EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Belli, Dawes, Fech, Hanrahan, Latta Konecky, Lee, Leiter, Peterson, Purcell, Rudy, Woodman

Absent: Adenwalla, Vakilzadian

Guests: Associate VC Amy Goodburn, and Interim Director Honors Program, Gwen Bachman

Date: Tuesday, October 24, 2017

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 (Rudy)
Rudy called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Associate VC Goodburn and Interim Director Bachman - University Honors Program
Goodburn reported that she and Bachman were asked to provide an update on the direction of the Honors Program and where it is going based on an external program review and surveys. She noted that the Honors Program began in 1986 and had only one director during this time until Bachman took over recently. She stated that with the retirement of former Director Patrice Berger, it was felt that this was a good time to take a holistic look at the program. She noted that two other units have added an honors program: the Raikes School was added in the 1990’s and four years ago the College of Business created an Honors Academy. She stated that these two programs are considered part of the Honors Program, but work autonomously.

Goodburn stated that recruiting undergraduate students is much more competitive now and we are competing with many other universities to attract high-ability students. She stated that we are using very aggressive strategies to recruit high-ability, out-of-state students. She pointed out that when the Honors Program was first created it was primarily for Nebraskans, but our enrollment goals have now expanded.

Goodburn stated that Neihardt, the dorm for the Honors Program students, is no longer attractive and there has been a steady decline of students who want to live there. However, it is a good idea to have the honors students live in the same facility. She stated that efforts are underway to find donors who would help support the building of a residence facility for the honors students.

Goodburn stated that last year the decision was made to have an external review conducted on the Honors Program and an external review team was developed with
reviewers coming from some universities similar to us, but also with some reviewers coming from leading national honors programs (Ohio State, Iowa, Kansas, Florida, and Alabama). She stated that the faculty and staff of the Honors Program were asked to develop a self-study to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and how they think the program should develop.

Goodburn stated that the external review found that while we have a good program, the value of participating in the program was not well articulated to either perspective students or current students. She noted that some colleges have low enrollment in the program and there were conversations about why these colleges don’t have more students enrolled. She pointed out that Art & Sciences has the most students enrolled in the program.

Goodburn reported that it was determined that the thesis requirement was not viewed as positively as it was intended and over the past five years, only about 30% of graduating students in the Honors Program complete the thesis. Bachman stated that the thesis has been redefined as a Senior Honors Project. She pointed out that not many departments offer honors courses and faculty members need to figure out what additional work a student would need to do in a course in order to get honors credit.

Goodburn stated that another restriction here is that our honors admissions process is inefficient and slow. She pointed out that at other universities students are invited into the honors program, but here they have to apply to it. Lee asked if students can get into the Honors Program if they have a lower ACT score, but prove that they are successful with their courses here. Goodburn stated that they can apply. Bachman pointed out that the current limitation is current students need a 3.5 GPA during the first semester and they would need to apply to the program. Bachman stated that joining the program after the first year on campus would make it difficult for a student to complete all the required credit hours. Bachman noted that students have to complete 24 honors credits. Lee pointed out that many students are very intelligent, but don’t score well on the ACT. Bachman stated that students are initially assessed on their high school grades and ACT scores, and have a second shot if they do well in the first semester.

Hanrahan asked if the implementation of the ACE program has impacted the Honors Program. Latta Konecky stated that she knows a number of sophomores who felt that the Honors Program is not worth their time because their major requires a lot of courses. Goodburn reported that Admissions conducted a survey to find out why high ability students were not signing up to be in the program. Those students who responded stated that they did not believe there were benefits to being in the program and that it offered no added value other than small class sizes and free printing. She stated that the second issue for students is that they thought being in the program would negatively impact their grades and they felt it would be better to be in pre-law program or pre-med community rather than the Honors Program. Woodman stated that for his daughter it was frustrating to have to get faculty members each semester to agree to treat the course as an honors course for the student. Goodburn stated that the problem is that there are not enough designated honors courses. She noted that students didn’t feel that the Honors Program
was beneficial in the job search, because employers usually seek students with skills rather than those who were in the Honors Program.

Peterson asked if there has been a survey that asked former honors students how they feel about the program. Goodburn stated that former honors students have said that they had a very good experience with the program, based on feedback from alumni. Peterson noted that when students in his honors seminar course (UHON 395h) reach the junior level they seem to value interacting with students from other disciplines. He stated that there are a lot of faculty members offering interesting courses and you would think that the students would value this kind of experience. Bachman pointed out that by the time students get to the junior level, those students who don’t see the value in the program have already left it. Lee noted that ACE 10 is similar to writing a thesis and students in the Honors Program can use their ACE 10 paper as the basis for their thesis so it is not like the thesis is much more additional work. Goodburn stated that this is probably true for the humanities, but in some disciplines ACE 10 is a very team based assignment.

Goodburn reported that the administration took a good look at honors programs across the country and Chancellor Green asked what we could do here with an honors program. She stated that one goal with restructuring the program is to streamline the curricular pathways by building a more robust curriculum of courses so students do not have to get contracts every semester. She noted that Bachman has been meeting and talking to departments to get college and department based academics in honors courses. She stated that every year the College of Business chooses 40 students to be in the Honors Academy. Peterson stated that he is not sold on the idea of having an honors academy. He is concerned that having an honors academy may create a second-class category of students because it is often the case that not all of the honors students in a college are accepted into that college’s academy (this is the case in the College of Business). Goodburn pointed out that one of the issues with the Raikes program is that each year there is an increase in applications, but the program is not expanding to accept more students. She stated that the question is where do we find a spot for these students who are very good but aren’t able to get in one of the specific academies.

Bachman noted that only about two people serve in the Honors Program office and it is the faculty who make the program because they are the ones to teach the students, advise the students, and help with a student’s thesis. She stated that if departments want to have honors sections then they need to offer them. She reported that she is rejecting approximately 40% of the contracts because they are very tenuous and she wants students to appreciate and learn the value of their interaction with the faculty. She pointed out that this can translate into students getting better jobs because they will have a closer alliance with a faculty member who can provide more meaningful recommendations.

Woodman asked if there are examples that can be provided to faculty members regarding the additional work an honors student needs to do for a course. Bachman stated that information on contracting courses for honors credit as well as sample honors contract projects can be found on the web (https://honors.unl.edu/faculty-staff/contracting-
courses). She stated that the Honors Program wants students to work with faculty members.

Peterson stated that the problem with contracting in general and a reason why the students might drop out of the Honors Program is because students might ask themselves why they want to do the additional work above and beyond what other students in the class are required to do. Bachman pointed out that we want honors students to take on extra tasks and duties because they want to get more out of their education, but this idea needs to be reinforced by the faculty members. She reported that some faculty members are just asking for a written three-page paper and are not requiring any other work from honors students.

Leiter reported that there are honors colleges, such as St. John’s University, where students dive deeply into a core curriculum such as “Great Books” and have lots of interaction with the faculty. Bachman stated that it is up to the faculty to decide whether to let additional students into academic programs like Raikes. Peterson pointed out that a real advantage to honors courses is that they are a smaller class where there is more interaction between the instructor and the students. Goodburn noted that honors colleges typically hire their own faculty and there are some advantages to having an honors college, but there are some disadvantages as well because they can become somewhat isolated.

Dawes pointed out that her three children came to UNL and were in the honors program, but they were disappointed because they were expecting a much more advanced course. She noted that most students do not know how to negotiate with a faculty member to get that advanced type of experience. Bachman stated that she thinks we need to communicate this information to the students and the parents because she does not think the departments are doing it. She stated that the job of the Honors Program is to facilitate the contract and to facilitate the program to be a meaningful experience for the students.

Peterson suggested that another improvement would be to have a first- and third-year seminar and a thesis and not have all of the credit hour requirements for the Honors Program. Bachman noted that previously, the mechanism for accumulating the 24 credit hours required for the program was confusing. She pointed out that it is now a lot easier to accumulate credit hours.

Hanrahan asked where the arts play into the Honors Program. He pointed out that the arts students have high talents and skills, not necessarily a high ACT score. He asked how the skill set of a student gets factored into whether they can be in the program. Bachman noted that the Business Academy and the Raikes School not only have the academic requirements, but the student has to write an essay and be interviewed. She stated that the arts could incorporate talent to the requirements of getting into an honors program.

Bachman reported that the Engineering College wants to have an honors program, but does not have the funding to support an honors academy. Instead it is going to pilot the
National Academy of Engineering “Grand Challenges” scholars program in collaboration with University Honors. She stated that in this program engineering students can get credit for different types of experiences, such as internships, education abroad and global experiences. She stated that when the student completes the program they will graduate with honors and the Engineering College is working on whether the students can have a distinction as a global grand challenge scholar. She stated that the intended outcome is the integration of multi-disciplinary college experiences within the honors structure. She stated that the hope is that other colleges will want a similar program. She pointed out that it does not take a lot of funding. Dawes asked if the University Honors Program will offer scholarships to these programs. Bachman said scholarships would need to be from the college and would require the dean’s approval.

Goodburn reported that some renovations are taking place in Neihardt and there are now some better classrooms and study spaces available. She stated that some advantages to being in the honors program include priority scheduling, but no longer includes free printing.

Goodburn noted that Bachman is serving as interim, but a search will begin soon for a five-year term for Director of the University Honors Program. She stated that permission has been granted to do an internal search, but applicants must be at the Associate or full Professor level. She stated that the search committee is being finalized and formal interviews will take place in January or February.

Lee pointed out that having a college honors academy works well if the disciplines of the college are narrow, but in a large college like Arts & Sciences it would be more difficult to have. Goodburn noted that the academy approach can be interest-based or topic-based. She reported that another 2nd year learning community is being developed with IANR and the Water for Food Institute called Global Water Leaders Community which will be piloted in fall 2018. She stated that this is a topic based, inter-disciplinary academy which is open to students across the university. She noted that the plan is to have focus in the fall semester on the science of water as a resource and in the spring there will be seminars with speakers and interviews of farmers and industry people. In the summer the students would go to Rwanda for an internship experience.

Lee asked if there could be a humanities academy. Goodburn stated that this is possible. Bachman noted that Arts & Sciences can get creative with developing faculty communities to have similar programs, but the faculty needs to decide how they would want the program to run.

Goodburn reported that she and Bachman have been asked to work with Brian Shanks, Associate Director, Housing Business & Fiscal Operations, to see about getting a new residence hall built that would be for athletes and honors students. She noted that Athletics is interested in fronting some of the costs for such a facility. She stated that a task force has been created to explore the idea and three possible locations have been identified. She noted that the Raikes building wants to expand and there could be a tie in to a new honors and athletes residence hall.
Goodburn stated that any feedback is always appreciated, and if anyone knows of possible candidates to serve as Director of the University Honors Program to please nominate them. She noted that an announcement about the position will be coming out soon.

Purcell arrived after meeting with Chancellor Green.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Meeting with ASUN Members
Purcell reported that the Executive Committee will be meeting with members from ASUN’s Executive Committee on November 14 to brainstorm on issues that the two groups can work on together.

3.2 Big Ten Faculty Leadership Conference
Purcell reported that she and Rudy will be attending the Big Ten Academic Alliance Faculty Leadership Conference at Penn State on Thursday, October 26 through Saturday, October 28. She stated that they will report on the conference at the next Executive Committee meeting.

3.3 Meeting with Chancellor Green
Purcell reported that she met with Chancellor Green and they discussed the budget reduction process. She noted that the Executive Committee would be invited to attend the APC meeting when the Chancellor presents the proposed budget cuts. It was agreed to delay revising the UNL Bylaws until after the budget reduction process was finished. Possible Faculty Senators on the Life Sciences Task Force were reviewed. She stated that during the meeting she shared the Senate’s goals for this year, and talked about the Extension Educator resolution that the Senate approved last year and which was forwarded to Central Administration.

Woodman reported that the Daily Nebraskan had an article reporting that the Graduate Student Assembly is requesting a meeting with the Chancellor to discuss due process because the graduate students are concerned how they could be treated following the freedom of speech incident on campus.

3.4 Athletics Director Bill Moos
Rudy reported that he met and spoke with new Athletics Director Bill Moos who said that he would be happy to meet with either the Senate Executive Committee or the full Senate.

4.0 Approval of October 17, 2017 Executive Committee Minutes
Peterson moved for approval of the revised minutes. Motion seconded by Dawes and approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business
5.1 Committee Updates
5.1.A. Grading & Examinations Committee Update

Purcell noted that the membership of the Grading & Examinations Committee consists of eleven people, but only four of them are faculty members. The rest hold an administrative appointment, however, she feels that they fully understand the charge that is in front of them regarding the proposed changes to the final exam schedule. She reported that the ASUN members of the committee are working to compile a draft survey to go out to the students about the proposed changes. She stated that the survey will not only address the double booking of exams, but also the graduation ceremony and whether it is important for them to receive their diploma at the ceremony. Peterson asked when the students expect to get the results back from the survey. Purcell stated that they want the survey back by late November. In addition, the Faculty Senate will vote on any proposed change put forward regarding a change to the final exam schedule.

Lee questioned why the problem of double booking can’t be resolved. Peterson pointed out that no one from administration has satisfactorily explained the reason. Rudy noted that there are 20 standard times for class periods, but only 18 standard times for exams and unit exams take up four blocks of time. He stated that eliminating the unit exam blocks would help alleviate the problem. Purcell reported that in an email letter from EVC Plowman the students indicated that they preferred having 90 minutes final exams rather than a two hour final exam, and that they were against Saturday exams, but we are unsure who these students are that provided this information to EVC Plowman. Rudy stated that he would like ASUN to ask the question, “In trying to resolve the double booking situation, were you able to find the UNL policy on how to deal with double booking?”

Hanrahan asked if the problem with the membership of the Grading & Examinations Committee should be resolved now. Peterson suggested that the syllabus of the Committee might need to be changed and this should be done first.

5.1.B. Non-tenure Track Faculty Members on Academic Rights & Responsibilities Panel

Purcell stated that an email was received from an Associate Professor of Practice asking why there were no non-tenure track faculty members on the ARRP. Peterson stated that this issue could be sent to the ARRC for review. Woodman noted that the ARRC reviewed this about a year ago. He stated that eliminating the unit exam blocks would help alleviate the problem. Purcell reported that in an email letter from EVC Plowman the students indicated that they preferred having 90 minutes final exams rather than a two hour final exam, and that they were against Saturday exams, but we are unsure who these students are that provided this information to EVC Plowman. Rudy stated that he would like ASUN to ask the question, “In trying to resolve the double booking situation, were you able to find the UNL policy on how to deal with double booking?”

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6.0 New Business
6.1 Addition to Faculty Senate Agenda

Purcell stated that she would like to have a period of time at the end of the Faculty Senate meetings for people to bring up issues of concern. She noted that this would be different than a focused open mic session and anyone in attendance could address the Senate. The Executive Committee discussed the issue and agreed to try it. The Committee approved placing it on the November agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:37 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, October 31, 2017 at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in 203 Alexander Building. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Joan Latta Konecky, Secretary.