EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent: Adenwalla, Dawes, Vakilzadian

Guests: Sam Brower, ASUN

Date: Tuesday, October 31, 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 (Purcell)
Purcell called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Sam Brower, ASUN - Class Attendance Policy
Purcell stated that Brower came to speak about ASUN’s proposed changes to the Senate’s class attendance policy and to provide an update on the Grading & Examinations Committee since he serves as one of two ASUN representatives on the Committee.

Class Attendance Policy Proposed Revisions
Brower reported that he chairs ASUN’s Academic Committee and at an Association of Big Ten Students meeting the ASUN Executives noticed that some of the other Big Ten schools were reviewing their class attendance policy and felt that our policy should be reviewed since it has not been updated since 2013. He noted that the ASUN Execs particularly liked the University of Illinois’ policy, and the University of Minnesota’s policy statement which provides a more specific list of excused absences. He stated that ASUN would like to suggest that UNL’s policy be revised to include a specific list of absences. He pointed out that an instructor would still retain authority over other absences that are not included on the list.

Brower stated that ASUN questioned whether the Office of Student Affairs is the right Office to notify instructors if a student is unable to contact her/his instructor due to a major illness, serious injury, hospitalization, or when military orders are given. He pointed out that additional revisions include providing more specification to the already existing information on some of the excused absences. He reported that he met with Jan Deeds, Associate Director, Gender Programs and Director, Women’s Center who provided good feedback about maternal leave and CAPS.

Brower stated that he is very interested in getting the faculty’s perspective on the proposed changes. Peterson suggested that structural changes were needed to make the
Woodman asked if instructors would be obligated to adhere to the excused absences list. Brower stated that instructors would not if the absences would cause a student to miss critical work. Woodman pointed out that instructors who teach large sections do not have the time to justify for each student what is considered critical work. He pointed out that the University has one regulation about students attendance, and that is attendance is required. The details and enforcement of a class attendance policy is basically up to the instructor. He asked if instructors were obligated to automatically excuse an absence if it was on the list, even if the course had an attendance requirement which only allowed, for example, two absences per semester. Brower noted that he understands that the faculty have a lot of latitude in terms of their course requirements. He pointed out that the class attendance policy was approved by the Faculty Senate and is already an overarching policy. He stated that the idea with the list of excused absences is to reinforce the responsibility of both the faculty and students with the class policy. Peterson stated that faculty want to have discretion on class attendance. Woodman suggested that a statement be included that says that the instructor’s attendance policy is what ultimately counts for a course. Rudy pointed out that the sentence “you are responsible for the attendance policy set by your instructor and should clear absences directly with that instructor” should remain in the document. Woodman stated that he would like to see a sentence added that students cannot use a disagreement with the attendance policy or what the student perceives as an unreasonable accommodation for an absence as the basis of a grade appeal.

Lee stated that the section about participating in intercollegiate athletic events should be changed to intercollegiate events because many students participate in other university sponsored events. He suggested that the list of excused absences include students missing class for a job interview. Hanrahan disagreed and stated that education comes first and students need to arrange their schedule so classes are not missed. He stated that the list of excused absences is too long and should be condensed. Woodman pointed out that most instructors are reasonable about legitimate excuses, but students should to adhere to the instructor’s policy on making up missed course work.

Rudy asked if there was anything that urgently needed to be fixed in the existing policy. Brower stated that ASUN would like to make students more aware of the policy. Lee suggested that instructors could put a link to the policy in their syllabus.

Brower thanked the Executive Committee for their input and stated that he will take it back to the ASUN Academic Committee to make the suggested changes and will bring it back to the Executive Committee for further consideration.

Update on Grading & Examinations (G & E) Committee
Brower reported that the G & E Committee has been charged with reviewing and proposing alternatives to the proposal to begin final exams on Saturday prior to finals week. He stated that the Committee agreed that it needs to determine how much of an issue there is of double booking of exams, and if having finals on Saturday would create bigger issues. He pointed out that the maximum number of students who experienced
double booking for the academic year was approximately 700, or about 2% of the student population.

Lee asked why unit exams cannot be eliminated. He pointed out that they could be a reason for the double booking because of the large block of time they take. Brower stated that the G & E Committee has not looked into this yet.

Brower reported that ASUN will be sending out a survey developed by the G & E Committee to students to get feedback on how they feel about having Saturday finals. He stated that questions on the survey relate to finals week preferences and whether students prefer to receive diplomas at the commencement ceremony. He noted that survey responses are due by Friday, November 24th and reminder notices will be sent out on the next three Mondays. The Executive Committee suggested several changes to the survey.

Rudy noted that there is a policy on double booking of exams and suggested that the survey include a question asking students if they are able to find the double booking policy. Lee asked how the students that Brower has spoken with feel about Saturday finals. Brower stated that the majority of students that he has spoken to about the issue are against the idea of Saturday exams.

Woodman asked if Brower had a sense of whether students prefer to get their diploma at commencement. Brower stated that students probably like the idea of receiving the diploma at the ceremony, but if it meant that finals would have to start on Saturday he thinks most students would not want to receive the diploma. Woodman pointed out that parents may want the students to receive a diploma at the ceremony because it is a very special moment to see your child graduate, and most people want to take pictures of the student holding the diploma. Latta Konecky noted that many universities either mail the diplomas to the students or allow them to pick the diploma up after the ceremony.

Brower stated that the G & E Committee will have the results of the survey analyzed and will provide a report to the Senate on the Committee’s findings.

3.0 Announcements
3.1 Email Concerning Freedom of Speech
Purcell reported that she has corresponded with faculty members regarding the issues of freedom of speech and academic freedom. She pointed out that the Executive Committee has had several discussions with the Chancellor and Executive Vice Chancellor about the issue and these conversations are recorded in the Executive Committee minutes which are available on the web (https://www.unl.edu/facultysenate/exec/Execminutes.shtml). She noted that a recent email claimed that the university was losing control of the narrative, particularly given the Op Ed piece written by three State Senators and sent to a Hastings newspaper. A request was made for the Senate to make a statement supporting free speech and academic freedom. Purcell asked the Executive Committee if the Senate should make a statement. She noted that Chancellor Green and President Bounds were responding to the claims made by the Senators in their Op Ed piece and Chancellor Green will send Purcell a copy of his response.
Fech pointed out that it is difficult for the Executive Committee to speak on behalf of all faculty members because there are faculty members on both sides of the issue. Belli stated that the university welcomes all students, regardless of political persuasion, and faculty members have the academic freedom and responsibility to introduce students in the classroom to societal issues that are relevant to the topic of their course. The Executive Committee agreed to wait to review the Chancellor’s response.

4.0 Approval of October 24, 2017 Minutes
Peterson moved for approval of the revised minutes. Motion seconded by Rudy and approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business
5.1 UNL Bylaws Revisions
Purcell reported that she spoke with Chancellor Green and Associate to the Chancellor Bill Nunez regarding the delay in making further revisions to the UNL Bylaws. She pointed out that the budget reduction situation is currently consuming everyone’s time and the plan is to address the revisions once the budget situation has been dealt with. She noted that this information was shared with Senator Patrick Shea who still would like the Senate to set up a committee now to work on revisions. Rudy and Peterson stated that as a UNL faculty member Shea is free to work on possible revisions to the UNL Bylaws if he wishes, but we should wait to form a Faculty Senate Bylaws Ad Hoc Committee.

6.0 New Business
6.1 Report on the Big Ten Academic Alliance Faculty Leadership Conference
Purcell reported that she and Rudy attended the Conference at Penn State where the Head of the Big Ten Academic Alliance, Keith Marshall, indicated that the Association of Governing Boards is putting out a statement on shared governance, which included “Despite institutional size or mission, effective shared governance provides the context for meaningful engagement and decision making in virtually every private and public college or university.”

Purcell reported that one of the main topics of discussion at the Conference was about free speech and academic freedom since campuses across the country are experiencing similar issues. Attendees were advised to be cautious about a Freedom of Expression statement, because then a statement on diversity, equality, etc. would be needed. However, attendees were also told that Purdue has a good Freedom of Expression statement. She stated that Purdue University is having orientation sessions for incoming freshmen regarding freedom of expression and freedom of speech and their document about free speech is similar to what Chancellor Green is drafting. She said the question was asked what is the best way to support faculty on these issues? Do we let the brush fire burn out or do we make a faculty statement that makes another news cycle? Belli pointed out that the faculty members have free speech rights. He noted that these are general principles and questioned why more statements need to be written on them. Rudy reported that the University of Wisconsin has a statement prohibiting hecklers from disrupting speakers. Leiter stated that there should be a rule preventing hecklers coming into a classroom and disrupting the class. He noted that this would not be considered as
suppressing free because it is a response to hecklers who prevent someone from speaking. Purcell stated that conference attendees were advised to review policies and procedures that guide the response to speakers and other campus incidents before something happens.

Purcell reported on the governance structure at Penn State and noted that the Board of Trustees has some members appointed by the Governor, some are outside business people selected by the Board, and some are elected, including a faculty member. She reported often faculty are told that they cannot serve as Regents/Trustees because they would be voting on business decisions, but isn’t it odd that there is no discomfort to have student regents’ in the discussion on tuition rates.

Rudy pointed out that non-tenure track faculty members at Penn State are called fixed term faculty members. He stated that the ratio of tenure track faculty members at Penn State has dropped from 55% in 2006 to 47.4% recently. He noted that more fixed term faculty members are teaching courses at the branch campuses.

Rudy reported that at the open table discussion the Purdue faculty members said that the faculty were not happy about their university’s proposal to purchase Kaplan University.

Purcell noted that the Conference is scheduled to be at UNL in 2020. She stated that she has some ideas for the conference and would be happy to help out with the planning of the conference.

6.2 Academic Rights & Responsibilities Panel (ARRP) - Including Non-tenure Track Faculty Members

Peterson stated that he is working on revising the Procedures for the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee. He stated that some guidance is needed to determine what rank of non-tenure track faculty members are to be added to the ARRP and how many. Belli suggested following the requirements for being a member of the UNL Assembly as stated in the UNL Bylaws. Peterson and Woodman suggested that non-tenure track faculty members should follow the current ARRP requirements for Extension Educators serving on the Panel. Rudy stated that they should be promoted to Associate or Full and be consistent with the requirements for the Extension Educators. Griffin pointed out that faculty members serve a three-year term on the Panel and non-tenure track faculty members should have an appointment for at least this length of time.

Peterson stated that another question is how many non-tenure track faculty members should be added. He pointed out that currently the Panel has 36 members who are divided into six special hearing committees. He pointed out that should there be an AFT-A or AFT-B case involving a tenured faculty member, a non-tenure track faculty member cannot serve on the hearing committee. He suggested including up to five non-tenure track faculty members, if enough people are willing to serve.
Peterson stated that he will send the suggested changes to the ARRP to the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Committee for review. He noted that changes will require Faculty Senate approval, the Chancellor’s approval and Board of Regents approval.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, November 7, 2017, immediately following the Faculty Senate meeting. The meeting will be held in the East Campus Union, Great Plains Room. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Joan Latta Konecky, Secretary.