EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Adenwalla, Belli, Dawes, Hanrahan, Lee, Leiter, Peterson, Purcell, Rudy, Vakilzadian, Woodman

Absent: Fech, Latta Konecky

Date: Tuesday, January 23, 2018

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 Draft Class Attendance Policy from ASUN (Sam Brower and Camille Sippel)
   Brower noted that he previously met with the Executive Committee on October 31, and he took the concerns raised by the Committee members at that meeting to ASUN for further revisions. He stated that the latest draft reflects these changes.

   Brower reported that ASUN feels it is particularly important to have an updated attendance policy because of mental health issues that a significant number of students are grappling with. Sippel noted that every year the student government Presidents and Vice Presidents of the Big Ten meet and this past year there was discussion about class attendance policies not including excused absences for mental health issues. She pointed out that at UNL in 2015, 235 students identified with Services for Students with Disabilities, but in the spring of 2017 this number increased to 340. She noted that this trend is being observed across the Big Ten. She reported that there has also been an increase of suicides on campus this year, and anxiety is an enormous problem for many students. She stated that the revisions being proposed to the policy include identifying mental health as a legitimate case for an absence.

   Sippel stated that another concern is with section C. Participation in intercollegiate athletic events and other UNL sponsored activities. She noted that student leaders may sometimes need to miss classes to attend conferences or other events related to student governance. She pointed out that some instructors will allow three class absences, but some students might have a combination of excused and unexcused absences and the proposed changes seeks to inform students what are considered excused absences.

   Vakilzadian asked how many instructors actually take class attendance. Sippel stated that in talking with other students she believes that 50% of the instructors take attendance.
Woodman noted that his course policy is that if a student misses an exam they get a zero grade. He asked why someone involved with student government should be treated differently from another student in his class if they miss an exam. Sippel stated that student-athletes are allowed to make up a class and any university associated activity should be treated the same, whether it is academic or sports related. Lee asked if the term “university involvement” as written in the policy is ambiguous. Woodman stated that the ambiguity should be removed. Sippel suggested that a university sponsored event should come through a department. She stated that student leaders needing to miss a class in order to participate in student governance may need to go through the ASUN office to get verification that the absence is due to a university sponsored activity. Peterson pointed out that some students might need to miss a course for professional events related to their major and these kinds of absences are not included in the policy.

Brower stated that a recommendation was made to include an appeals process for students should they believe they have been wrongly denied the opportunity to make up work for a course due to a disagreement with the instructor about the legitimacy of an absence. He noted that the language regarding the process was taken from the University of Minnesota. Lee stated that this sounds similar to a grade appeal. Woodman pointed out that grade appeals occur post semester.

Brower stated that he realized that some of the excused absences could be seen as a new avenue for students to abuse their course attendance, but ASUN tried to make the language more favorable for the faculty to help prevent any abuse of the policy.

Woodman pointed out that the proposed changes could be viewed as an academic freedom issue because the policy cannot require a faculty member to accept excused absences. He noted that the first sentence of the policy states that students are responsible for the attendance policy set by their instructor and should clear absences directly with that instructor. Yet, the policy later states that it is the instructor’s responsibility to not penalize the student and the instructor must provide reasonable and timely accommodation or opportunity for the student to make up missed work. Vakilzadian pointed out that the policy makes the assumption that the faculty are unreasonable when students have absences. Brower stated that academic freedom is a huge priority and thinks ASUN could pursue some minimal standard of the excused policy.

Adenwalla stated that she is concerned that there could be abuse of the policy. Sippel stated that she believes there is an incomplete policy that if a student misses numerous classes that there could be a delay with the course. Woodman pointed out an incomplete is not automatic and has to be requested. Furthermore, the instructor also has to approve the incomplete. Sippel stated that with an incomplete the student is responsible for getting all of the material and to make up the coursework. She noted that some students, particularly some of those with mental health issues, will drop a course if they see that their grades are being affected due to their absences.
Leiter stated that he thinks the policy should be part of a course syllabus because the instructor has to inform the students what her/his class attendance policy is. He pointed out that he is concerned that we are setting up a multi-page document that creates a lot of opportunities for disputes. He asked if the appeals process mentioned in the policy would require a hearing. Brower stated that the policy is to set forth what are some legitimate reasons for absences, but it is the instructor that sets the attendance policy for a course.

Belli questioned what it means to penalize a student for an absence. He pointed out that this only applies if there are points assigned for attendance in a course, and this should be clarified in the policy. He stated that it should be clear that students are responsible for all of the work of the course, whether or not they have an excused absence.

Hanrahan pointed out that it is the student’s responsibility to attend a course, whether or not it is an excused or unexcused absence. Adenwalla noted that students who do not come to class regularly can bring the class down by asking questions in class that had previously been covered.

Peterson pointed out that the policy will need to go to the full Faculty Senate for approval. Woodman stated that it should come back to the Executive Committee for further review before it goes to the Senate. Purcell asked Brower to submit another revised draft to the Committee.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Chancellor Green’s Leadership Retreat
Purcell reported that she and Rudy attended the Chancellor’s Leadership Retreat on Monday which included 25-30 campus leaders. She stated that Professor Berger, Associate Dean in the College of Law, gave an overview of first amendment case law. EVC Plowman presented an overview of academic freedom, and Deputy General Counsel John Wiltse and Associate General Counsel Bren Chambers talked about free speech as addressed in the Board of Regents Policies.

3.2 Town Hall Meeting
Purcell reported that she and Rudy attended the Chancellor’s Town Hall meeting immediately following the retreat where he discussed the strategic plan for the campus and announced that an outside organization, Academic Leadership Associates, was being hired to facilitate the strategic plan. She noted that a question was raised about faculty being involved in the process after the meeting and Chancellor Green reported that yes, faculty will be involved. She stated that the process will begin in February with the goal of having a draft ready in August. Woodman questioned how the Chancellor was going to pay for the outside consultant given the current budget situation.

Purcell stated that the Chancellor spoke about the budget, but he did not provide any further information from what he gave to the Executive Committee on January 16.
4.0 Approval of January 16, 2018 Minutes
Griffin noted that she has not received the Chancellor’s edits yet. The Executive Committee agreed to table approval of the minutes until the next meeting.

5.0 Unfinished Business
5.1 NU Freedom of Expression Policy Statement
Purcell distributed comments she received from faculty members regarding the NU Freedom of Speech proposed policy. Of particular concern to the Executive Committee was the statement’s language on civility. Leiter pointed out that there is no way you can require civil free speech. Belli noted that the AAUP states that controversial discussions is the heart of learning, yet the policy seeks to prohibit this in classes if the subject matter does not pertain to the course.

Purcell reported that she was informed by Corporation Secretary Carmen Maurer that no further changes would be made to the document because it was going to the Board of Regents to be adopted as Policy at its meeting on January 25.

5.2 Draft Travel Policy
Purcell noted that over 180 people attended the BRT’s travel policy forum held on January 16. She stated that she received a phone call from Senior Associate to the President Kostelnik who asked how the BRT could be more responsive to the concerns raised by the faculty at the forum. Purcell stated that her response was that there needs to be more shared governance in these kinds of decision. She pointed out that the forum was mostly informational and no real dialogue occurred. Adenwalla asked if the travel policy was set. Purcell stated that it is her understanding that the policy is not final yet.

5.3 Shared Governance
Purcell stated that she is considering responding to an email from President Bounds regarding the need for shared governance and suggesting that there should be a faculty member on the Board’s Committees to provide input. She pointed out that the recent development of the NU Freedom of Expression Statement and the BRT efficiencies are examples of the lack of faculty input. She noted that Woodman was the only faculty member to serve on the BRT Steering Committee. Woodman pointed out that the Steering Committee was not provided any detailed information on the impacts of the proposed cuts. The Executive Committee reviewed the draft email and agreed to continue working on the wording. The email will be sent out for approval to the Committee.

6.0 New Business
6.1 NU Budget - Letter of Concern/Resolution?
Purcell asked if the Senate should pass a resolution similar to the one passed last year on April 25, 2017 supporting the funding of the university budget. She noted that there is a group called “One Nebraska” that is working to gather more support for the university. Woodman suggested Purcell email the April 25, 2017 resolution for review by the Executive Committee.
6.2 Interview Questions for UNL Honors Director Position
The Executive Committee identified the following questions for the candidates for UNL Honors Director:

- Please articulate what the value of an honors education are and how it is beneficial for the students.
- How do you retain students in the Honors Program?
- What can you do to make the program more attractive?
- What can you do to increase the number of dedicated honors courses/sections? How do you make this work in the College of Arts & Sciences?
- Are there enough faculty members to teach Honors courses?
- How can you increase support for honors students and what could be some other incentives for these students?

6.3 Agenda Items for EVC Plowman and VC Boehm
The Executive Committee identified the following agenda items for EVC Plowman and VC Boehm:

- Elimination of Honors Convocation Ceremony
- Update on Hiring of Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development
- Plans for the College of Journalism and Mass Communications
- Justification for Creation of New Associate Vice Chancellor and Academic Leader Success Position in IANR
- Update on Hiring of ENREC Director

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, January 30, 2018 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.