

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Baesu, Bearnese, Eklund, Gorman, Leiter, Lewis, Pierobon, Shrader, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, VanderPlas

Absent: Gruverman, Reimer

Date: Tuesday, September 16, 2025

Location: Nebraska Union, Big Ten Conference Room

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 EVC Button

Shrader stated that he wanted to acknowledge the professionalism of the EVC for notifying in person, the news to departments that their academic unit has been identified for possible elimination. EVC Button noted that it was a painful process to notify the units, and he cannot underscore how difficult it was to deliver the news to our colleagues. He stated that Interim VC Heng-Moss has been doing the same thing in IANR. He pointed out it was a sad and challenging day for UNL and noted that everyone at UNL believes in a strong R1 university, but when you face the level of divestment in the university after we have already cut \$75 million and our budget and we are now facing an additional \$27.5 million, it gets much more difficult to reduce the budget without having significant negative impacts. He stated that the investment from the state and tuition revenue are not keeping up with our expenses and the skyrocketing costs of insurance all contribute to what we can spend. He noted that previous budget reductions were horizontal, but there has been a call to make more strategic and vertical cuts, not only from the Board of Regents, but by faculty and staff members at UNL as well.

EVC Button stated that he has been taking more calls from the media, and the Executive Leadership Team is trying to be responsive and transparent. Shrader asked if EVC Button felt that the people who need to hear the message of how devastating the cuts are to the campus were clearly getting the message. EVC Button stated that he believes so and pointed out that in President Gold's State of the University address he talked about how the NU system model for allocating state funding to campuses has not been modified for many years. President Gold then spoke clearly about the reduction (in real, inflation-adjusted dollars) the NU system faces over the biennium. He reported that the Board of Regents had approved a request for a 3.5% budget increase, but we only received a .625% increase for each year of the biennium, which when you add in the inflation rate of nearly 5%, you are already talking about a significant reduction in your budget. However, he noted that we need to be mindful that the State is facing its own fiscal deficit.

Lewis asked what kind of lobbyist work is going on and whether the University should hire a new lobbyist. EVC Button reported that the University recently changed our federal lobbyist firm to Cornerstone Government Affairs in Washington DC and noted that Associate Vice President for Government Relations Matt Bloomstedt and Vice President for External Relations Chris Kratochvil is also involved with working with the state legislature.

Leiter stated that the university needs to do a better job by connecting us with the public and the legislators and explaining how important the faculty work is. He pointed out that we should have a PR group within the university to get the message out to the public.

2.1 How were the metrics that were used in the budget reduction plan determined and what considerations besides metrics were used in the decision-making process?

EVC Button reminded the Executive Committee that the metrics were shared with the Committee earlier this summer and were discussed with all Department Executive Officers in May. He noted that the metrics were developed over a series of months with the assistance of college leadership team, the Academic Planning Committee, and other shared governance partners and the metrics are in alignment with existing criteria that is stated in the APC's Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reallocations and Reductions which was approved by the Faculty Senate. He stated that the metrics align with the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Post-secondary Education.

EVC Button reported that the guiding principles for instructional resource metrics were growth in the unit/program; student demand; efficiency, are the resources in the unit/program used efficiently; effectiveness, what are the student success metrics; and how much tuition does the unit generate. He pointed out that all metrics are weighted equally and include undergraduate, graduate, and professional data.

EVC Button stated that the guiding principles for selecting research resource metrics were: research stature, what level is the unit contributing to elevating UNL's research stature; prominence and reputation, how does the unit compare to its peers; resource generation what level of external sponsorship is being received relative to state budget; and growth, is externally sponsored research growing. He added that the equal weighting of instruction and research aligns with the primary mission of UNL for high quality education and advancing knowledge. He stated that the z scores that were calculated for each metric were weighted by each unit's apportionment percentages for instruction and research to reflect the specific distribution of time and effort within each unit.

EVC Button noted that the APC's purview is to address elimination or reductions in academic programs but there are other factors impacting the budget reduction plan such as administrative cuts and the VSIP.

VanderPlas pointed out that Statistics has three new faculty members and the data analytics program is only three years old so some of the CCPE metrics should not apply

because the first contingency of undergraduates will not graduate until May. She noted that there are only two other R1 universities that do not have a Statistics department and she reported that the feedback to the department has been that they are doing what they have been asked to do. She stated that some of the operationalized decisions might need to be reconsidered. EVC Button stated that VanderPlas raised some important points but noted that many things have to be balanced in the decision-making process, and consideration was given as to the long- and short-term goals. He stated that the APC has discussed some of these issues that were raised, and the Committee will continue to discuss them.

Shrader asked if the departments proposed for elimination were given notice several years ago that they would need to make improvements. He noted that it is difficult to make significant changes in only a few months as compared to being able to make improvements over a three-, four-, or five-year period. EVC Button stated that no program was on a probation list, and every program periodically goes through an academic program review where strengths and weaknesses are identified.

Shrader asked if the data used to determine the metrics was the most recent. EVC Button reported that, in order to have consistent application, data was gathered from 2020 through 2023-2024. He pointed out that there needs to be consistent application and we went back to a time period when we had consistent data.

VanderPlas asked if any consideration for variability was given for small departments. EVC Button stated that this can be taken into account. He pointed out that people need to remember that no single metric is weighed more heavily than another. He stated that the qualitative review of each unit also allowed the ELT to understand variability within the data for smaller programs

EVC Button stated that in order for us to be a university that is strategic and grounded in aspirations for student success and ambitious about rejoining the AAU, the metrics are going to be a part of our planning and action going forward in order to get us to achieve our goals and to track our progress. He stated that the administration welcomes feedback and critique because that will enable us to improve.

Gorman asked if all faculty members can access Tableau and whether faculty can look at data in real time. EVC Button stated that he expects unit chairs and deans' offices are sharing the metrics with the faculty in their departments, and he believes the faculty have access to much of the data that is reported in Tableau. He suggested that there could be a dashboard in the future where everyone that has access to Tableau can view all of the data.

Pierobon asked EVC Button if the budget reduction proposal that was recently made public was responsive to recommendations of the APC. EVC Button affirmed that it was, and pointed out that the APC will still be weighing in on the proposed reductions and there will be public hearings for each of the units that have been identified. He noted that

the ELT does not want to have to cut academic programs but at the end of the day we still have to cut \$27.5 million.

VanderPlas asked how the university will mitigate the damage from the budget reduction proposal. She noted that faculty and students are already looking to go elsewhere. EVC Button stated that UNL is a very efficient campus across the board, but the rebuilding process will take years across the entire university. He noted that the VSIP alone will change the university, and it will take a long time to recover from the loss of those senior faculty members.

Shrader pointed out that the recent revisions to the Regents Bylaws deliberately left out creative activity in the apportionment of duties for faculty members and the AAU metrics appears to not be beneficial to creative activity. He asked how we reconcile this discrepancy as we move. EVC Button pointed out that when he looks at the metrics analysis, several programs in humanities and creative fields are at the top of the metrics so the metrics are not skewed against them. He noted that if you have strong student demand, an efficient unit, doing well relative to other schools across the country, the high performing unit will be recognized. (Appended information from EVC Button obtained after the meeting: Appended below is language from recent guidance from the Office of the Provost related to new apportionment categories. This is relevant to a concern raised during the Senate Executive meeting.

Apportionment options (expressed as a percentage) are as follows:

- a. Research
 - i. Includes research and creative activity, as defined by the discipline.
 - ii. Includes directing the research/creative activity of graduate students, technicians, post-docs, and interacting with faculty collaborators.
 - iii. May include research linked to the other apportionment areas (e.g., research on pedagogical change in instruction).)

Vakilzadian asked if we will reach the \$5.5 million in VSIP. EVC Button stated that the applications are robust, and he can confidently say that we will hit the number. He pointed out that applications can still be submitted until the end of the month but noted that applications will need to be approved and then there is a period of time when an applicant can withdraw their application. Vakilzadian asked if there is a percentage of applications that will be accepted. EVC Button stated that the Chancellor needs to approve the applications, but he thinks there will be a high acceptance rate. Lewis asked what percentage of VSIP funds would be used to hire people. EVC Button stated that he would propose that we have a strategic hiring pool for the campus from the VSIP money and we will use the metrics to inform strategic resource allocation decisions. He noted that cluster hiring is already being thought about in order to do some rebuilding in key areas. He reported that our external research awards are higher this year than last year at this time, and he could envision some of the strategic hiring could be more collaborative team based for working with UNMC faculty.

Vakilzadian asked if Foundation funds could be used for hiring purposes. EVC Button pointed out that it would be difficult for a department to pay full salary and benefits and a

start-up package from a Foundation account. Nonetheless, Foundation funds are critical to our faculty recruitment and retention efforts and can be used in creative ways to provide bridge support for several years. He pointed out that in most cases the position would need to be on a state-supported line.

2.2 Can the APC information request document be shared confidentially with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee?

EVC Button explained that the document provided some brief paragraphs that helped explain the proposed reductions. He stated that a document along with each unit's metrics, a FAQ document, and definitions for the metrics, will be sent out tomorrow to the impacted units. He pointed out that he believed that every unit had seen their specific metrics, but he found out that this was not universally the case. He stated that he wants to make sure every impacted unit gets the chance to see their metrics.

Eklund asked if we will be doing a little more partnering in the future with our sister campuses and if we are looking at an official merger of UNL and UNMC for reporting purposes. He stated that there seems to be a lot of necessary steps towards moving back to just having a University of Nebraska and asked if there is any type of unofficial timeline for restructuring the university. EVC Button stated that he believes the timeline is the same that President Gold has stated. He pointed out that President Gold has consistently said that UNL and UNMC is applying for joint accreditation. He noted that if the HLC approves our application, there will need to be a shared governance body between UNL and UNMC and the Faculty Senate will need to be involved in this.

2.3 Enrollment Numbers – this summer we were being told that enrollment numbers were looking positive, yet the numbers show that we had a slight decrease. Any idea of what happened and how this will impact our budget situation? How were UNK and UNO's enrollment numbers?

EVC Button reported that overall, our enrollment was basically flat, which is reasonable given the current climate we are in. He noted that the majority of the melt was in graduate and professional students. He stated that with changes in funding due to the loss of federal grants, units cannot support as many graduate students, and there is a great deal of uncertainty for international students due to the regulatory climate. He stated that there had been a pause in visa appointments which impacted international students.

EVC Button stated that despite the dip in graduate and professional students, our net tuition overall is strongly positive compared to last year's number. He reported that we have had an increase of over 10% in first-time out-of-state freshman students and our net tuition has increased by 5%. He stated that there has also been a decline in our remissions numbers too as we fund these with other resources.

2.4 Will there be any restructuring of the business centers?

EVC Button reported that there are no plans to restructure the business centers, but if there is less demand due to having less faculty members, we may have to consider changes to business centers. He pointed out that we will continue to look at efficiencies across the campus.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Faculty Senate Resolution

Shrader reported that he has sent the Faculty Senate resolution to the Board of Regents, to President Gold, to Chancellor Bennett, and to EVC Button. He noted that he received a response from President Gold and EVC Button.

3.2 President's Newsletter

Shrader stated that Griffin is reminding him that he needs to get out a President's newsletter, the sooner the better.

4.0 Approval of August 26, 2025 and September 9, 2025, Minutes

The Executive Committee decided to keep the August 26th minutes on the table until a more summarized version can be created. Shrader asked if there were any further revisions to September 9, 2025 minutes. Shrader asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Gorman moved and Vakilzadian seconded approving the minutes. Motion approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

5.1 Finalizing Executive Committee Goals

The Executive Committee reviewed the final draft of the Executive Committee goals which will be presented to the Faculty Senate at the October 7 meeting. Baesu suggested that the Faculty Senate should explore the creation of an ad hoc committee to examine the current state of academic freedom on campus. Lewis pointed out that the local AAUP chapter focuses on academic freedom and suggested that the Executive Committee meet with them periodically to discuss the issue.

The Executive Committee finalized the Executive Committee goals. Baesu moved to approve the goals. Motion seconded by Vakilzadian and approved by the Executive Committee.

5.2 Proposed Revisions to ARRC Procedures Update

Lewis reported that the new ARRC Chair, Professor Kubick, will be meeting with VC Davis and EVC Button to talk about the proposed revisions to the ARRC procedures that were approved by the Faculty Senate last year. Lewis stated that Kubick will try to get them to forward the revisions to President Gold's office so they can be included on the next Board of Regents agenda for approval.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Agenda Items for Chancellor Bennett

The Executive Committee identified the following agenda items for the Chancellor for next week's meeting with him:

- What effects do you think the budget reductions will have on students and on the teaching and research mission of the university?

- Can you characterize what the additional \$6.5 million reduction will be used for?
- What are your strategies to reach out to the campus community during the budget crisis?
- Do you have any idea as to how we address any future budget shortfalls?
- We have been told that the spiraling insurance costs have contributed to the university budget shortfall. Is the university doing anything to try and counteract these rising costs?

The meeting was adjourned at 5:06 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, at 2:30 pm. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.