

UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES
March 4, 2025
Presidents Pete Eklund, John Shrader, and Kelli Kopocis, Presiding

1.0 Call to Order

President Eklund called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

2.1 Faculty Senate Executive Committee Elections

President Eklund reminded that the Faculty Senate elections for a President-Elect, Secretary, and two members of the Executive Committee will be held during the May 6 meeting. He stated that Senators interested in serving on the Executive Committee should contact himself or Coordinator Griffin.

2.2 NU Faculty Senate Presidents Writing a Letter to the Legislature

President Eklund reported that the four Faculty Senate Presidents of the NU campuses are crafting a letter for the Legislature to voice faculty concerns with recent bills that have been proposed and the Governor's plan to reduce the university's budget.

2.3 Big Ten Academic Alliance Faculty Leaders

President Eklund reported that all the eighteen campus leaders from the Big Ten are developing a letter that will be sent to the federal administration in Washington D.C.

3.0 Chancellor Bennett

Chancellor Bennett noted he was Zooming in from the Phoenix Airport because he did not want to miss the Faculty Senate meeting today because of all of the recent things that have been happening with the federal mandates. He pointed out that the university's administration is working really hard for UNL, and the university system is working hard to stay engaged with the campus community. He noted that in the Chronicle of Higher Education he has been outspoken in defense of academic freedom and tenure and stated that we take any proposals that would limit academic freedom in any way, regardless of the source, very seriously. He reported that he remains very committed to those two foundational and fundamental principles of the work that we do at the university. He stated that we are also working hard with our federal delegation to seek clarity on the executive orders from the new federal administration. He stated that we need to do our part to educate our friends in Washington on the impact that the executive orders are having on the university, the faculty, staff, students and on the State of Nebraska.

Chancellor Bennett reported that Interim VC Nelson, Office of Research and Innovation, has been in close communication with him and the campus, and with the national community, about the federal mandates being made that are impacting research grants. He noted that many of the federal mandates are ending in legal cases, and at this time, the actual direct effects of the mandates are limited but pointing out that the situation is very dynamic and can change quickly. He stated that Interim VC Nelson, and Interim EVC Button met with approximately 50-60 members of the research community to discuss where things currently stand and where we are heading. He is asking everyone to continue to think big in terms of research and to continue to write proposals. He pointed out that Nebraska, and the nation, need researchers' work and creativity for advancing health and well-being, and for the security in our region. He stated that as the State's land-grant university we cannot slow down, and he asked faculty to please continue to do the things they have been doing.

Chancellor Bennett noted that it is the time of the year for reporting research expenditures, and he reported that in fiscal year 2023 we were at \$366 million, but for this fiscal year, we are currently at \$386 million. He reported that our research data will be combined with UNMC and the Office of

the President and will become public along with our national rankings in November 2025. Chancellor Bennett stated that, as directed by President Gold, we will be completing the comprehensive review for all activities related to the Dear Colleague Letter, Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. He reported that the review is a Chancellor led review against the backdrop of the Dear Colleague Letter which, he pointed out, is currently not the law. He stated that he has complete confidence in Professor Marc Pearce, Associate to the Chancellor, Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, who is conducting our comprehensive review and who has guided us through state and federal laws, Board of Regents Policies, and university practices in the past. He pointed out that we have not been out of line with our hiring practices, and we have been in compliance with federal laws and Regents' policies.

Chancellor Bennett noted that there are four principles that people need to consider with this comprehensive review. One is that we will comply, as we always have, with state and federal law. Two, we will make changes, when necessary, that allow us to continue our important work and fulfill our teaching, research and engagement missions. Three, we cannot make changes that negatively impact academic freedom as we are committed to this principle. Four, we will not make changes that hinder important student success work.

Chancellor Bennett reported that last week he had an excellent meeting with a group of faculty and staff members whose work and interest aligned with the type of work referred to in the Dear Colleague Letter. He noted that many of the senior faculty members have dealt with similar letters over the course of their careers and they know from their experiences that we should not overreact and over respond to the Dear Colleague Letter. He stated that he will continue to seek the group's input to draw upon their ideas in terms of strategies and to think about any changes that might need to be made going forward.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that the university's budget continues to be a challenge which means we must continue our work to reduce our expenses while at the same time increasing our revenue. He noted that everyone should have received his recent email message regarding information on our plans to eliminate our structural deficit as well as to develop a plan to deal with further cuts in case there are reductions to our state-aided budget and federal research funding.

Chancellor Bennett stated that one way to increase our revenue is through increased enrollment. He reported that we currently see some positive signs for our fall enrollment and pointed out that if we were to have increased enrollment in all categories of students it would definitely improve our revenue funding. He stated that we also need to make sure that our students are having a positive UNL experience while they are here.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he has been actively engaged with members of the unicameral in order to help them understand what the university does and how it impacts the state. He pointed out that UNL's economic impact alone is \$3.6 billion, and he doesn't miss any opportunity to remind the legislators about it.

Chancellor Bennett reported that in a 24-hour period, the Glow Big Red Campaign raised just over \$1 million. He stated that this demonstrates the confidence that our stakeholders have in what we are doing. He pointed out that he hopes the faculty will see this support as a small example of how important our work is and how people believe in the work we are doing.

Chancellor Bennett noted that this is a busy and unpredictable time for all of higher education, but he wanted to express how much he appreciates everyone and how hard they are working. He pointed out that continuing to follow our principle of every person and every interaction matters, will help us get through this challenging time. He stated that while we are exhausted and frustrated, we have a level of engagement that remains relevant and successful and provides the leadership that is so desperately needed which in turn impacts our students who are counting on us to help them be successful.

4.0 Interim EVC Button

Interim EVC Button reported that he is honored to be serving in the role of Interim EVC noting that this is an extraordinary time for our university and higher education. He pointed out that he can reaffirm that, despite all of the challenges we are currently facing, every time he goes to departments or colleges, he sees how incredible the faculty, staff, and students are and all that they do. He stated that his primary message is that we need to be uncommon in our persistence and we need to adhere to our values of respecting, caring, and supporting everyone's successes at UNL. He noted that we need to be relentless in focusing on student success through our teaching, service and outreach with Nebraska Extension and we need to rely on shared governance to have open and candid discussion with everyone. He pointed out that we are stronger when we work together.

Interim EVC Button stated that some examples of our student success are shown in a variety of metrics. He reported that from the fall 2024 semester we had an 86% retention rate which is the highest ever at the university and is an incredible sign of the hard work that is occurring across the university. He noted that over 82% of our fall first-year student cohort complete 15-credit credit hours by the start of the second semester, which is a historic high and the percentage has increased every year since 2020. He reported that course withdrawal rates were at their lowest level since spring of 2020, which is an indication that the students are getting the support that they need and are on track for timely graduation. In addition, the average credit hours earned were significantly higher over 13 credit hours on average, which is the second highest overall amount of student credit hours we've seen at the university. He stated that the number of students on academic warning was reduced by 7%. He reported that UNL is implementing Stellic, a one-stop degree management system, to help students with degree planning, audits, early alerts, scheduling and departmental enrollment planning, and it is being piloted in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, College of Architecture, and Public Affairs and Community Service.

Interim EVC Button reported that our students compete at a very high level nationally and we have 14 students who are semifinalists and who are in contention for Fulbright scholarships, and we have an outstanding student who is competing for a Truman Scholarship which is a highly competitive national competition. He noted that 30 students have earned Gillman scholarships in 2024. He stated that we have a culture of student success that is due to the collaborated efforts of staff teams, program coordinators, and the Office of Student Life. He pointed out that in the fall 2024 semester alone there were approximately 41,000 individual advising appointments and many direct one-on-one advising appointments. He stated that the culture of student success that is prevalent on campus is due to the collaborated efforts of staff teams. He complimented Senior AVC Goodburn for her guidance on this issue.

Interim EVC Button stated that currently, 80% of freshman applications and 43% of transfer applications have been admitted, however there has been a 1% decrease or 87 resident students, which is not surprising given the decreasing demographics in Nebraska. He pointed out that out-of-state deposits are up by 12% and there has been a 34% increase in deposits with international students as well. He noted that these are all positive indicators for our net tuition going into the fall, but it is still early in the recruiting process and numbers could change. He reported that applications for housing have opened up and the campus is gearing up for Admitted Student Day on March 29th when thousands of students and their families visit campus.

Interim EVC Button stated that graduate applications continue to grow every year, and we are up 16% overall noting that we have had nearly 600 additional applications, and the majority of these students are international students. He noted that April 15th is the university deadline for students to decide if they are coming here. He stated that he is aware of the uncertainties around international travel and visas and noted that members of Graduate Studies have been regularly meeting graduate chairs and are talking with students. He thanked VC Maegan Stevens-Liska and Dean Deb Hope for answering student questions and pointed out that the international students really appreciated the outreach.

Interim EVC Button reported that we will be going back to the pre-pandemic academic year schedule for 2025-2026, noting that there will not be a January pre-session, but 8-week sessions to support our growth for online programs will be available for any courses at any level.

Interim EVC Button wanted to provide an update on a set of leadership searches. He stated that the search for the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences is underway and the on-campus interviews for the four candidates were just recently completed. He wanted to thank the search committee for their work and stated that he hopes to make an announcement very soon about who the new dean will be. He reported that the next search that will be conducted is for a Vice Chancellor for ASEM and work is currently being done to identify a search firm. He noted that a search committee will be established soon.

Interim EVC Button reported that the Executive Steering Committee of the Business Simplified Initiative met with the Executive Leadership Team and provided an update on the work of the Initiative. He stated that the next step is to establish implementation teams, and the goal is to bring more efficiency to our processes and to streamline our efforts.

Interim EVC Button reported that he really appreciated working with the Senate Executive Committee on the Faculty Background Check Policy which would be for new hires and for those faculty members who are seeking to move into an administrative position. He stated that this is the best practice in higher education, and it is in the interest of safety for our campus. He noted that we are the only university in the Big Ten that does not have this policy. He stated that the policy will be applicable for new full and part-time academic positions. He reported that we are still finalizing the policy and want to make sure it is aligned with the existing staff policy.

Interim EVC Button noted that the NU system is being reorganized and encouraged everyone to provide feedback to President Gold on how we can become a more efficient university and to advocate for new ways of how the university system is organized.

Interim EVC Button reported that he had a great conversation last week with faculty, staff, and students about the Dear Colleague Letter and the conversation gave us a great opportunity to make sure we are in compliance with Nebraska law. He noted that they continue to partner with all of the colleges and deans. He stated that he is excited to be hosting a campus community conversation about academic freedom. He reported that 119 people have signed up for the conversation and he anticipates that ideas, along with practices, and resources will be shared, especially for faculty members who may be targeted for what they teach. He stated that he hopes this is the first of many conversations to support outstanding teaching.

Professor Turkman, College of Architecture, noted that her unit is in the search process and asked if the recent letter from the administration that was sent out about a hiring freeze means that they cannot hire. Interim EVC Button stated that the search will not be affected. He stated that the hiring freeze means that a position needs to be carefully reviewed to see if it is needed. He noted that we are still hiring, but there are additional reviews that are conducted to see if the position is truly needed.

Professor Kolbe, Johnny Carson School of Theater & Film, asked what the chances are of getting visas for graduate students and new faculty members, given the current political climate. Interim EVC Button pointed out that Graduate Studies, ISSO, and others on campus work well to help incoming graduate students and faculty get visas. He stated that we will need to work diligently and get these people keyed into our resources that can assist them and noted that we want to recruit the very best we can, but you should be aware that there may be some significant lag time right now in obtaining visas.

Professor Rumann, Educational Administration, stated that while it is great to hear that our

retention numbers were the best ever, he pointed out that for indigenous students the retention rate is only at 50%. He stated that the Dear Colleague Letter, along with the loss of financial support for the Raices Project, is worrying students and he asked if there have been conversations about these issues. Interim EVC Button stated that these are concerns for all of us and highlighted that the equity gap still exists. He pointed out that we need to be mindful and keep focusing on every student's success. He reported that we are working diligently to ensure that we are in compliance with federal regulations, and we have been working to secure funding from other sources. He noted that we are in the middle of a comprehensive capital campaign and the bulk of the funds that are raised will be used for student support.

Professor Harris, Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences, noted that the university-based retirement plan has a minimum age of 26 for admittance and pointed out that this is an equity issue. Interim EVC Button stated that he will investigate this and report back on it.

Professor Bourke, School of Computing, asked how much the State appropriates to the NU system and what percentage is the \$5 million reduction to UNL's budget. Interim EVC Button reported that \$5 million represents 1% of UNL's total state-aided budget. He stated that the state appropriation percentage of the NU budget is 20.08% (FY 25), for UNL, state appropriations is 17.3% of total budget (FY 25). He pointed out that the problem is that we have already had so many budget reductions in the past, but with the Chancellor's proposed \$5 million budget reduction we are trying to do the least amount of damage as possible and the \$5 million will help us address the cashflow with the structural budget deficit for this fiscal year. He reported that a careful analysis is being carried out, and the college deans and Executive Leadership Team have been engaged in looking at the budget situation. In addition, he noted that we are also in a legislative session. He stated that VC Zeleny has extensive data on the budget and there is a lot of information about the budget on the [NU system website](#). He stated that tuition rates also need to be considered, and the Board of Regents will be addressing the rates at its June meeting. He pointed out that we need everyone advocating for the University.

Professor Bourke stated that two-thirds of the state-aided NU system's budget comes from state-appropriations and tuition. He reported that he was told that 17% of this is for UNL. He pointed out that in a previous Faculty Senate meeting the question was asked how low the state-aided budget would have to go before we are no longer considered a public university. Professor Kolbe stated that part of the frustration is that we have been told by the upper administration that we cannot continue this death by a thousand cuts. He pointed out that departments are not getting positions filled that are needed and instead of having small vertical reductions, we keep on thinning out the entire system. Interim EVC Button noted that we are all tired of doing more with less funding, but the vertical elimination process is more painful, and it is irrevocable. He stated that a \$20 million budget reduction will be transformative for UNL, and shared governance will be needed which will include the Academic Planning Committee's involvement. He pointed out we need to find a reasonable and thoughtful path for the future.

Professor Schauer, Modern Languages and Literature, asked if there was any information regarding the Raices Project which has lost its federal funding. Interim EVC Button reported that there are a lot of dedicated people who are working to secure funding so we have a program that can be maintained, and there are a lot of people who want to help with the program which is critically needed due to the shortage of teachers. However, he said we need to make sure we are in compliance with state and federal law.

Professor Meiklejohn, School of Biological Sciences, noted that many junior faculty members are facing a different landscape for conducting their research work which could take longer than previously planned due to the federal mandates and restrictions. He suggested that their start up packages and time for promotion and tenure be extended. Interim EVC Button pointed out that when researchers face unique circumstances there is a process to request extensions to start-up funding and mandatory promotion and tenure review periods. He noted we have had a 70-year

partnership with the federal government which is now under threat, and this is a good reason for us to look at each case individually to consider whether adjustments need to be made. He stated that he is anticipating the need for tenure clock extensions and stated that faculty members should first bring their concerns to their unit leaders. He noted that the situation with F&A fees is currently in the courts.

Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, stated that since the situation may take four or more years, she suggested that some of the expectations for research for promotion and tenure might be loosened. She asked whether there are processes in place to consider this. Professor Gel, Supply Chain Management and Analytics, asked if there was the possibility of obtaining other sources of funding for research. Interim EVC Button noted that there are a number of things that can be done. He pointed out that promotion and tenure start first in the units, and he can initiate conversations with all of the college deans about the questions that were just raised, and this could open up the conversation of whether we want to reconsider the existing promotion and tenure policies. He stated that many units encourage seeking other funding sources, but if it is funding for research, we need to see the product and the scholarship that will come from the research work. He suggested that faculty members should engage with their chair and dean about seeking other funding resources. He noted that units should be connected to their Foundation representative to seek private foundation opportunities.

Professor Gay, Physics and Astronomy, pointed out that the staff and faculty have been cut to the bone to the extent that it is impacting the teaching and research missions of the university, yet we have administrative bloat. He stated that the administrative bloat could be reduced without affecting the core mission of the university.

4.0 Approval of February 4, 2025 Minutes

President Eklund asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Tschetter, History moved for approval. Motion was seconded by Professor Leiter, College of Law. The Faculty Senate approved the motion, there were no abstentions.

5.0 Ombuds Report (Professor Franco Cruz and Professor Pytlik Zillig)

Professor Franco Cruz stated that he and Professor Pytlik Zillig have a .20% FTE to serve as Ombuds for all faculty members at UNL. He noted that as Ombuds they are neither advocates for any individual, or group, nor do they represent university management. He stated that they facilitate informal processes and meetings are confidential, unless there is a threat of immediate harm to the individual when they need to notify the police, and no notes or records are maintained of what is said during the meeting.

Professor Franco Cruz reported that from July 2023-June 2024, the number of engagements with UNL faculty members was 69, from which 32 cases emerged. He noted that faculty from all ranks use the Ombuds' services, and the top issues raised were about working environment, conflict with mentor/supervisor/chair, bullying or perceived bullying, and formal policies/merit evaluations or promotion. He reported that 56% of individuals indicated that there was improvement with the issue after meeting with the Ombuds, and 13% engaged in formal processes or left UNL.

Professor Franco Cruz stated that the Ombuds meet with the other NU Ombuds and also the Big Ten Ombuds and are involved with the IOA. He noted that they also provided guidance to Austin Peay State University to establish their Ombuds Services.

Professor Franco Cruz reported that in addition to providing an annual report to the Faculty Senate, the Ombuds give presentations at the New Faculty Orientation Fair, meet with Associate Deans, and provide a presentation to the UNL Postdoctoral Association. He stated that they also have meetings with the Counseling and Psychological Services and with the Office of Disability Services. He reported that an office user evaluation survey was established.

Professor Franco Cruz stated that the Ombuds have made recommendations that UNL address policies that are out-of-date, conflicting and unclear. Another recommendation is for UNL to provide support for assisting groups/units/departments with issues pertaining to communication, culture, and working environments.

Professor Franco Cruz stated that the goals of the Ombuds are to host the Big Ten Ombuds' 2025 meeting, to have a UNL conflict ecosystem meeting, and to expand its outreach across the campus to facilitate services. He noted that they are always willing to come to speak with departments and colleges about the services they can offer and how they can help provide information to faculty members.

6.0 Committee Reports

6.1 Parking Advisory Committee (Professor Leiter and Director Carpenter)

Professor Leiter, Chair of the Parking Advisory Committee, reported that parking fees would not be increasing. However, there are some modest increases to parking fines for violations and meter parking is increasing from \$1.25 an hour to \$1.50 an hour. He stated that parking violations are usually illegal entry or exits from the parking garages and driving through the gate. He stated that illegal entry will increase to \$50 but if a parking gate is damaged the fee will increase to \$100. He noted that Parking and Transit Services is self-funded and most of its revenue is generated through parking fees.

Professor Gay asked if parking is enforced for the A lots on Saturdays because there are many students who use these lots on that day. Director Carpenter stated that typically after 3:00 p.m. permits can be used in different lots and on the weekends the lots are open to all permit holders.

Professor Gel had a question about the need to swipe your ID card to get into a parking garage. Director Carpenter pointed out that if a permit holder has a front license plate, the new system will read the license plate so there is no need to swipe a card.

Professor Pierobon, Mathematics, reported that his wife and he have their cars listed on his permit and with the old system it worked fine but with the license plate system it is not working well. Director Carpenter stated that as long as one vehicle is used at a time and the license plates are up to date, you can have two vehicles on one permit.

Professor Kolbe pointed out that motorcycle parking in some areas is no longer available. Director Carpenter stated that some of the motorcycle parking has been moved to other locations. He stated that some of the spaces on the south side of the campus have been moved to the north side of the campus in the Loop.

6.2 University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (Professor Jones)

Professor Jones, Chair of the UGCC, noted that Senators received the report. She stated that 57 new courses were approved, 238 courses were changed, 30 were removed, 16 new ACE courses were certified, and 8 ACE courses were removed. She reported that this year the Committee is going through the ACE recertification process for ACE 1, 2, and 3 this academic year, and ACE 4, 5, and 6 are scheduled for recertification during the 2025-2026 academic year.

6.3 Graduate Council (Dean Hope)

Dean Hope noted that the Senators had the report. She wanted to express appreciation to those faculty members who serve on the Graduate Council, noting that they do a lot of work for our graduate programs. She reported that one graduate certificate program was approved, modifications were made to a master's program, and from August 2023 through May 2024, 55 new graduate courses were approved, 141 were revised, and 35 were inactivated.

Dean Hope reported that the Graduate Council approved the change in CIP Code for Professional

Accountancy. She stated that the Council aligned UNL's policy with the system policy to allow junior enrollment in 800 level courses for students in an accelerated master's program.

Professor Gel asked what an accelerated master's program is. Dean Hope noted that some people call it a 4+1 program and it allows students to get a master's degree a year faster because students get to double count up to 12 credit hours. Professor Gel asked if the Graduate College determines the criteria for admission to these programs or whether admissions will be done at the local level. Dean Hope stated that each program would submit a proposal about how they want to handle the accelerated program, they would specify the specific pathway of courses and identify those that would double count, and they would determine what kind of admission criteria they are going to use. Professor Gel asked if the accelerated master's program could be for an online program. Dean Hope stated that it could. She suggested looking at the [Accelerated Master's page](#) on the Graduate Studies website to see more information.

Professor Bourke stated that the School of Computing, where he is an undergraduate advisor, has signed up students for their 4+1 program but pointed out that the advisors desperately need a FAQ page or information on what kind of funding can be used for the 4+1 program. He asked if the 4+1 courses would be covered by FAFSA or the GI bill noting that some of the funding sources only allow up to four years of funding for a program. He stated that having a comprehensive list of available funding sources for these programs would be very helpful to advisors. Dean Hope stated that there is a shortened version of information from Justin Chase Brown, Director of Scholarships & Financial Aid, about overall financial aid but Professor Bourke may be looking for something more specific and Graduate Studies can work with him to put more information together.

Professor Gel asked if the one year of a 4+1 program can be from a different college, such as the undergraduate in engineering but get a master's in statistics. Dean Hope stated that as long as the people in the programs and the deans agree to it, that should be fine.

7.0 Unfinished Business

7.1 Proposed Revisions to Parking Advisory Committee Membership

President Eklund noted that the motion to revise the membership of the Parking Advisory Committee was presented at the last meeting, but it needs a motion to approve. Professor Leiter moved to approve the revisions. Professor Tschetter seconded the motion. Professor Leiter noted that the revisions decrease the number of faculty and staff members, pointing out that the Committee has difficulty attaining a quorum at meetings with the current membership requirement. President Eklund asked if there was any discussion on the motion. Hearing none he asked the Senate to vote. Motion was approved, there were no abstentions.

7.2 Motion to Approve the Ballot for Elections to the Academic Planning Committee, Academic Rights & Responsibilities Committee, and the Academic Rights & Responsibilities Panel

President Eklund pointed out that the motion was presented at the last meeting and comes from the Committee on Committees which is a Faculty Senate Committee, so it does not need a second. He asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, he asked the Senate to vote. The motion was approved. Coordinator Griffin noted that the ballot will be sent to the faculty via a survey.

8.0 New Business

8.1 Open Mic

Response to Dear Colleague Letter from the Department of Education

Professor PeeksMease noted that the Chancellor stated that we "are law-abiding citizens" but then also stated we would not compromise our values, but he did not address what happens when these two things conflict. He pointed out that when he mentioned the Dear Colleague Letter, neither the

Chancellor or Interim EVC Button Prior uttered the words “diversity” or “inclusion.” He noted that even prior to the Dear Colleague Letter the Chancellor cut the Office of Diversity and Inclusion budget, despite the outcry from the Faculty Senate and the Academic Planning Committee’s recommendation to not cut the ODI budget. The Chancellor then went on to dismantle the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and this was done at a time when the faculty were not on campus. He pointed out that all of this was done while diversity and inclusion were still part of our N2025 strategic plan.

Professor PeeksMease noted that the chancellor has alienated many of the faculty, staff and students on campus by the action of eliminating the ODI and now expects the faculty and staff to do the work the office did. He questioned what has changed on this campus with the elimination of the ODI. He stated that there is significant discontent with the administration for advocating issues related to diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, he finds it ironic to have the Presidential Administration and State Legislature dictating what faculty can and cannot stand for and teach. He asked who is better served to speak for themselves and their needs than those carrying out the teaching and research.

Professor PeeksMease stated that the UNL administration has, contrary to what they say, acted based on fear. He noted that Rosa Parks also felt fear when outsiders told her that she couldn’t sit at the front of the bus, but it feels like this administration is willing to give up their seats after so many people have worked so hard to fight for that right. He stated that his hope is that the Faculty Senate will hold this administration accountable.

Professor PeeksMease reported that the Chancellor stated today in an e-mail message that “we must continue to make our compelling case to state leaders that there is no better investment than the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.” Professor PeeksMease said very clearly that without this University there is no Nebraska. He pointed out that the state and federal government believe they hold all the power. He stated that the faculty, staff, and students do “hold the cards,” we do have power, and we can speak the truth to those who attempt to dictate who we are and who we should be.

Professor Werum, Sociology, stated that even though she clearly speaks for herself today, she is reasonably certain that she speaks for the vast majority of her colleagues in her department, and in fact for colleagues across our institution.

Professor Weum stated that she happens to have a PhD both in a STEM discipline, as well as in a humanities field, plus over 30 years of professional experience. Her collaborators hail from climate science, computer science, engineering, and various social sciences. Some of her research deals with the causes and consequences of educational inequalities. Other projects deal with the causes and consequences of protests, or the societal consequences of climate extremes. Virtually all of her projects have in the past been funded by federal agencies as well as private foundations. And yes, one of her current, NSF funded projects has made the radar screen of the senator from Texas known for absconding to Cancun while his constituents were freezing to death during an ice storm. What is that grant about? She stated that it is on the impact of military service on people's educational and occupational outcomes. You see, it has words like race, gender, and diversity in it – never mind that it directly addresses the civilian reintegration of veterans, who are disproportionately affected by disabilities, and thus rings every single DEI bell imaginable. She stated that quite clearly, these efforts to impugn DEI initiatives seek to dismantle laws ranging from the 1964 Civil Rights Act to the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, and the 1994 USERRA, which prohibits discrimination against veterans.

Professor Werum stated that the same attacks also constitute an existential threat not just to her entire discipline, but to many scientific disciplines. Sociology has a specific scope of study that informs the fundamental empirical questions we pose: *What are the dimensions, causes and consequences of social problems and inequalities, whether intended or otherwise? How can we*

minimize inequalities and problems most effectively? She stated that at UNL, she teaches a range of courses on race and ethnicity, sex and gender, the causes and consequences of educational inequalities, of social movements and protests, and of social policies. There isn't a single subject in her discipline unaffected by these attacks. The American Sociological Association has joined the American Federation of Teachers in a lawsuit challenging the so-called "*Dear Colleague* letter" the Department of Education released on February 14, 2025. These illegal mandates constitute a direct attack on our constitutional rights as individuals and as entities. They are a direct challenge to everyone's 1st Amendment rights, never mind challenges to academic freedom in all its dimensions, the freedom to teach and do research, and the freedom to learn for our students. If you think that this isn't your discipline's problem, because the schoolyard bullies will only go after other people, remember this is how fascism always takes root. She stated that she doubts the need to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer to you, but it is time to stand up and actively resist, rather than duck and cover, and appease the enemies of democracy. It's time to call a spade a spade. Our mission as an institution and higher education at large are under attack. Our leaders and the general public need to hear the faculty loudly and clearly.

Professor Rumann stated, speaking as a member of the Faculty Senate that he appreciates the comments from Professor PeekMease and Professor Werum. He pointed out that the faculty needs to know that the Senate needs to advocate for the faculty and the students. He stated that the Dear Colleague Letter makes it clear that the federal administration wants to de-mantle higher education and noted that we must stand up to these bullies, because the university is reacting to fear. He pointed out that there was a special meeting of the Board of Regents to revise the Regents Bylaws because they were reacting to the Dear Colleague Letter and reacting to fear of what the federal government will do to our research efforts. He reported that a group of Native Elders in Lincoln have contacted the administration asking them to please take action to defend diversity. He stated that we must take a stand for our students and stated that this is a call to action for all of us to speak to our legislators and constituents to defend higher education, academic freedom, and diversity and inclusion.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:46 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 2:30 p.m., and will be held in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A and via Zoom. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.