

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent: Kopocis

Date: Tuesday, March 11, 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 (*Eklund*)

Eklund called the meeting to order 2:29 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett/Interim EVC Button/VC Zeleny

2.1 Educating Legislators on AAU Membership and Being an R1 University

Chancellor Bennett reported that he and President Gold are constantly having to explain and defend the model of NU being a tier one research university to our stakeholders and what our productivity must look like if we are going to be relevant as a member of the Big Ten and an AAU university. Reimer asked if our stakeholders understand the importance of our membership in the AAU and is the university making enough an effort to educate the stakeholders. Chancellor Bennett stated that they understand that currently every other university in the Big Ten is a member of the AAU and they consider being a member of the AAU from the athletics perspective. He noted that there are 13 new legislators and there was a level of education that needed to take place to familiarize them with all that the university does for the state and the importance of being a member of the AAU.

Shrader stated that the term productivity becomes pejorative in the public opinion and their focus is on what they think the faculty are supposed to be doing. However, he stated that we, and the administration, need to become more vocal about what the faculty actually do because the message that is currently coming out from the university is not good enough. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that we not only have a Nebraska brand, but an international brand as well. He noted that people from other parts of the world want to come to the University or work with our faculty and he is very proud of our faculty. He noted that four or five faculty members appeared at the special Board of Regents meeting and what they said, and how they said it was outstanding. He pointed out that we will need a lot more people actively engaged in sharing and communicating with the public about what the university does, and how it benefits the state.

2.2 What is the plan for dealing with the \$5 million budget reduction for this fiscal year? What is the formula for college and unit cuts and why? Is it related to college or unit performance or simply a percentage?

VC Zeleny reported that the first phase of UNL's budget reduction is \$5 million, which is 1% of our state-aided budget. He stated that the 1% reduction will be shared by all units across the campus, but it will not impact things such as insurance premiums and cost of facilities.

Shrader asked if structural changes within the system would help alleviate some of our ongoing budget woes for the university. VC Zeleny stated that it would depend on how the funds are prioritized as we move forward. He pointed out that this would be a good question to ask President Gold. Chancellor Bennett noted that he does not think there is going to be any structural changes in the near future, pointing out that there is an ongoing search for a Chancellor of UNK and President Gold is currently focused on the joint reporting of UNL and UNMC. Shrader asked if UNL and UNMC will remain as individual entities. Chancellor Bennett reported that we have signaled to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that the President is now the Chief Executive Officer, and the Chancellors are now considered the Chief Administrative Officers. He pointed out that this change was made by the Regents when Athletics was put under the President's office. He reported that, if accepted by the HLC, the system office would hold the accreditation rather than the campuses. He stated that UNK and UNO would maintain their individual accreditation.

2.3 Previously there was a rubric on program assessment that was informing budget reductions (average of 7 graduates in the major over the past 5 years). Are we still operating under that rubric or has the rubric changed?

Interim EVC Button stated that this is a time for the faculty voice and for advocacy for the University and it is a time for the Faculty Senate Presidents to use their voices. He reported that another \$10-20 million structural deficit would be horrendous for UNL and fundamentally change the campus. He noted that he is telling the deans the same thing to energize their faculty and their advisory boards.

Interim EVC Button reported that the rubric for informing budget reductions comes from the Coordinating Commission of Postsecondary Education which was an entity created by the Nebraska Legislature. The CCPE has guidelines to assess minimum performance standards for all academic programs across the state and this is done on a seven-year cycle. He stated that undergraduate programs must have an annual average of at least seven students graduating during a five-year period, master programs must have at least five, and doctoral programs at least three. He pointed out that for programs that fall below the levels, they must go through in-depth reviews assessing how the program will be addressing enrollment and annually monitoring reports on enrollment. He noted that these are annual standard activities that are conducted every year in accordance with the guidelines.

Chancellor Bennett reported that the system office receives information from the CCPE on programs and whether they are meeting these guidelines and every month at the President's Council this information is shared. Interim EVC Button noted that the Deans must approve programs, and they are continually making determinations on programs whether some of them are being combined or whether some programs are being put on

pause. He stated that many different action steps are possible for managing academic programs and they all need to be considered.

2.4 How is the university going to ensure student and faculty free speech rights on campus, in light of Trump's posts on Truth Social about "illegal protests" causing students to be expelled "permanently" and universities to lose government funding? Will the university be following up with students/faculty to ensure that everyone knows their rights and what current university policies are about protests?

Chancellor Bennett reported that the campuses have been in contact with Interim VP and General Counsel Chambers who have kept the Chancellors very well informed as to what would need to happen for ICE to come into our classrooms. He pointed out that he thinks it is unlikely to happen here due to the complexities of what must be done before ICE could take action.

Interim EVC Button pointed out that the University has clear guidance on academic freedom. He stated that peaceful and non-violent demonstrations can be held because it is freedom of speech. He noted that the UNL Police does a good job to diffuse situations to ensure everyone's safety. He stated that we must maintain our academic enterprise and do so in a safe way. He pointed out that anything that interferes with our ability to maintain our academic enterprise would be a problem. He noted that there are also due process rights and the [Board of Regents Policies, 2.1.2](#), addresses this thoughtfully.

2.5 How is the university working to ensure that undocumented students can continue their education and feel safe on campus? Fear of ICE raids can be just as damaging (if not more damaging) than the actual presence of ICE agents on campus, in terms of how comfortable students feel showing up to class and activities.

Interim EVC Button reported that every student has access to free legal services on campus and information cards are being produced to let students know about this service. He stated that there have been close communications with various student groups on campus about this issue.

Tschetter pointed out that faculty members are getting emails from students who are afraid to come to class. She asked if communications have gone out to the students to ensure that they are safe. Interim EVC Button stated that there have been communications. Chancellor Bennett reported that Assistant VC TJ McDowell has been helping and working with groups of students who are concerned about possible ICE raids.

2.6 What criteria are used for declaring instructional continuity due to weather conditions? We've had several days this semester where LPS and SCC cancelled and UNL did not even move online. How is the university working to ensure these decisions don't place an unreasonable burden on faculty and students who have children? Have there ever been discussions about having some sort of emergency childcare available on campus? If every person and every interaction matters, we should be trying to ensure that faculty and

students can both prioritize on-campus responsibilities when there is a mismatch between LPS and UNL responses to weather.

VC Zeleny stated that safety is the most important issue when deciding whether to close the campus for inclement weather. He pointed out that the campus never totally shuts down because we have about 2,000 students living on campus and there are specific staff that are needed to take care of them regardless of the weather conditions. He stated that the question that is asked is whether the campus can be accessed, and this is determined in consultation with Landscape Services and the UNL Police. He said that if the campus can be cleared by 7:30 a.m. the campus is most typically open, and we try not to have a late start, but sometimes that is not always an option. He reported that UNL does coordinate extensively with the superintendent of LPS as well as the Lincoln Police and the Department of Roads when determining whether we should have an instructional continuity day. He pointed out that we don't just default to instructional continuity day because there are many classes and labs where the preference is to be in person.

VC Zeleny noted that the administration tries to make the decision to go to an instructional continuity day the night before, but the timing of the weather can play a factor as to when a decision is made. He stated that it makes sense for some faculty members to declare an instructional continuity day for their classes and noted that faculty should use a commonsense approach for what works best for everyone's safety.

VanderPlas pointed out that everyone knew about the approaching storm and questioned why a decision was not made earlier. VC Zeleny stated that the March 4-5 storm began on the afternoon of March 4th, and we knew that Lincoln would not be hit as hard as Omaha. He noted that Anderson Hall, the Digital Media Arts Center, and some other buildings lost power on the evening of March 4th but noted that there was close communications with the LPD and Roads department and it was felt that travel was still safe. He stated that the main issue with the storm was the wind.

VanderPlas stated that not everyone teaching has the authority to move their class to an online format, particularly Graduate Teaching Assistants, and the university needs to consider the safety of these people. VC Zeleny noted that this was a good point. He stated that the timing of the storm and how it progressed made it challenging to decide whether to have an instructional continuity day or whether to have the campus have a late start.

Leiter stated that the administration needs to carefully think about the faculty and staff that are working at the university on days of adverse winter weather because of the challenges it places on the employees to get to work. He noted that the problem on March 5th was ice, and with LPS closed, many of the staff and faculty members have to stay home to take care of their children. VC Zeleny stated that the university does try to make a decision that is in the best interest of the campus community.

VanderPlas noted that having emergency childcare on campus for days when LPS is closed but the university is open would be helpful. VC Zeleny stated that he is not aware of a formal situation where emergency childcare was available and noted that some offices have a bring a person to work policy. Griffin recalled that there was discussion about offering this service when University childcare was first being established, but it

was determined that it was not feasible due to the uncertainty of the number of children that would need childcare and the cost of providing it.

2.7 Can you provide clarification on the shared Engineering program with Nebraska Wesleyan. How will this work? (Button)

Interim EVC Button reported that this is a standard articulated agreement which allows students from Weyslan University to transfer to UNL to complete their degree. He pointed out that they cannot transfer in more than 90 credit hours and the agreement clearly defines what courses can be transferred.

2.8 Can you provide recommendations for people who put their syllabi online given that people are looking to find any mention of diversity, inclusion or equity? (Button)

Interim EVC Button stated that faculty members have the right to post their syllabus online and it is their decision on how much information they want to include about the course. He stated that they have not received any concerns about this issue, but he can understand why faculty members may be wary. He noted that there was a campus discussion on academic freedom where the university's strong support of academic freedom was articulated. He stated that a follow-up survey is being conducted of those who were in attendance, and if anyone is being harassed, there are additional resources available to assist them.

3.0 Class Absences for Students Serving in the Military (AVC Goodburn, AVC Marks, AVC Pearce, and Director Brownell) (3:30)

AVC Marks reported that they were meeting with the Senate Executive Committee to discuss the Senate's [Class Attendance Policy](#) because there have been some incidents where students have had issues with how the policy has been applied. As an example, a student serving in the National Guard was met with a lot of resistance from a professor about providing an alternative exam time and another student, whose parent died during finals week, had a professor who was unwilling to make any sort of accommodations for the student.

AVC Marks noted that the Class Attendance Policy gives broad discretion to the faculty member on when to accommodate absences although the policy does provide a list of possible scenarios for allowing absences. He stated that one of the things that emerged when reviewing some of the instances is that the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance may occasionally need to provide supportive measures for a student, or sometimes a faculty member, when there may be reports of discrimination or harassment, and the supportive measures may require some alternative arrangements related to classwork and tests. He pointed out that if these supportive measures are in place, they supersede the instructor's discretion outlined in the Senate's Policy for allowing class absences and noted that we need to stay in compliance with federal laws and guidelines. He stated that AVC Pearce is prepared to offer some extensive written guidance for the Executive Committee to review.

AVC Marks noted that accommodation for students needs to be reasonable and there is an expectation that the students will complete the work of the class. He stated that the

intent is to honor the instructor's discretion for class attendance but also protect some student situations. He reported that attendance policies at some of our peer universities have mandated excused absences in situations such as military service or jury duty. He asked if the Executive Committee might consider revisiting the attendance policy to better acknowledge situations such as when there may be mandated IEC supportive measures in place.

AVC Marks stated that the last part of the policy deals with appeals of an instructor's decision, but the process needs clarification because currently it references going to the Chief Academic Officer.

Tschetter noted that instructors are getting many more requests for class absences and for special accommodation. She pointed out that she had a student who was going to be gone for a lengthy period of time for military service but demanded that he should be allowed to do all of the coursework at the end of the semester and that he should get at least a C+. She noted that there are times when she has recommended to a student that they should take the course at a different time when they can attend the classes.

AVC Goodburn reported that military students usually know when they need to be absent, and they should contact their instructor at the beginning of the semester to work with the instructor to devise a plan for when the student can do the coursework. She pointed out that the major attendance issue is when there is an illness.

Vakilzadian stated that no justification is provided when there is a student who needs additional time, or breaks, when taking an exam. Reimer pointed out that medical providers must provide in writing the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office for students to get special accommodation, but HIPPA privacy policies do not allow the reason for why the accommodations are needed by the student. Baesu noted that SSD must provide a time when these students can come into their office to take an exam, and they need to expand their hours to accommodate the students.

Tschetter asked if it is true that students in military service may not have access to the internet. Director Brownell stated that this is correct. The student may not be given access to the internet and at some training sites, their phones are collected. Baesu asked if students serving in the military know how long they will be deployed for. Director Brownell stated that sometimes they do but not if they are responding to a disaster. He stated that if a student is in the National Guard they know what their schedule will be at the beginning of the semester, and they are informed that they need to work on an accommodation plan with the instructor. He noted that the number of students in the Guard is increasing and 99% of the time there are no problems, but there is occasionally an incident where there is a problem with the instructor. Tschetter pointed out that she has had students enrolled in a 5-week summer session class, but they needed to be gone for three weeks of the class. Director Brownell stated that the student should be recommended to take the course in another semester.

Shrader asked what the planning process would be for a student serving in the National Guard when they register for a course. Director Brownell stated that students know when they have drill weekends and possibly training schedules, but they don't know when the exams times will be when they sign up for the class. The student needs to work directly with their instructor to come up with a plan. Shrader asked what kind of a plan would be developed. Director Brownell stated that it could be difficult to know if the student will have access to the internet which could dictate how the plan will be implemented.

Shrader pointed out that when student athletes are in a class the instructor is notified by Athletics. He asked if instructors are notified if they have a student serving in the military and the potential class conflicts that there may be. Baesu stated that it would be really helpful if this information could be provided to the instructor. Reimer agreed. Director Brownell stated that it would be possible to provide instructors with a list of the students who are actively serving in the military, but the instructor would need to review the list to see if any of their students are in military service. He noted that he does not have the staff to notify each individual faculty member.

Tschetter stated that the problem comes when an instructor is notified of an absence at the last minute. Director Brownell stated that the idea is for the student to work with the faculty members and an advisor at the start of the semester. Reimer suggested that students may need to be better educated as to when they should have those conversations with their instructors because not all students do as they are recommended.

Tschetter stated that the four-year plan for military students can create problems if they are going to have to take a course during another semester. Director Brownell pointed out that the four-year plan allows these students to get funding to go to the university. He stated that his office works with these students to try to keep them engaged so they ultimately graduate on time.

Shrader stated that he supports the idea of revising the Class Attendance Policy and working with the students. He noted that having good communication will help, but he asked what the recommended process should be if a student gets towards the end of the semester and then suddenly realizes they have all this work to do in a limited amount of time. Director Brownell stated that some faculty members like to give an incomplete. He pointed out that if the student and the faculty member had an agreement at the beginning of the semester then the student needs to comply with the agreement. Baesu noted that with an incomplete the instructor outlines a process for the student to complete the work and once they do that, the student will get an official letter indicating their grade. Director Brownell pointed out that his office gets a copy of the military orders and a copy can be made for a faculty member if they would like to see it.

The Executive Committee agreed to review the Class Attendance Policy and to review our peers' policies.

4.0 Announcements

4.1 No Executive Committee Meeting During Spring Break

Griffin reported that the Committee would not be meeting next week due to spring break.

4.2 UNL and UNMC Accreditation

Eklund reported that UNL will not, as an individual campus, be reapplying for accreditation. He stated that UNMC is already accredited but the system office is waiting to hear the HLC's decision on the request to combine UNL and UNMC's accreditation.

5.0 Approval of March 4, 2025 Minutes

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

6.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

7.0 New Business

No new business was discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in the Nebraska Union. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.