated that confidentiality will be stressed to the APC, Staff Senate, and Faculty Senate Executive Committee members.

Eklund asked if there has been any discussion about combining programs or colleges across the university system which could help to reduce costs without the need to eliminate programs and while maintaining UNL as the flagship campus. Interim EVC Button reported that these kinds of discussions have been occurring, but UNL is expected to address its own structural deficit. He noted that the system and each of the other campuses have their own structural deficit. In addition, the State has a decline in tax revenue which has impacted the state appropriations to the university. He noted that he and Interim VC Heng-Moss have been working on the budget deficit in a manner where we can position the university to be strong and a leader in higher education and flexible to be able to go through any future realignment.

Eklund pointed out that the VSIP is being offered again and asked how much those savings could impact our budget deficit. Interim EVC Button stated that it could take care of a considerable part of the budget deficit. Reimer stated that while the VSIP could help with the budget deficit, she questioned how the VSIP faculty members would be replaced for teaching. Interim VC Heng-Moss pointed out that the loss wouldn't just impact the teaching faculty, but also the research faculty as well. She stated that the VSIP request of a faculty member needs to be considered holistically as to what their contributions and impacts are to a department and whether the department can continue meetings its mission with the loss of the faculty member.

Vakilzadian asked when the VSIP would be implemented. Interim EVC Button stated that the VSIP would begin with the next academic year, applications will need to be filled by late September, and the Chancellor would need to accept the application. He stated that once the line becomes available next academic year, some of the funds could be used to temporarily fill some positions. He noted that faculty members who have taken the VSIP cannot be rehired for a full-time position although they could be hired on a temporary basis. He stated that at the end of the VSIP payout, funds are restored to the university and if there should be any available leftover funds, they could be used to fill strategic positions.

VanderPlas noted that in the spring there was mention of a possible VSIP, but it was thought that there would not be support for it. Has that changed? Interim EVC Button stated that there is a lot more agreement from the Board of Regents and from President Gold to use the VSIP tool to help with the budget deficit on each of the campuses.

2.3 Faculty are hearing about reducing costs in administration. Is that possible reorganization or potentially eliminating jobs? Is there consideration of consolidating or merging programs, units and colleges or schools? Will the budget proposal alter the workload, primarily teaching and research, of current faculty and future faculty? If so, how would that be implemented?

Interim EVC Button pointed out that absolutely everything has to be on the table to address the budget deficit we are facing. He noted that UNL has already reduced \$75 million from its budget since 2020 so administrative reductions, mergers and eliminations could be made. Shrader asked if it is a fair assumption that these considerations would be

occurring at the system level as well and whether there will be adjustments to the workload. Interim EVC Button reported that there will be a separate process for adjusting apportionment and workload and this is addressed in Regents Bylaws 4.3.

2.4 What is the status of the efforts to get back into the AAU? How is this budget crisis impacting those efforts?

Interim VC Heng-Moss stated that our aspiration is still to regain our AAU membership, and it is an active goal at both the UNL and the system level. She noted that the application to the Higher Learning Commission to have joint accreditation for UNL and UNMC was submitted early this year. She stated that shared research metrics for the two campuses have been reported. She pointed out that while it seems at odds to be pursuing membership into the AAU with the budget challenges we are facing, the AAU criteria for admittance is about commitment to conducting impactful research, a commitment to student success, and a commitment to faculty and staff excellence. She noted that these are all things we are very committed to. She stated these commitments are going to really be important for the future of the flagship land-grant campus and important for the university system, as well as the State of Nebraska. She stated that one of the things we need to continue to elevate is the significant economic contribution the University of Nebraska makes to the State.

Vakilzadian stated that in the past when new hires were made on soft money, they later became tenured positions and were then moved to the state-aided budget. He asked if this model is still in use. Interim EVC Button stated that in some colleges this is still occurring.

Interim EVC Button reported that he has been working with Foundation partners to engage in a faculty hiring initiative which would be funded by private funding. He noted that while he had a 12% decline over the last five years in the number of our faculty, our research productivity level has increased, but if we want to expand our research productivity further, we will need to bring in more faculty members. He pointed out that we are doing well on a variety of Phase 1 AAU indicators. He reported that we are also trying to raise funds to make it possible to leverage our research growth. He noted that there are several factors as to why we have had a decrease in our tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, and research faculty. The decline is not all budget related, noting that it is due to a variety of factors.

2.5 What has crossed your desk in the last few weeks that is important for the Executive Committee or the faculty as a whole to be aware of?

Interim EVC Button reported that over the summer university staff have worked very hard to get our students re-enrolled in classes, and of those that were eligible, over 90% of these undergraduate students are returning to campus, and of the 2024 first-year cohort, over 85% have re-enrolled. He stated that the majority of the holds on students are due to financial reasons with these students typically owing \$200 or more, but our staff have been working with these students to try to help get these holds resolved so that they can continue their academic journey.

Lewis asked if our enrollment has recovered after the Covid pandemic. Interim EVC Button stated that we have recovered, and our student success rate is the highest we have ever had. He noted that our student success rate and research excellence have shown that UNL has been seeing improvements year after year. Shrader asked how this translates to the average Nebraskan about the work we do here at UNL. Interim EVC Button stated that when we talk with Nebraskans, we convey the impact the university has on the state.

Interim VC Heng-Moss pointed out that Nebraska Extension is the university's presence in the 93 counties in the state, and it is now partnering with Enrollment Management and Admissions. She reported that she was just traveling across the state for the Roads Scholar Tour which not only enriches and enhances administrative leaders and faculty members at the university who participate in the tour, it gives them the opportunity to meet people throughout the state and citizens of Nebraska to get to meet and know some of the professors and leaders at the university. She stated that Interim AVC Snowden, ASEM, joined the tour when it was out in the Panhandle, and after visiting there, Interim AVC Snowden made the decision to have a recruiter for that area based in the Panhandle region rather than having the person based in Lincoln and traveling out to the Panhandle twice a month. Interim VC Heng-Moss stated that this is incredibly important because it allows the recruiter, and the people in the Panhandle to get to know each other which in turn leads to a development of trust.

Eklund asked whether our projected enrollment looks positive. Interim EVC Button stated that enrollment continues to look good, and we are still showing a positive increase even with the challenges for graduate students and for international students.

Interim VC Heng-Moss reported that the State of Nebraska is hosting the Secretary of Agriculture, and more than likely the state delegation will be in attendance as well. She noted that Nebraska is the third largest agricultural producer in the country.

Interim VC Heng-Moss noted that USDA has recently made some announcements on changes that the agency is undertaking. These changes align with financial resources and priorities which impact USDA platforms across the state, some of which are here at UNL, and which contribute to our research partnership with USDA. She noted that USDA will be relocated from Washington, D.C. to five different sites. These sites include Kansas City, Indianapolis, Fort Collins, and Salt Lake City.

Vakilzadian asked how our budget deficit has been impacted since faculty and staff did not receive salary increases. Interim AVC Button stated that if salary increases were provided, it would have added an additional \$3 million to our budget deficit.

Interim EVC Button reported that university-wide awards will be announced soon, and he noted that several of the awards will be given to faculty members of UNL.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Title II Compliance

Shrader reported that he has contacted Bren Chambers, Deputy General Counsel, and asked if the Executive Committee could meet with a university attorney who can discuss Title II compliance with us.

Shrader noted that he, Gorman, and VanderPlas met with Director Monk, CTT, to talk about Title II and while it is not CTT's job to implement compliance, some suggestions were made about it. Gorman pointed out that it was a very good conversation and he noted that Director Monk and some of his staff understood the faculty's concern with trying to make all online documents compliant. He stated the CTT mentioned that there was software available that could assist with the Title II compliance issue, but they could not obtain funding for it. He suggested that the Executive Committee could bring a resolution to the Faculty Senate to see if support could be made available to the CTT. He pointed out that the group was assured that compliance will not affect the content of an instructor's classes. He stated that lawyers in the Justice Department do not realize the impact of these regulations on universities.

Shrader reported that the CTT would like the Faculty Senate to consider a clause in the Syllabus Policy that all instructors should include a clause about AI, whether it can be used for the class, and if so, how it can be used in the used.

3.2 Letter representing AAUP chapter and AFIRE

Shrader reported that he received a copy of the email and letter sent to Chancellor Bennett by members of AFIRE, and the local AAUP chapter. He noted that the letter was concerned with the Chancellor's recent message of colleges/departments having to scrub their website for programs or initiatives pertaining to diversity, equity, or inclusion.

3.3 Staff Senate Report

Shrader stated that he received a copy of a report from Past President Jordan Gonzales on staff feedback and ideas on alternative compensation, rewards, and benefits for university employees in lieu of not receiving a salary increase this year. He noted that the comments were made during two Staff Senate Townhalls conducted this summer. He stated that he would share the report with the Executive Committee.

4.0 Approval of June 24, July 8, and July 22, 2025 Minutes

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the June 24, 2025, minutes. Motion to approve the minutes made by Tschetter, seconded by VanderPlas, and approved by the Executive Committee.

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the July 8, 2025, minutes. Motion to approve the minutes made by Reimer, seconded by Vakilzadian, and approved by the Executive Committee.

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the July 22, 2025, minutes. Motion to approve the minutes made by Tschetter, seconded by VanderPlas, and approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Executive Committee Retreat

The Executive Committee finally agreed to meet on Thursday, August 14th to work on developing the committee's goals for 2025-2026.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Faculty Senate Meeting Schedule for 2025-2026

Griffin noted that the university will be reverting to its original academic calendar with the spring semester starting the second week in January. She pointed out that the Faculty Senate Bylaws call for the Senate to meet nine times during the academic year, but this was suspended due to the pandemic and the creation of the January 3-week session. She noted that the January Senate meeting is scheduled during the second week of January and asked if the Senate should once again meet in January or wait until February to meet. The Executive Committee agreed that the Senate should meet in January.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, August 26, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.