

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

**Absent:** Shrader

**Date:** Tuesday, January 21, 2024

**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 (*Eklund*)**

Eklund called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

**2.0 Interim EVC Button**

Interim EVC Button stated that he looks forward to working collaboratively with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and he appreciates the valuable and thoughtful questions the Committee has identified. He also wanted to thank the members of the Executive Committee and the Senate for their service and work that they do for the university.

**2.1 Update on budget including Governor Pillen’s proposal to cut \$14.3 million from the University budget.**

Interim EVC Button, who was speaking on behalf of the Chancellor who was unable to attend the meeting, noted that the Chancellor spoke with the Executive Committee prior to the winter break and at that time Chancellor Bennett talked about the possibility of having another VSIP. Interim EVC Button reported that the Chancellor plans to move forward with the VSIP and the university is working on developing the processes that would be needed to enact it.

Interim EVC Button pointed out that President Gold’s message on January 17<sup>th</sup> provided the most useful update regarding the Governor’s proposed 2.07% budget reduction to the university’s base state-aided core budget. He noted that last year the Regents approved a 3.5% budget increase in state-aided funding which was in alignment with Nebraska’s state and community college systems and in consultation with the Governor’s office. He stated that the university will engage with State Senators to negotiate the university’s budget and in the meantime, it is really important that we get the message out about all of the great work being done at the university and how the university contributes in many ways to the state.

**2.2 What are the plans the President might be making for the “reimagining of our system?”**

Since VC Boehm was unable to attend the meeting due to a schedule conflict, Interim EVC Button stated that he thinks that the reimagining of our system is part of the university-wide strategic planning process pointing out that President Gold outlined the five foundational pillars that will guide the university into becoming an extraordinary university. He stated that the campuses will be asked to build strategic plans as we move forward, and he believes we can play an important role in being part of the strategic planning process.

### **2.3 Who do we thank for the increase in the mileage reimbursement rate?**

Interim EVC Button stated that he will find out what offices were involved to increase the mileage reimbursement rates and will contact the Executive Committee with the information.

### **2.4 How does IANR fit into the President's reimagining of our system?**

Interim EVC Button pointed out that IANR is a critical part of our mission and will be a critical component to any strategic planning process. He noted that there will be a transition period between when VC Boehm returns to the faculty and Dean Heng-Moss assumes the Interim VC of IANR role, but this should be a smooth transition.

### **2.5 What are your priorities as Interim EVC?**

Interim EVC Button stated that we need to reflect on the many leadership changes that have occurred both on campus and across the system and in addition we have budget uncertainties, and now there are changes at the federal level that need to be considered. He pointed out that the university is working very closely with General Counsel given the federal orders that have been issued recently by the President.

Interim EVC Button reported that one of his first priorities is to learn and listen pointing out that he wants to build trust with everyone that he works with on campus. He wants open communication and plans on emphasizing inclusion and transparency. He stated that he plans on getting out and listening to all that he meets. He noted that he has already met with all the college deans and is now arranging leadership teams of faculty and staff so we can see how we can all work together to move the campus forward.

Interim EVC Button stated that we need to build on the excellence of being the R1 flagship campus and we need to continue to tout the great work that we are doing. He pointed out that the UNL faculty and staff have expertise in many areas and are thoughtful leaders who can help lead higher education in Nebraska and beyond. He stated that he wants to engage with the Faculty Senate, and he is looking for productive ideas for positioning the university to greater excellence in the years ahead. He pointed out that this starts with student recruitment, and we need to help our students to be successful here at the university and to prepare them for world leadership. He stated that our net tuition outlook needs to be sustainable, and we need to have a good mix of outstanding in-state, out-state, and international students.

Interim EVC Button reported that our research efforts need to offer competitive support for graduate students, particularly graduate students in the Big Ten. He stated that we

need a robust faculty and staff hiring and recruiting plan as we head into the recruitment season, and we need to consider how we can increase faculty and staff capacity while thinking about operational excellence and efficiency. He reported that he often hears about the problems of the slower administrative processes and pointed out that we need to improve our responsiveness to be a more effective and efficient campus.

Interim EVC Button noted that there is a very large capital campaign in progress, and he is still involved with that. He stated that this is a very important campaign for the long-term health of the university, and he noted that he is pleased to continue being involved in the fundraising for the university as a whole and for the College of Arts and Sciences.

Vakilzadian noted that President Gold announced last semester that there would be an AI taskforce. He asked how this taskforce would be structured. Interim EVC Button reported that there is a taskforce that is looking at AI across the institution and there is curriculum development that is occurring. He noted that UNL is in the process of approving a master's degree in AI and a graduate certificate in AI as well as the development of an undergraduate degree program. He pointed out that AI is rapidly developing and there is a lot of collaboration occurring between the campuses regarding it. Vakilzadian asked if there will be undergraduate and graduate programs and if they will be connected with the other campuses. Interim EVC Button pointed out that there is strong interest to see where it is possible to share resources and to collaborate where we can, but there are challenges when one program is strictly online, and another is in person. He noted that UNL has been teaching AI courses for many years and UNO has an interest in wanting to serve their students as well. He reported that there is a desire to see where we can be more efficient in offering courses and we need to see where there are programs we can collaborate with. Vakilzadian asked if these AI efforts could lead to a separate department and noted that there needs to be discussion between the campuses to make sure creating a department is done correctly because we do not want two separate departments doing the same thing.

Bouma stated that international recruiting of students needs to be improved, pointing out that this would help with our budget because of the tuition international students pay. She reported that UNO and UNK are attending higher level international events to recruit students, but UNL has been absent at these events. Interim EVC Button noted that we are down approximately 1,000 international students, which is more than we expected. He stated that international recruiting efforts are being reviewed, and a Director of International Student Recruiting is being added. He stated that there is great coordination between ASEM, Global Affairs, and the Graduate Studies Office and said that considerable attention is being given to improve our international recruiting efforts. Vakilzadian asked if new policies from the federal government will have an impact on our international recruiting efforts. Interim EVC Button reported that we are anticipating some changes and working to be ready to maintain our aggressive recruiting program while also taking care of our current international students.

Eklund asked if other universities are experiencing the same problems with lower graduate student enrollment and a decrease in international students. Interim EVC

Button stated that this is a challenge for universities across the country. He pointed out that recruiting even undergraduate students in our state is challenging because we are in competition with our peers. He noted that we have not rebounded with our international student enrollment as well as some other institutions. Reimer pointed out that another opportunity for recruiting students, particularly international students, is to ask our current students or alumni to tell their peers about the success they have had here.

## **2.6 Guidelines for compliance of course materials with the new ADA Title II Rule**

Interim EVC Button reported that Teacher Connect had an [announcement](#) and article providing information and resources for making changes to all digital course materials in order to meet the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which must be done by April 24, 2026. He noted that the article has links to the Digital Accessibility Training course available in Bridge as well as UNL's [ADA Title II resource webpage](#). He stated that the Center for Transformative Teaching will be hosting a series of accessibility workshops during the spring semester. He noted that news announcements about the requirement for making these changes were announced in Nebraska Today and Teacher Connect. He pointed out that we have many experts on campus that can provide assistance including the CTT staff and instructional designers.

VanderPlas pointed out that most of the training and information assumes that you are using Microsoft documents but noted that not everyone does. She stated that as a statistician she uses other programs, but she has not been able to find someone who can assist her in changing over the many documents she uses. She asked if additional resources are being made available for those like her that have to change everything, including an entire e-textbook. She pointed out that it is important to make sure there isn't a disincentive for faculty members not to put course information online, otherwise students might have to pay textbook fees again. Interim EVC Button acknowledged that there are challenges for some faculty members and asked VanderPlas to forward her questions to him so he can share them with our experts on campus and stated that he will follow up with her about it.

Vakilzadian stated that he does not think that faculty know about these resources and how they can get help. Interim EVC Button stated that the information will continue to be pushed out through Nebraska Today and Teacher Connect. In addition, all college deans and officers have been notified and provided information.

Eklund asked if graduate assistants can assist in making the necessary changes. Interim EVC Button stated that if they are teaching, they will need to make these changes to their online course materials. Reimer suggested that when onboarding new GTAs there should be a module addressing website accessibility requirements.

## **2.7 Do you feel like you need to monitor the morale of the faculty given the repeated messages of having to deal with another budget deficit?**

Interim EVC Button stated that we need to continue to keep a close eye on how people are doing and where the university can be responsive to assisting people. This can be

accomplished by staying connected and having open lines of communication with the deans and other leaders and being proactive with faculty and staff retention. He noted that having an awareness of the culture, a commitment to academic freedom, and ensuring the faculty and staff know how much they are appreciated are essential.

Interim EVC Button stated that he would like to institute a regular campus climate survey, and he hopes this can be done collaboratively with the Faculty Senate. He pointed out that a lot of our faculty and staff are doing work in spaces that are more challenging given the political environment and culture. He suggested that we need to bring people together to provide support and for us to express our commitment to them. He welcomes ideas on whether this would be helpful to do or if there are other ways to address faculty morale and he welcomes thoughts on what might be most important and impactful.

Eklund reported that there are faculty members who are interested in having the Senate, with the help of the deans, produce their own survey so that we can have access to the data. He stated that any type of forward motion to proceed with this would be wonderful and he believes it would be a good way to get answers to what faculty are feeling and what they find frustrating. In turn, he said the results could allow us to work collaboratively to find solutions to common problems. Interim EVC Button noted that we have great methodologists on campus and there are examples of robust climate surveys from other universities. He stated that he has been looking into funding such a survey and believes together we can devise a good survey. He stated that he would speak with the Chancellor about this, and he would appreciate the Senate's recommendations on how we can move forward with a survey.

VanderPlas stated that in regard to the question of faculty feeling supportive, making faculty feel secure with academic freedom is crucial, pointing out that when the state legislature says things challenging academic freedom or tenure, it feels like an attack on the faculty who are just doing their job. Interim EVC Button stated that there was a wonderful workshop with the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Law about academic freedom and he is happy to share the Powerpoint slides from the workshop and hopes that there will be others. He pointed out that the American Association of Colleges and Universities reported that a third of the faculty across the country feel a lack of protection of academic freedom. He noted that all faculty at UNL need to know that the university defends the principles of academic freedom for both faculty and students, and he is interested in finding ways that we can articulate and communicate this information better and he would be happy to partner with the Senate on this.

Reimer stated that there is the campus wide student success model but she has heard from a colleague that there is a need for more college level efforts to support students. Interim EVC Button stated that he appreciates the comment and feedback, and he might lead a discussion with the deans about this issue.

## **2.8 What are your views of how faculty should respond to the talk at the legislature?**

Interim EVC Button noted that everyone is a citizen and should be engaged but when interacting with the legislature university employees should be clear that they are speaking as a citizen, not as a member of the university. He reported that the university has a team of people who are carefully watching the legislature, and they are keeping abreast of the developments and there will be opportunities to hear updates from the team. He pointed out that many bills will be introduced, but many of them will not even make it out of committee. He stated that the university will continue to defend the principles of academic freedom and tenure.

## **2.9 Remaining Initiatives in Academic Affairs**

Eklund asked for an update on the progress of the policy requiring faculty background checks on new hires. Interim EVC Button reported that the Senate Executive Committee made great recommendations and said that AVC Marks is working on revisions, and he believes a final draft will be coming soon.

Leiter pointed out that people may not be aware that as part of the hiring process any faculty member of tenure and above such as administrators requires a Westlaw search which is an arbitrary news search which looks at news reports rather than a criminal background check. He stated that the Westlaw search can identify news stories if someone is alleged to be involved in professional misconduct. He noted that there is a \$200 cost to conduct this search. Interim EVC Button stated that he will get the latest version of the faculty background check policy to the Executive Committee to see if there is any mention of the Westlaw search.

Eklund asked if social media can be used to identify any kind of misconduct. VanderPlas pointed out that our search training specifically states that social media cannot be used.

Interim EVC Button noted that the Chancellor called for a more decentralized initiative to make people feel safe and included and he is working on bringing people together to work on this initiative. He reported that the Chancellor also called for an initiative to simplify business practices to ensure that we have an excellent operation. He pointed out that we also need to sustain our commitment to faculty and staff retention.

Interim EVC Button reported that we are currently in the midst of a search for a permanent dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences, and we expect to have candidates on campus sometime in February.

Eklund noted that there are serious concerns about the Governor proposing a \$14.3 million reduction to the university's budget, yet there is a push for us to rejoin the AAU. He questioned if the legislature reduces the university's budget how it would negatively impact us. He pointed out that there is a greater push occurring at UNL for the faculty to become unionized. Interim EVC Button noted that the budget is a proposal and there is a lot of time and additional things that need to take place before it is finalized. He stated that we need to push for the continued support of the flagship campus and the university, and we need to make the case of the phenomenal return that the university gives back to the state. He pointed out that even with budget reductions we have been able to provide

salary increases and we want to be competitive with our salary and benefits to retain and recruit faculty members.

### **3.0 Announcements**

No announcements were made.

### **3.0 Approval of December 10, 2024 Minutes**

Eklund asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Tschetter moved for approval. Motion was seconded by Bouma and approved by the Executive Committee.

### **4.0 Unfinished Business**

#### **4.1 Family Leave Policy Status**

Eklund noted that he received a notice in November from Interim Provost Jackson stating that the proposal would need to be discussed again at the President's Council by the Chancellors. Eklund reported that Interim Provost Jackson also said that another opportunity to discuss and consider the policy for all employees – including those not covered by union contracts – might be during routine Bylaw/Policy revisions. Interim Provost Jackson also wrote that he would pass Eklund's message on to legal counsel and the corporation secretary to ensure their awareness.

Eklund stated that there was a suggestion that we might need to examine what kind of family leave policy the new members of the Big Ten have. Eklund suggested that we invite Professor Ann Powers and Professor Jenny Dauer to meet with the Executive Committee to discuss the family leave policy.

### **5.0 New Business**

#### **5.1 February Faculty Senate Meeting**

Griffin noted that Chancellor Bennett will not be able to attend the February 4<sup>th</sup> Faculty Senate meeting. The Committee then discussed what should be on the Senate agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:33 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in 203 Alexander Building. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.