

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Bearnes, Gorman, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas

Absent: Baesu, Eklund, Gruverman, Leiter, Lewis, Pierobon, Reimer

Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2025

Location: 201 Canfield Administration Building

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 at 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett (guests: Interim EVC Button, Interim EVC Nelson, Associate Dean Lodl, Director of External Relations Morrison)

Shrader stated the following “that we in the faculty are very concerned – I will speak here for myself – about where the red line is. At what point do we fulfill the mission of this university and of higher education without the constant inspection - and over-analysis - of external forces.

And where do we say, ‘enough is enough.’ Our values, our mission, our purpose are being defined by people who have political agendas ahead of the interests of our students and of the people in this state. Let’s not even talk about the interests of the people whose work it is – whose long-standing professional interests – are to offer the highest quality education to the people of this state and students from all over the world.

And it feels like those interests – whether they be political or financial or philosophical – are dominating what we do. Whatever happened to the idea: let the professionals do their job? They hire us – administration, faculty, staff, vendors, etc. – because this is what we do. Let us do our job.”

Chancellor Bennett stated that he shares Shrader’s concerns and pointed out that he has voiced these same concerns with President Gold. He noted that we are in a situation where each month we will need to figure out what financial concerns we need to tackle for that month, and he pointed out that in his 20 years of being in university administration, he has never seen a political environment like we are facing today. He noted that he has real concerns about how we can move forward.

2.1 When do you expect to consult with the Senate Executive Committee and the Academic Planning Committee about the budget reductions? What strategic priorities are being used to determine the reductions and how do you plan to work with the APC to ensure all necessary procedures are followed in order to get the budget approved by the Board of Regents in December?

Chancellor Bennett expressed deep concern about the current challenges facing the university, including a significant budget deficit and external pressures on the institution's mission. He outlined a \$20.5 million structural deficit that has grown to nearly \$28 million, which the administration is working to address through strategic program eliminations, modifications, and realignments, as well as reducing administrative overhead. He emphasized the unprecedented nature of the current environment and the difficulty in maintaining the university's status as a flagship, land-grant institution while facing these budget constraints. He reported that last week he and several members of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) gave a presentation to the Academic Affairs and the Business Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents outlining how we can make strategic budget reductions to address the structural deficit but also showed them the impacts of what these budget reductions would mean for UNL. He noted that the Committees received the presentation well and there was candid and detailed discussion with the members of the Board.

Interim EVC Button reported that early consultation begins this week when he will be meeting with APC Chair Cressler, APC Secretary Davis, and APC Coordinator Griffin tomorrow to begin thinking about the timeline for the APC's work on the budget reductions. He stated that he anticipates that the APC will have a meeting in early August to think through a proposed timeline pointing out that he thinks the APC's public hearings on proposed reductions would need to take place in September and October because the Chancellor will need to present the proposed reductions to the Board of Regents committees in November for consideration by the full Board in December. He stated that the APC will need to work quickly and efficiently given the tight timeline it will have to review and make recommendations on the proposed reductions and noted that once the Chancellor Invokes the Procedures for Significant Budget Reallocation and Reductions there will be engagement with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the APC, and other shared governance partners.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that Interim EVC Button has done an excellent job working with the deans to analyze data on metrics which will help us to make strategic budget reduction decisions. Interim EVC Button reported that priorities will look at academic excellence and student success, hands on experience for students, research excellence and engagement with Nebraska Extension. He pointed out that the data for the metrics was compiled from a five-year period but noted that the metrics don't provide all of the information needed so there has been consultation with each of the deans and associate deans to get a wholistic view of the qualitative aspects of programs.

2.2 Many research grants have been delayed or subjected to secondary reviews by funding agencies, disrupting project funding that supports faculty and graduate students. In my department, a research professor with 20 years of service at UNL faces potential job loss due to a funding agency's lack of response after seven months. This situation is particularly critical for research professors and graduate students. What are the university's policies for addressing such cases? What resources are available to temporarily support research faculty during these funding delays until grant funds are in?

Interim VC Nelson reported that there have been some delays in the grant portfolio with grant funds coming through on a delayed timeline. She suggested that anyone experiencing delays receiving non-competing renewal funding (the next year of funding for an already awarded multi-year grant) should work with Sponsored Programs to see whether a grant would be eligible for IPAS (Institutional Prior Approval to Spend) which allows us to continue to expend money when we know grant funding is coming but is delayed. She noted that the IPAS allows for very careful tracking of the spending.

In cases of delays receiving new awards, Interim VC Nelson stated that there are some other situations where bridge funding can be made available. For example, she stated if a PIs received a great, fundable score about a new grant proposal, after having recently completed another grant, this may be a case for bridge funding to bridge critical staff during a period of delay to the new award. She encouraged faculty members to discuss this with their department chair and dean about the availability of bridge funding. Vakilzadian pointed out that he does not know how much funding the college would have to provide bridge funding. Interim VC Nelson reported that the volume has been low enough so that bridge funding can be managed on a case-by-case basis and sometimes funding can be found through partnerships. She noted that funding awards may be delayed because the funding agencies have lost so many employees.

Shrader asked if Interim VC Nelson can estimate the number of people we have lost who were involved with grants that have been suspended. Interim VC Nelson stated that the exact number is difficult to determine at this time, but she believes there have not been that many people who lost their jobs due to a suspended grant. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that we are trying to do everything we can to retain people.

2.3 Several departments at UNL have experienced significant turnover due to retirements and faculty accepting better offers from competing universities. This has happened in the Electrical Computing and Engineering department, where we have lost half of the senior ECE faculty in Omaha campus and three in Lincoln Campus due to better offers and retirements. The ongoing hiring freeze has led to substantial vacancies in programs, damaging department, college and UNL's reputation. What measures are in place to address these issues to prevent further damage to UNL's standing, considering the hiring freeze and university budget issues?

Interim EVC Button stated that while we are being very responsible with our resources, we are not preventing critical hires, and we continue to be aggressive in actively retaining a high level of people. He noted that our overall retention rate is approximately 70%. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that there are people who question how we can continue to hire, but stated that we need to continue our mission of teaching and research.

2.4 On Friday you sent the ELT and Deans an email message about a second phase of reviewing programs or activities labeled as diversity, equity, and inclusion. What will this review entail since we have already had a review?

Chancellor Bennett reported that there have been people outside of the university that have examined our websites and found some sites and titles that still refer to diversity,

equity, and inclusion. As a result, he has asked the deans to do another review to address the items identified. He noted that this is a complex effort that is not easily accomplished.

Shrader asked if the university has been in violation of any state law or Board of Regents' policies. Chancellor Bennett reported that UNL has not discriminated against anyone.

VanderPlas asked if people are going to be asked to remove workshops, awards, and classes they have taught from the CVs because their work related to diversity, equity, or inclusion issues. Chancellor Bennett stated that we have not been asked to go to this level of review.

2.5 How is the university planning to respond to the loss of money for SNAP educational programs in the recently passed federal budget, which supported a lot of extension programming? How will the university continue to support its extension mission given these cuts?

Associate Dean Lodl reported that the Snap-ED program has been administered through Nebraska Extension since 1992 but with the federal government discontinuing funding, the program will end September 30th. She noted that the Snap-ED program has been an educational program to teach people how to eat healthier and how to shop smarter for food. She reported that 120,000 people in Nebraska benefitted from the program.

Associate Dean Lodl stated that 24 positions will be eliminated, and notices have gone out to those people. Tschetter asked if faculty members have been terminated. Associate Dean Lodl stated that those who were immediately terminated with student workers and graduate students. She noted that 8 FTE Nebraska Extension personnel will eventually be terminated. Bearnes asked if the Extension faculty members will receive a 90-day termination notice. Associate Dean Lodl reported that full-time faculty will have a 90-day notice and will receive salaries and accrued benefits through October 21. She pointed out that tuition remission benefits are extended a year after termination notice. Vakilzadian asked what would happen with the employees' health insurance. Associate Dean Lodl stated that this is a Human Resources question and pointed out that a Human Resources member was on every call when people were given their termination notice. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that the employees would be eligible to get Cobra insurance. Associate Dean Lodl reported that there are some positions open in the University and Extension that Extension personnel can look at and apply for them if they are interested.

Bearnes noted that Snap-ED was a fabulous program that was available in many counties in the state. She pointed out that some of the employees associated with it have been here for 24-26 years and she wondered if Extension could do something to acknowledge and celebrate these employees before they are gone. Associate Dean Lodl noted that the decision to cut the program was made by the federal government. She stated that the discontinuation of the program had nothing to do with the quality of the program or those working on it.

2.7 How are you planning to make university employees feel valued and/or improve morale? While the salary freeze also affects the faculty, staff are lower paid and are even more affected by the salary freeze and inflation combination. It's already hard to recruit staff and turnover is high, so what is the plan? Staff turnover has a huge effect on faculty, both in time lost to search committees and in efficiency reductions as new staff members get up to speed.

Chancellor Bennett stated that it was a very difficult decision for him to not give faculty and staff salary increases this year. He reported that Ben Lennander has been appointed as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, and he has been charged with figuring out ways to connect with our employees in new ways. He pointed out that we have an obligation to our employees and we need to honor that obligation.

2.8 Campus Updates

Interim EVC Button stated that enrollment numbers are looking up and first-time freshmen enrollment is up as is enrollment numbers for transfer students. However, enrollment for graduates is down slightly. He noted that housing deposits are up which is a sign that students are still choosing to come to UNL and noted that 84.4% of freshmen are returning this fall.

Director Morrison reported that the university's fundraising effort closed June 30th but the final total of the UNL donations has not been determined yet, but it is likely to be \$200 million. He stated that the donations can be used to address remissions and there was a discussion about faculty support for endowed chairs and professorships, faculty travel and development. He noted that the Foundation is looking for ways to better partner with the campus.

3.0 Interim CIO Haugerud

3.1 Outlook Migration

Interim CIO Haugerud reported that 49% of the Microsoft migration for UNL departments has been completed. He noted that some of the consistent problems that ITS has seen after migration is the ability to share emails with those that have not migrated yet, particularly with students. He stated that Microsoft made some security changes with the VPN which resulted in some people needing to be manually migrated over which took an additional 60 support hours. He reported that a common problem was people having difficulty getting into the Sharepoint site. He noted that the college IT staff have been very engaged in the migration process.

Shrader asked how many people have been dedicated to the migration effort. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that close to 200 people have been involved. He pointed out that, depending on the size of the unit, typically 3-6 people are actively engaged when the migration is occurring. Shrader asked when the students will be migrating. Interim CIO Haugerud reported that students will be migrated at the end of December pointing out that about 60,000-80,000 students will be migrated.

Tschetter noted that the process has not been seamless, and she had problems getting into Zoom and Canvas and is still having difficulties with Eduroam. She reported that the local IT people in her college were very helpful but the problems she encountered with getting into Zoom and Canvas had to be elevated to a higher level at ITS and the people she had to deal with were very condescending. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that she should contact him if there are problems that are not resolved and apologized for the experience she encountered. He noted that he has not heard this kind of negative feedback and that most people have said that the IT people have been patient and understanding.

VanderPlas reported that she uses Linux and when she tried to download her old emails she was told by an IT member that she would need to get a Windows machine which she said is not possible since her department no longer has extra machines that can be distributed. Interim CIO Haugerud encouraged those who are experiencing these kinds of problems to contact him because he should be able to get additional resources to resolve the problem.

Tschetter noted that prior to a unit's migration, there are a number of emails sent out about what will happen with the migration, and she suggested that it would be more helpful if the emails just explained the basics of what will happen with the migration and what they can expect after the migration with Sharepoint and email. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that a website was developed to help people, but the College of Arts and Sciences was one of the first colleges to be migrated and more assistance was needed. He reported that every July the Eduroam needs to be upgraded which impacts the encryption certificate and could result with people having some difficulty accessing it.

Vakilzadian pointed out that emails to UNMC are not working. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that UNMC is having some problems with their email system. He noted that they changed their security setup which is very restrictive.

Interim CIO Haugerud pointed out that unl.edu will remain but internally the university system nebraska.edu appears. He stated that our licensing agreements for applications like Zoom are under unl.edu so people should use their unl.edu email address when logging into the systems.

3.2 Title II Compliance

Interim CIO Haugerud stated that Canvas has deployed Ally which will scan the documents in Canvas for things that are considered not compliant with Title II. Gorman pointed out that the university's communications about Title II compliance contains some errors. For instance, university communications says that all digital contents in course materials must be compliant with Title II, but this is not what is stated in the Title II regulations. He stated that Title II compliance only applies to web content material. He pointed out that a lot of faculty members are unsure what to do with their course materials and it is very nebulous whether the Title II compliance pertains to links to things like GitHub. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that he believes a website has been

developed to address questions about Title II compliance, but he would need to confirm this.

Shrader reported that he reached out to Director Monk of the Center for Transformative Teaching about complying with Title II regulations and there will be a Zoom session with him on Friday morning. Interim CIO Haugerud stated that he would be happy to have a longer conversation with the Executive Committee concerning IT matters.

4.0 Announcements

No announcements were made.

5.0 Approval of June 24, 2025 and July 8, 2025 Minutes

Due to the lack of a quorum, the approval of the minutes was postponed until the August 5th meeting.

6.0 Unfinished Business

6.1 Executive Committee Retreat

Griffin noted that there was not a date when most of the Executive Committee members could attend the retreat. The Executive Committee discussed other possible dates and Griffin said she would send another poll out to see if a more suitable date could be found.

7.0 New Business

No new business was discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:56 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, August 5, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.