EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Anaya, Bender, Guevara, Joeckel, Nickerson, Rinkevich, Ruchala, Schubert, Sollars, Wysocki

Absent: Reisbig, Woodman, Zoubek

Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2014

Location: Faculty Senate Office

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 to Order
Guevara called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

2.0 Announcements

2.1 East Campus Town Hall Meetings Regarding Possible Tax on Revolving Accounts
Sollars reported that VC Green is setting up three informational town hall meetings to provide information regarding the possible tax on revolving accounts.

2.2 Regent Hawks’ Request for Information Regarding Students Dropping Courses
Nickerson reported that Regent Hawks is adamant that the university find out why students are dropping some of their registered courses. He noted that Regent Hawks mentioned at the recent Board meeting the 40% course drop rate for students in engineering courses. He stated that statistics were presented to the Board but Regent Hawks wants more detailed information. He pointed out that while this information could be helpful, it would be difficult to obtain.

Schubert recalled the topic being discussed previously by the Board. He noted that there are typically very large enrollments in the first year of classes for engineering students, but many students realize after attending classes that it is really not the field they want. Nickerson stated that this happens in Biological Sciences as well. Schubert reported that as a result of the drops the Engineering 101 and 102 courses have been revised to make them more interesting and he thinks it may have shown some improvements in the retention of students.

Sollars pointed out that it was not 100% clear whether the 40% course drop rate meant that the students were dropping out of the NU system or going to other departments/courses within the university. She stated that it is difficult to get some of the data on this and those who do leave the university oftentimes do not want to reveal why they left. She stated that an independent entity might be needed to collect this kind of information.
Wysocki noted that in Computer and Electronics Engineering there was a pretty high dropout rate but most of the students were dropping courses because they were not capable or did not have the requirements necessary for the courses. As a result many of them went on to other majors. Guevara pointed out that some students are very strategic about keeping their grade point average up and will drop a class if they think it could jeopardize their GPA. He noted that some departments offer courses that help students determine whether they want to go into a particular field. Wysocki stated that departments that have some preconditions on their courses often have lower enrollments but fewer dropout rates.

Schubert stated that the response to the Board needs to come through the administration because they will have access to the data. Guevara noted that faculty members may know, better than anybody else, some of the reasons why students drop a course but they are not statistically able to record the reasons. Perhaps an effort to systematically ask faculty members about it should be made.

3.0 Approval of 1/29/14 Minutes
Ruchala moved for approval of the minutes as revised. The motion was seconded by Rinkevich. The motion was approved.

4.0 Unfinished Business
4.1 Update on Reporting Executive Committee Concerns on the TIPSPrevention Program
Guevara stated that he thought he would wait until the Chancellor dealt with notifying the campus of the budget cuts before he contacts the Chancellor about the concerns of the TIPSPrevention program. He pointed out that two of the main concerns are how the program will be run to make sense of false reports and which faculty members, if any, will be appointed to review complaints that are filed. He stated that there needs to be some assurances that there will be protections built into the program if this program is adopted. Furthermore, he stated that the thought of central administration having files on faculty members without any knowledge of the affected faculty member, the corresponding department chair/director, or the dean should raise a red flag for all.

Joeckel wondered if any legal counsel has been sought to review the program as there is the potential for legal issues to arise with the program. Guevara stated that he will send a draft of his comments to the Executive Committee before forwarding them to the Chancellor.

5.0 New Business
5.1 Report on Chancellor’s Meeting Notifying the Campus of Upcoming Budget Cuts
Guevara noted that the Chancellor reported that UNL is short $4.6 million and that it was his impression that these cuts must come from the permanent budget. He reported that one of the big issues that need to be addressed is how the tuition from online courses is distributed. He noted that currently a major portion of the tuition bypasses the campus
and goes to the departments. He pointed out that the original idea with the online courses was to get outside students to take the courses but the result has been that 75% of the online students are UNL students. He noted that when he developed an online course he requested that it be offered only to outside students but he was told that this was not possible.

Joeckel wondered what has happened at other peer institutions that have attempted to offer online courses. He pointed out that if there is an overall trend indicating that the majority of online students are already enrolled students at a university it could have an impact for these courses in the future. Guevara stated that there may be an incentive to create online courses for outside students only so campuses are not poaching their own students. He stated that the Chancellor has reported that the administration will rework how the tuition from online courses will be distributed.

Joeckel asked how the current distribution of online tuition fees created a deficit. Guevara noted that the decreased tuition is a part of the budget deficit. Nickerson noted that part of the deficit is a carryover from the previous year’s deficit. He pointed out that UNL’s share of the system wide deficit is $800,000. Guevara stated that the Chancellor said that he hopes that the cuts will not be as painful as they could be. He noted that the Chancellor is not calling on the deans to make cuts in their budgets and that the process should be completed by commencement in May. Nickerson pointed out that the current cuts are a good lesson on why the faculty should be supporting increased enrollment.

5.2 Review of Faculty Senate Meeting
Guevara noted that unfortunately the lack of a quorum prevented the Senate from approving several motions that were pending from previous meetings and prevented the Senate from acting on an emergency meeting. He stated that he was pleased to see that people were interested in asking Executive Director Dan Duncan questions about Innovation Campus.

Schubert noted that the presentation on Tuesday was the first time the faculty had a bigger view of what is actually being planned for Innovation Campus. He stated that one of the biggest concerns for students who are currently at UNL is how much of a change they will see if they work on Innovation Campus and he thinks this will impact them negatively in an academic sense. He pointed out that corporations who may come to Innovation Campus may be in competition with each other and a lot of research is cloaked with restrictions and requirements that will not allow students to reveal the research they are doing. He stated that students can wind up in an enclosed academic environment.

Nickerson pointed out that this is the direction the university has taken and the university considers it to be one of the most important directions. He stated that the faculty needs to find out more about what is being done on Innovation Campus so there is a better job of planning the Campus. Schubert stated that he does not think the faculty can make any influence on the direction of Innovation Campus. He noted that senior faculty members point out that we had a research park with Technology Park which was not very
successful. He stated that the argument that the Park was too small or too far away are not very valid and he has concerns that transportation to Innovation Campus will be limited or non-existing. Nickerson stated that he believes the campus will get better transportation to Innovation Campus once it is up and running.

Joeckel asked when buildings will be completed and companies will begin moving in. Nickerson noted that the Food Science and Technology department plans to offer classes on Innovation Campus beginning with the fall 2015 semester.

5.3 Consideration of an Electronic Vote for an Emergency Motion
Guevara noted that an emergency motion could not be considered at the February Senate meeting due to the lack of a quorum because of the weather. He asked the Executive Committee if it should consider conducting an electronic vote on the emergency motion to oppose LB 1018 which is currently before the Nebraska Legislature. Bender stated that he wrote the motion partly due to concerns that Board of Regents across the country are increasingly becoming less supportive of academic freedom and he wondered if this may be part of the reason why the Regents want this legislation passed.

Schubert noted that the Regents are stating that it is easier to recruit top candidates for the higher administrative positions if a closed search is conducted because candidates would be able to apply without fear that their current employer would find out. He pointed out that if these people will only leave their current posts in secrecy they would probably do the same while employed here. Joeckel stated that this is conjecture. He asked why a similar proposal to LB 1018 has not come up before and why is there an effort to change it now.

Sollars reported that at the IANR Senator’s luncheon it was pointed out that confidentiality is becoming the norm for hiring top administrators for universities. She noted that someone currently employed at another university could jeopardize their relationship with their constituents and donors if it was known that the person was seeking a job elsewhere. This could in turn undercut their effectiveness at their home institution. She reported that she asked if there is any evidence to support this claim but none is available. Guevara stated that Nebraska should lead the nation and state that the searches for NU presidents, vice presidents, and chancellors will remain open. He pointed out that the University of Nebraska is a public institution and the search should be open so the public is aware who the top candidates are for the position of President. He stated that he vehemently opposes the proposed legislation as bad for the University of Nebraska, even if it seems good for those who conduct business related to searches and hiring by public institutions that have, by definition, a financial interest.

Wysocki questioned whether such a law could really protect a person from being identified as a candidate. Schubert stated that the argument that a closed search would attract better qualified individuals is a hollow argument.

Ruchala moved that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee oppose LB 1018 and authorizes the Senate President’s designee John Bender to provide testimony to the state
legislature on behalf of the Executive Committee. Rinkevich seconded the motion. The motion was approved with 9 in favor and 1 abstention.

Rinkevich moved that an electronic vote of the Senate be taken to support Bender’s motion read at the February 4 Senate meeting. The motion states:

I move that the Faculty Senate go on the record as opposing LB 1018 currently before the Nebraska Legislature on the grounds that the bill, if passed, would prevent the public and the faculty of this university from having any effective voice in the process of selecting university presidents, chancellors, or vice presidents. Furthermore, the president of the Faculty Senate or his designee is authorized to testify on behalf of the Senate before the Legislature’s Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee in opposition to LB 1018.

Schubert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Guevara noted that an email message will be sent to all Senators asking them to vote electronically on the motion and to respond by 10:00 a.m. Thursday morning in lieu of the legislature’s hearing in the afternoon.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:19 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Wednesday, February 12, 2014 at 3:00 pm. The meeting will be held in the Faculty Senate Office. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Toni Anaya, Secretary.