

## UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES

February 3, 2026

Presidents John Shrader, Rich Leiter, and Pete Eklund, Presiding

### 1.0 Call to Order

President Shrader called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

President Shrader said “Good afternoon and welcome to our February meeting of the full faculty senate. We are now in order. As we gather today, I’m struck by the moment we find ourselves. Still suffering the trauma, the fallout of millions of dollars of budget reductions, the loss of jobs – among our faculty, our staff, and the potential loss of students, and possibly students who will not be here in the future.

A little more than two weeks ago we spent about 85 minutes with the university president and the interim chancellor – on her fourth day on the job. They listened and the president admitted what he told me in private, that ‘mistakes were made’ in the process of cutting the budget. We heard the words ‘transparency’ and ‘trust’ - how many times? Yet, 24 hours later we get a letter via email – from both of them – basically saying it’s a done deal, we are moving on.

So, in the last several months we have sent warning signs, publicly and privately, starting way back in the summer .... that things are really amiss here on our campus. We did so in private with the president and we did so in public, in hearings, at the board of regents, in this body. We were the first body to note ‘no confidence’ for the chancellor.

And yet, here we are.

These are words directly from the president and interim chancellor’s letter to us: “During a highly difficult process to reduce the UNL budget, we wholeheartedly support the leadership team and the values that guided their work, even as we recognize the profound effect these decisions have had on our academic community. The team – they wrote – “acted with integrity and care.”

Nowhere in this message, or in any since, do we hear the words ‘mistakes were made.’

So – this is our crossroads. We work with the administration, or we don’t.

We offer them help – which in one man’s opinion they badly need – in innovating and re-imagining who we are.

I think this entire enterprise from the governor, through the legislature, to the Board of Regents, to the president, to the chancellor’s office, the EVC’s office on down, needs to put on their creative hats, use their imagination to make this enterprise work efficiently again. To imagine what we are in ten years.

I am sorry to report I don’t yet see many creative strategies coming. I don’t see much imagination.

I see ideas of a concept or a plan. But ideas are not a strategy.

So...we work with them on these measures. Or we don’t.

In my view.... The ball is in their court. And we wait for their serve.

Or we don’t.”

### 2.0 Announcements

#### 2.1 Nominations for Faculty Senate Executive Committee

President Shrader announced that elections to the Executive Committee will occur at the April 28<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting. He reported that the following positions will need to be filled: President-Elect, Secretary, an Extension Educator, and two Executive Committee members. He stated that if any Senator is interested in serving on the Executive Committee, please contact him or Coordinator Griffin.

#### 2.2 Nominations for Academic Planning Committee Non-tenure Track Faculty Member

President Shrader stated that nominations are being sought from the Faculty Senate for a non-tenure

track faculty member from any discipline to serve on the Academic Planning Committee. He noted that this will be a three-year term beginning August 1, 2026. He stated that if any Senator is interested in serving on the Executive Committee, please contact him or Coordinator Griffin.

### **3.0 Interim Vice Chancellor Nelson**

Interim VC Nelson stated that she will be providing some updates on federal funding and our research portfolio here at UNL as it interfaces with some of the dynamics that we've seen with the federal agencies over the last year. She stated that she will also have updates about some programming from the Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) regarding internal funding for faculty members and where ORI is headed going forward.

Interim VC Nelson reported that over the last couple of years the ORI has worked hard to think about what the vision of the Research Office is, what are some values that they try to live every day, how the Office serves faculty and interacts with the campus, and what are the functional areas of the Office. She stated that across the campus the research enterprise is working to discover, create and to innovate in ways that advance Nebraska, the nation, and the world. She noted that it is really important for the faculty and those we partner with to experience that ORI is offering efficient and robust supports, is inspiring bold thinking and an entrepreneurial mindset, that ORI embraces diversity in lots of different perspectives and in the ways that we collaborate with others and that we do it all with integrity. She pointed out that different services in ORI are really trying to promote a culture and an environment for excellence.

Interim VC Nelson showed a slide with a graph from AAAS (see attached PowerPoint presentation) that provides graphics and data around what's happening with the federal funding agencies as we've navigated some changes in the federal government over the last 12 months or so. She reported that the original White House budget request last year for these federal agencies, such as NIH, Institute for Educational Sciences, NSF, Department of Energy, and other science and technology programs showed a significant decrease in the percentage of funding, but the graph also shows what Congress has been doing since the White House's request and she is pleased to share that most funding agencies, including the NIH and NSF, have FY26 budgets near or on par with what they were in the past. She noted that graph does not show the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, but she is pleased to say that the NEH and the NEA budgets are landing at \$207 million each, which is pretty much flat to what it was historically. She reported that now that the agencies have a set budget they can work with, they can award funding. However, she pointed out that the agencies have fewer employees so getting information out and processing grant proposals is slower. She noted that ORI still has its [Federal Research Updates website](#) available for people to see the latest information that is going on with federal agencies.

Interim VC Nelson reported that the national conversation about F & A rates seems to be stabilizing for now. She recalled that last year at this time there was a suggestion that we could face a reduction to an F&A rate across universities which is obviously very different from our negotiated rate of 55.5%. She noted that cuts to F&A are currently blocked due to congressional blocking language and legal action

Interim VC Nelson stated that a group has been set up nationally that we've been engaging with called the Joint Associations Group (JAG) and they have developed a FAIR model which is a proposed alternative to how we've always done F & A in recent decades. She stated that JAG members are from ten different professional organizations and including Vice Chancellors and Vice Presidents for research around the country as well as government relations professionals. She noted that these JAG members worked very hard through late spring and summer to establish the proposed alternative model. She reported that they have worked hard to socialize the model to the White House and with Congress, and there is hope that as these conversations continue the model will be considered which will provide an optimal way forward that supports universities so they can continue to conduct federally funded research.

Interim VC Nelson stated that the next update she will provide is on UNL's research portfolio. She reported that our research proposals are up 18% year-to-date and noted that this does include a single \$82 million proposal that was submitted to NSF late last year. She stated that the university always continues to encourage everyone to submit proposals even though it has been a tough time for faculty to know what grants are available and she asked everyone to remind their colleagues that the ORI is always ready to help faculty members with their proposals. She stated that the research awards we have received this year are down 2% from this time last year. She pointed out that this includes some grants received in the fall with multi-year funding, rather than receiving the funding on an annual basis. She reported that our expenditures are down 12% from last year noting that we have seen a pretty significant slowing in spending across UNL in the months of November to January. Expenditures are now starting to increase slightly again. She stated that ORI is trying to determine if there are things in place, such as a hiring freeze, or procurement issues that are impacting the expenditures. She stated in this climate faculty may be wanting to hold onto their grant funds to stretch it out to support people working on the grant, but she wanted to remind the faculty that the ORI office is there to help them.

Interim VC Nelson stated that the HERD survey, which is the national reporting across universities in terms of federally funded portfolio, continues to have us ranked as 55<sup>th</sup> overall for all R & D spending. She pointed out that this is the second year of our joint reporting with UNMC and stated that the improvement in our ranking has been significant. She reported that we recently increased by one rank, to 62<sup>nd</sup> in terms of federal funding. She stated that our reporting for FY2025 for the HERD survey has just finished and it looks like UNL will have broken \$400 million in expenditures for the first time, noting that the final number may be around \$410 million in our annual research expenditures. She stated that she and the ORI are really proud of the work that the faculty have been doing which has elevated the university in continued growth trajectory for federal funding.

Interim VC Nelson reported that ORI has put together a team to work with department chairs and center directors to help nominate faculty for external awards and recognitions. She noted that we need to make sure that our faculty are being given the national recognition they deserve for their work. She stated that ORI has been working since last spring to develop a Research Identity Framework specific to UNL and faculty members convened to begin discussions on developing a framework. She stated that during the fall semester, 30 faculty volunteers drafted a short description for each identity area that had been suggested during the May 2025 Research and Innovations Convening and 24 faculty members served as initial reviewers of the draft descriptions. She noted that a research identity area framework feedback form was developed and accessed 671 times. Since then, ORI staff have been incorporating more than 200 comments, and the final research identity framework will be released in mid-February. She stated that ORI's latest Research News for February lists six upcoming virtual ideation workshops that faculty members can register for. She stated that there will be another May convening this year and national speakers will be brought in to give presentations.

Interim VC Nelson noted that last year she spoke to the Faculty Senate about the ORI developing an updated set of internal funding opportunities for faculty that would, in part, replace what had been known as the Research Council opportunities. She reported that now a call for faculty volunteers to serve on a review panel is being utilized and this has led to participation by faculty members who have expertise in specific areas. She noted that people participating included emeriti faculty and early career faculty members. She stated that a listing of the grants that will be available this semester and the volunteer site for a review panel for internal funding can be found on the ORI website [Internal Funding Opportunities](#).

Interim VC Nelson reported that ORI has been working to fill positions on some key teams. She noted that Sponsored Programs has stabilized staff turnovers and has been focusing on filling and training for vacant positions. She stated that Sara Quinn now serves as UNL's Research Integrity

Officer and Rachel Wenzl is Deputy Research Integrity Officer. She stated that Jordan Soliz and Deb Hamernik remain as Institutional Officials over their respective areas. She shared about the recent launch of the Faculty Innovation Ambassador Program through NUtech Ventures.

Professor McElravy, Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, asked if ORI has had the opportunity to look through the draft system metrics that is coming from President Gold's office. Interim VC Nelson stated that, like the faculty the ORI is having a look at the recent version shared to provide back any questions and feedback. She noted that if we are going to have a NU goal that advances excellence, prominence and impact that could position us for possible readmittance to the AAU, then AAU indicators probably make sense as one aspect of what we pay attention to. She pointed out that we should think together about what indicators are important to our campus as we move forward.

Professor Gel, Supply Chain Management and Analytics, wanted to ask about Executive Memorandum 46, Institutional Activities Involving Foreign Countries of Concern, which establishes procedures and standards for review and approval of certain activities that are within the scope of an employee's job, and which involve certain foreign countries of concern. She asked if there would be any guidance from ORI about EM 46. Interim VC Nelson stated that ORI is aware of the EM and the Office is working hard to try to understand the intent of the Memorandum. She pointed out that ORI is careful with tracking any federal requirements with research, but the EM goes a bit beyond when it comes to international work and ORI wants to offer as much guidance as they can, but they also want to offer the guidance that is in alignment with the policy developer so people are not being misguided in terms of the intent. Professor Gel pointed out that this kind of policy is related to our research expenditures and our ability to find capable students to do the research work. She hopes that this will be explained to the Board of Regents and that ORI will provide the faculty with some guidance. Interim VC Nelson stated that she will be co-chairing a group, along with the Global Nebraska office, that will focus on some of these issues which will hopefully allow them to generate some guidance for the faculty. President Shrader asked if the system's office asked for her input before EM 46 was posted. Interim VC Nelson stated the now approved version of EM 46 was finalized by the NU Office of the President, and ORI is working on trying to help provide guidance to the faculty.

Professor Vakilzadian, Electrical and Computer Engineering, asked what our ranking was before the joint accreditation with UNMC. Interim VC Nelson stated that UNL was ranked in the high 80's for all R&D expenditures, and she thinks UNMC was ranked above 100, but now reporting jointly we have jumped to 55. Professor Vakilzadian asked if UNMC is helping us or are we helping them. Interim VC Nelson reported that we are better working together when we talk about rankings.

Professor Gay, Physics and Astronomy, asked if there is any sense that there is a move to join the UNL research office with UNMC's. Interim VC Nelson reported that there is no directive to combine the offices, but both offices have been working proactively to find synergy and to see what strengths each campus has, and we are looking to see what opportunities there could be for maximizing our opportunities for funding.

#### **4.0 Approval of January 13, 2026 Minutes**

President Shrader asked if there are any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, he asked if there was a motion to approve the minutes. Professor Kolbe moved to approve the minutes. Motion seconded by Professor Vakilzadian and then approved by the Faculty Senate.

#### **5.0 Committee Reports**

##### **5.1 Teaching Council (Professor Cress)**

Professor Cress reported that the primary function of the Teaching Council was to consider teaching awards including the Sorenson, OTICA, UDTA and ADT awards. She pointed out that the Council developed a rubric to help with deciding who should receive the awards. The Council

will also participate in the review of teaching and learning seed grants and will support and promote initiatives to enhance the quality of instruction at UNL. She noted that Nick Monk, the previous Director of the Center for Transformative Teaching, was working on getting the Century Club back together. She stated that the Century Club is for those faculty members teaching classes with over 100 students. Professor Cress recommended that the Senators encourage their colleagues to apply for the teaching awards and the seed grants.

## **6.0 Unfinished Business**

### **6.1 Motion on Use of Electronic Voting System**

President Shrader noted that a motion was made at last month's meeting for the Senate to use an electronic voting system when voting on motions during the meetings. He asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, he asked the Senate to approve the motion. Motion was then approved by the Senate.

## **7.0 New Business**

### **7.1 Motion to Create a Subcommittee to Review the University of Nebraska Strategic Plan System Metrics – v1.07**

President Shrader stated that he was declaring the motion as an emergency motion because the administration is moving quickly on developing these metrics. There were no objections to the motion being called as an emergency motion.

President Shrader read the following motion: “ Be it resolved: That a special committee of five to seven members be appointed by the President of the Faculty Senate to review the “University of Nebraska Strategic Plan System Metrics - v1.07” and other relevant versions of this plan. The committee is specifically charged to identify and provide recommendations regarding any matters of concern to the faculty, including potential misapplications of these metrics, their impact on academic freedom and departmental autonomy, and any unintended or deleterious consequences that may arise from their design or implementation—with particular focus on the burden of data collection and reporting on units as well as the potential for administrative interference in curriculum and pedagogy. The committee shall give its initial report at the March 2026 meeting of the Senate and shall continue its work until it submits its final report or is discharged by the Senate.”

Professor Harris, Biochemistry, asked if the special committee would have any power or could point out any flaws with the proposed metrics to President Gold or the Interim Chancellor. He pointed out that he does not want to see this as a puppet committee. President Shrader stated that the special committee could definitely point out errors with the proposed metrics and the Faculty Senate could create a resolution addressing the findings of the special committee. He noted that the Executive Committee is suggesting 5-7 people review the proposed metrics in the next month. He pointed out that we need to be as clear and complete as we can given how vague and incomplete the proposed metrics are. He stated that the faculty need a strong voice about the metrics because they will likely be used to create a performance indicator. Professor PeeksMease, Sociology, stated that in looking at the draft metrics, he definitely believes we need a special committee to provide input, and he noted that there needs to be accountability.

Professor Gel asked if this is just a short-term committee or whether it would be a standing committee. She pointed out that the motion does not clearly define how long the committee will be active and she suggested that this be clarified and she questioned whether the APC has seen the metrics document. President Shrader stated that the resolution calls for a short-term special committee which is to make a report on the system's draft metrics that we received from President Gold's office. He noted that the document has been shared with the Interim Chancellor, EVC, and the Deans. He stated that we want to move quickly so we can provide a response to make the metrics a more fulsome document. Professor VanderPlas, Statistics, pointed out that we did not push back on the Executive Leadership Team's metrics, and we know how inaccurate the data was and how it can be used in a terrible way. She stated that we need to take our recent experiences and

do the work to review and provide feedback on these draft metrics. Professor Zuckerman, Educational Administration, asked what power the special committee would have. She pointed out that doing anything is better than doing nothing and we need to speak as one voice and we need to speak loudly.

Professor McElravy asked if any context has been provided on how the metrics would be used or applied. President Shrader stated that the only information that was given was that the metrics were based on the Odyssey to Excellence five pillars and 14 strategies and the metrics are a concept of a plan to move the university forward. Professor McElravy reported that he shared the draft metrics with his colleagues in his department and stated that he received immediate concerns about them. He noted that he appreciates the use of metrics, but the metrics need to be accurate, and the faculty needs to know how they will be used. He pointed out that the growing distrust between the faculty and the administration will only continue to erode if how the metrics are used is not clearly shared with the faculty and he sees this as another reason to empower the special committee.

Professor Lewis, Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, reported that she has drafted materials and an analysis of the metrics to help assist the special committee. She noted that creating the special committee provides an opportunity for the faculty to weigh in on the metrics before they get used. She pointed out that the metrics should be compared to AAUP standards and the metrics should be used for the whole system, not to be used on individual faculty members or departments. She stated that we need to make sure that the metrics are not being misused and noted that there are many different facets to these metrics that we cannot control.

Professor Miekkeljohn, School of Biological Sciences, asked if the Senate was supposed to get the draft metrics. President Shrader stated that the Senate Executive Committee asked for the document. Professor Miekkeljohn asked at what level the metrics are to be used and whether they could be used for faculty members and/or units. He questioned whether our campus even knows how they will be used. Professor Gay stated that there is something very insidious about system-wide metrics particularly if UNL and UNK would be using the same metrics.

Professor Gel stated that she thinks forming the special committee may be premature. She noted that universities need to use some metrics which can be used to show growth, but the important thing is how the data will be used and what benchmarks will be used, and we need to be sure that these are reasonable targets. She believes that we need more information before moving forward with the special committee.

Professor Powers, Chemistry pointed out that metrics such as published research, serving on editorial boards, number of grant proposals are just some of the things that are being missed in these metrics and instead the metrics are being watered down to publications. He stated that the Senate needs to be on board with creating a committee.

Professor Kolbe stated that the math of these metrics does not even work out and it is a poorly written document. He pointed out that it doesn't even mention creative activity and research. He noted that the important part is that the EVC asked for our input so therefore the Senate should form this committee.

President Shrader called the question. The motion to approve the formation of a committee was approved, 48 in favor, 2 against, and no abstentions.

President Shrader asked that anyone interested in serving on the special committee to contact either himself or Coordinator Griffin.

## **7.2 Draft Ballot for Elections to the Academic Planning Committee, Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee and the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Panel**

President Shrader stated that the draft ballot comes from the Committee on Committees and is being presented but will not be voted on for approval until the March 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. He pointed out that there are still open spots on the ballot and urged the Senators to either consider running for election or to encourage someone from their department to run for election. He noted that candidates must be tenured faculty members. If interested, they should contact either Coordinator Griffin or Professor Kelli Kopocis, chair of the Committee on Committees.

## **7.3 Open Mic**

Professor Kolbe stated that in talking with colleagues the question was raised why faculty members who have tenure and who had a good review the previous year need to produce their materials for an annual merit review in a year when the promise of a merit raise means nothing. He noted that the annual budget comes out with the beginning of the fiscal year but since annual reviews are not conducted until February or March, if it is known in the previous July that there will not be enough of an increase to give merit raises, why should the tenured faculty have to go through all of that work. He suggested that this is something that the Executive Committee should raise with the administration.

Professor McElravy wanted to provide an update about the merger of the Agricultural Economics and the Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication departments. He pointed out that initially the IANR administrators framed that the merged departments just needed to decide on a name for the school and some general operational guidelines. However, the APC guidelines for merging units require more extensive work and the APC would need to approve the merger. He noted that the APC has created a subcommittee to work with the departments as they go through the merger. He stated that one of his concerns is the framing of the role of the APC within the merger process pointing out that the APC has been vilified but he sees the APC's role as an important component of shared governance. He stated that the faculty needs to continue to uphold the shared governance principles and processes that we have. He pointed out that the departments were told by the administrators that they needed to complete the work in one semester which, he noted, is a tremendous amount of work, and the APC is being blamed when in fact, the APC did not create the timeline for when the process needed to be completed. He stated that he was confused about what documents were shared with the Board of Regents, was it that the merged units are a new program which is different from the documentation needed for merged units. He questioned how we can continue to trust the administrators that we are working with if they are not being transparent about what is going on and if they are vilifying the very processes of shared governance that we have agreed to work by. He questioned if the Board's decision to create a new program should be voided because it's not a new program it is a merger.

Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics, stated that arguably, the Board's decision should be voided. He pointed out that in reading the APC guidelines on mergers it suggests that things such as the justification for the merger, a personnel plan, how the promotion and tenure process will work, and other plans should all have been presented to the APC before it was sent to the Board of Regents for approval.

Professor Gay, who is a member of the APC, said that the Committee was told that it was important that the APC have a subcommittee to oversee the merger process, and the APC was told they would need to approve the merger. He pointed out that the APC is eager to work with the departments in anyway we can. He noted that the APC was told that the purpose of the merger was to save money through merging the departments and through VSIPs. Professor Peterson pointed out that there is no real savings through attrition and departments do not need to be merged to see attrition.

Professor PeeksMease noted that when you need answers you don't know who you need to go to and he thinks the administrators don't know either. He questioned who is making decisions and the faculty kept saying we need shared governance but where are we with getting input into the

processes earlier. He stated that these continued top-down approaches without faculty input continue to create a wedge between the faculty and the administration. President Shrader stated that the frustration goes in many different ways because he is sure when the HLC application was put together the system office did not include the leaders of the campus, just as the Interim VC for Research was not asked for any input into the draft system metrics. He stated that we have a leadership crisis as much as anything else from the top down and we need to try to solve that problem.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:13 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room A. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Ann Tschetter, Secretary.