

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Bearnes, Eklund, Leiter, Lewis, Pierobon, Reimer, Shrader, Tschetter, VanderPlas

Absent: Baesu, Gorman, Gruverman, Vakilzadian

Date: Tuesday, May 27, 2025

Location: 203 Alexander 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*)

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

2.0 Joint Accreditation (AVC Goodburn, Director Sollars)

Shrader asked what the genesis was for the HLC application for joint accreditation of UNL and UNMC. Sollars stated that it had been on the minds of administrators for quite a while, but she is not clear when the actual application was generated. She reported that she learned about the joint application being submitted in February and stated that it is when she had the first opportunity to read the application. She noted that she is the HLC accreditation liaison officer for UNL.

Shrader asked if she would have been involved from the beginning with accreditation plans. Sollars stated that it is typically the case that both institutions work together to prepare merger applications, but it made sense for our joint accreditation application to be handled at the system level because our application is slightly different than the typical application for joint accreditation. She pointed out that in the typical cases one of the campuses is stronger than the other campus, and the stronger campus assumes some level of control of both institutions. However, in our case we have two fully functioning, well accredited campuses that are both thought of very highly by HLC. She stated the NU system wanted to keep the identities of each of the campuses in place under joint accreditation, and the typical change of control processes was not exactly set up to do this. Leiter asked if that is where the branch designations came up for each of the campuses if we achieve joint accreditation. Sollars stated that the idea of the two-branch campus structure just came up recently after discussion about what we wanted to accomplish with the joint accreditation. She stated that the two branches would be equal co-partners with each campus retaining their own branding, hiring processes, and governance structures. She noted that we still need to figure out what the exact mechanisms will be for shared processes that we will be developing in order to facilitate any joint approval and reporting mechanisms. She stated that HLC requires the basic structure to be in place, but other things, such as some of the processes, do not need to be fully determined at this stage of the application approval process.

Eklund stated that he has heard that the UNMC faculty are not enthusiastic about joint accreditation. Sollars stated that it is her understanding that UNMC is fine with the currently proposed structure. Leiter noted that the UNL and UNMC Libraries have reported statistics jointly for many years now. Goodburn pointed out that combining UNL and UNMC's research expenditures was pushed under President Carter's term.

Sollars pointed out that we have six months to reply if HLC denies the application, although it is her understanding that the application is sound and generally accords with HLC expectations. She noted that UNL was supposed to submit their comprehensive reaccreditation materials in 2026-2027. Leiter asked if UNMC is accredited by the HLC. Both Sollars and Goodburn stated that UNMC is accredited by the HLC. Goodburn stated that if the visit goes well and HLC approves the merger in November, then UNMC would have to get rid of their accreditation number and UNL's accreditation would be named University of Nebraska.

Shrader asked if we have a clear picture of what the practical implications would be for UNL with the joint accreditation. Goodburn stated that one of the benefits is that it would help increase our retention and graduation rates. She pointed out that currently there are approximately 250 incoming freshmen that want to be in a nursing program. She stated that they would take two years of courses here and then they would transfer to UNMC, or to another nursing program in the state. Currently their transfer is seen as a loss in our retention numbers but with the joint accreditation that would change, and we would retain those numbers, and it could increase our graduation rates by about 4%. She stated that another potential benefit would be having access to the libraries at UNMC and UNL and Sollars noted that this would be very beneficial to faculty on both campuses. Goodburn stated that there are several units trying to develop a public health policy major at UNL, and with joint accreditation the UNL students could take online courses at UNMC, although she noted that we would need to figure out how this could be done. She pointed out that we could create an admissions process where students would only have to apply once and it would be a more seamless transition for the students.

Tschetter stated that faculty governance is a big concern and while she sees the positive aspects of joint accreditation, the faculty governance issue needs to be addressed. She pointed out that there had been very little discussion prior to the application. Sollars stated that the system-level administrators felt that from their perspective much of what was being done was entirely regulatory. She pointed out that joint accreditation does not mean that we must combine faculty senates and noted that there's not going to be any real changes to the structure of UNL and UNMC because of the joint accreditation.

Pierobon stated that the general perception of many faculty members is that joint accreditation is going to change everything, and there are many questions about it. He stated that there needed to be earlier and better communication about applying for joint accreditation and how it would impact the campuses. Leiter pointed out that when the Executive Committee learned about joint accreditation it was presented that the application was already written and submitted. He noted that the administration should have first said that it was thinking of applying for joint accreditation and then should have asked the faculty of both UNL and UNMC for their perspectives on the idea.

Tschetter stated that the general attitude of administrators not communicating with the faculty until things are further down the road is a real problem. She stated that it occurs with the budget and with other things such as joint accreditation and it breeds distrust.

VanderPlas asked if joint accreditation would make it easier in the future to incorporate UNK and UNO into the system level accreditation. Goodburn stated that restructuring is an administrative decision that the President's office could undertake now. It would not require joint accreditation. Leiter asked if we would still be considered UNL. Sollars stated that we could still manage our branding so we could still be called UNL to maintain our distinct identity. She noted that we are still the flagship and land-grant institution.

Tschetter asked how they see faculty governance playing out if we are jointly accredited with UNMC. Sollars stated that there would be a real advantage for campus' faculty leadership to begin this conversation. She stated that it might be beneficial for UNL to be proactive and to propose a few joint meetings with UNMC to allow the two campuses to learn more about each other's culture and governance expectations.

Sollars reported that she believed that the schedule for the HLC team visit would be posted on the system's website tomorrow morning.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 College of Engineering Scholarship of Engagement Fellows Program

Griffin stated that congratulations need to be extended to Pierobon, who is one of four engineering faculty members to have earned a two-year fellowship in the College of Engineering's Scholarship of Engagement Fellows Program. Pierobon reported that the fellows will be traveling across the state to develop projects that connect with communities and people across Nebraska. He stated that the four fellows will tell communities about the research they are doing, and he will be visiting reservations and centers for addiction recovery as well as meeting with city mayors and city councils. He noted that he is preparing an NSF center proposal to design and implement computational frameworks that can produce accessible mental health tools across the state, especially in rural communities, and he wants to get the community to co-create part of the research. Shrader noted that the Journalism and Mass Communications College is talking about doing something similar to get the message out about the work the College is doing. Pierobon stated that the Engineering program is a pilot that may be expanded at the college and possibly campus level.

4.0 Approval of April 29, 2025, and May 6, 2025 Minutes

Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to the April 29, 2025, minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Tschetter moved and Reimer seconded, approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

Shrader asked if there were any revisions to May 6, 2025, minutes. Hearing none he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Reimer moved and Tschetter seconded approval of the minutes. Motion was then approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Revisiting Proposal for Faculty Members to Respond to Vicious Comments on Teaching Evaluations

Eklund pointed out that our current teaching evaluation system is something from another generation. He stated that the students now are from a generation where they are used to being able to make anonymous comments, sometimes derogatory in nature, without being held accountable for their remarks. He reported that he recently had a colleague share an evaluation that contained brutal, vicious and untrue comments. He questioned if there is a way we could consider a means by which a faculty member can respond to viscous, untrue comments.

Lewis stated that she appreciates this conversation and noted that a number of questions come to mind. She stated that the annual review of faculty members is done differently in different units, but the department chairs conduct the annual review. She reported that CEHS changed the teaching evaluation to focus on learning and to provide a more impartial response, but the new form does not prevent a student from voicing concerns. She pointed out that teaching evaluations should be about what the student has learned from a course. She suggested that tackling this issue might be an opportunity to have some cross-college communication and problem solving to resolve the issue. She noted that there needs to be careful referencing though because research has shown that women and under-represented faculty members are judged more harshly by students and department chairs could use these evaluations negatively against a faculty member. She stated that when a faculty member goes up for tenure and promotion, they are the only person who can put anything in their file.

Tschetter noted that she has mixed feelings on the subject. She stated that anything that makes someone different from the norm usually gets judged harder by students, but students need to have an outlet to identify if there are problems with an instructor. She pointed out that the current process for teaching evaluations is terrible and very few students submit online evaluations.

Lewis questioned whether the Senate could be more involved in looking into this issue. She suggested creating an ad hoc committee with a representative from each college with the charge that the ad hoc committee come up with a list of the issues and possible solutions. Shrader stated that the Executive Committee should re-examine the proposal provided by Professor Sonmez this February. Eklund stated that faculty should be able to write a letter in response to extremely negative comments.

5.2 Title II Compliance – Deadline Date

Griffin noted that Professor Harris, School of Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences, has requested a meeting with someone from General Counsel and perhaps others to discuss the concerns he raised at the May 6 Faculty Senate meeting about Title II Compliance. Shrader stated that he would contact General Counsel to see if a meeting could be arranged.

5.3 Proposed Letter from Faculty Senate Presidents of UNL, UNO, UNMC, and UNK

Shrader reported that the other three campuses have created a letter about their concerns of the proposed revisions to the Regents Bylaws. He noted that the letters have been approved by their Faculty Senate, and they would like a similar letter from UNL. The Executive Committee discussed and revised the letter to raise the point about getting clarification on what the phrase “in consultation with” means in the proposed Bylaws revisions.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Response of the May 27 HLC Accreditation Presentation

The Executive Committee had a brief discussion about the frequently asked questions session with President Gold regarding the application for joint accreditation with the HLC. It was noted that there were only 34 people in attendance.

6.2 Agenda Items for Chancellor Bennett

The Executive Committee identified the following agenda items for Chancellor Bennett:

The Executive Committee was told by you during the December 10th meeting (<https://facultysenate.unl.edu/sites/unl.edu/academic-affairs.faculty-senate/files/media/file/24Dec10mins.pdf>) that the plan was to conduct a national search for the Director of the Gender and Sexuality Center. Can you provide an update with what is going on with this search.

Will there be a search for the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation?

What are we doing as leaders and educators to prepare for not just a few but scores of athletes on campus making hundreds of thousands of dollars? Is there any information on how these funds are impacting the academic performance of these athletes?

What is the university doing to ensure that graduate students have sufficient support for the summer? What are the rules for notifying these decisions to allow graduate students adequate time to apply for internships? International students are having a hard time getting internships this year. Are there any resources available to students who are having financial difficulties? Are there additional supports for international students who cannot get unrelated jobs (e.g. food service) due to visa restrictions?

Is there a plan in case the federal government starts coming after the University like it has done recently to other universities?

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.