

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Present: Baesu, Bearnese, Boudreau, Dawes, Eklund, Kopocis, Lott, Minter, Paul, Shradler, Tschetter, Vakilzadian, Zuckerman

Absent:

Date: Tuesday, August 29, 2023

Location: 201 Canfield Administration 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 (*Kopocis*)

Kopocis called the meeting to order at 2:33 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett/EVC Ankersen

2.1 What are your first impressions of UNL since being on campus? What do you see as our strengths and what areas need improvement? What do you think you will focus on first?

Chancellor Bennett stated that he was excited to be at UNL and to be the 21st Chancellor here. He noted that he looks forward to having good conversations about higher education both here at UNL and more broadly. He thanked the Executive Committee stating that he appreciates the work that they, and the Faculty Senate do, and he believes in working together with the Senate.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he has met with many different people on campus from students to faculty members to support staff and his first impression was how much everyone really cares about the university. He stated that one of our strengths is the ability for us to identify and move towards the same direction for our shared goals and discussions such as this one with the Executive Committee to make sure we are in alignment with our goals. For instance, Chancellor Bennett pointed out that a question the campus needs to ponder is how large of a campus we want to be. He asked if the current 23,500 enrollment is the right number for us, should we be smaller or larger and what are the pros and cons of each. He noted that these are the kinds of discussions he would like to engage the Faculty Senate with.

Chancellor Bennett pointed out that there has been considerable talk about positioning ourselves so we can seek membership with the AAU again. He noted that this will have to be an institutional and a system commitment for us to achieve what is necessary to be voted back into the AAU. He stated that it would be interesting and beneficial to hear many voices around whether this is a goal we should pursue. He noted that there are some categories we can build on to gain membership again, but there are other categories that will take some time for us to meet.

Chancellor Bennett acknowledged that we have budget issues that need to be addressed and we are going to have to decide what our priorities are and how deep we need to make budget reductions. He noted that his approach is to address hard, heavy transformative questions in discussions which include multiple perspectives. He stated that people need to be comfortable to speak up in these discussions and he likes people who are not afraid to have a dissenting but respectful voice. He pointed out that we will be able to grapple with the issues faster if we all contribute to the conversation.

Chancellor Bennett noted that transitions are always challenging for a university, and it will probably be approximately a year before we will have a new President since President Carter is not leaving until December 31.

Vakilzadian asked what the Chancellor's thoughts were on whether the budget reductions should be vertical or horizontal cuts. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that we still do not know what the exact numbers will be for the budget reductions so it is difficult to state how reductions will be made and what the expectations will be from the Central Administration. He stated that there are many different variables that need to be considered before budget reductions can be defined. Vakilzadian reported that he has heard rumors that staff would be cut and pointed out that we need the staff, including Information Technology specialists for faculty to be able to do their work. Chancellor Bennett cautioned buying into any rumors or speculating what would be cut. He pointed out that he has a very real appreciation for the staff of the university, and it would not be responsible to eliminate staff positions to meet the budget shortfall. He stated that when it becomes clearer to us about the actual budget numbers, the administration, the Academic Planning Committee, and the Faculty Senate will need to make decisions about the budget reductions.

Shrader asked what priorities would need to change that would make us eligible to join the AAU again. Chancellor Bennett reported that we need to stabilize our enrollment and strategies for enrollment are going to be important. He stated that retention is a part of the effort to stabilize enrollment and we need to improve our retention rates and noted that we need to do a deep dive in seeing why students are not coming back. He stated that as an R1 institution we need to continue our research road and give everyone the opportunity to conduct research. He pointed out that research is a big piece to getting back into the AAU.

Minter stated that in terms of institutional transformations, she wondered whether the Nebraska Foundation could be a better partner in helping us to get a caliber of scholars that would be members of national academies. Chancellor Bennett stated that he believes we have an opportunity to weigh in with some of the donors who share our philosophy to once again be a member of the AAU. Zuckerman noted that she just watched a scholar talk about academic freedom and the threat outside entities, such as the AAU which has its own set of metrics, could have to our academic freedom. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that there are concerns about academic freedom that exist beyond AAU membership. He noted that the trends that are occurring in some states with respect to academic freedom are definitely concerning. Zuckerman stated that before funds are put towards

hiring high caliber professors, consideration needs to be given to places like the College of Education and Human Sciences because there is such a need for more teachers in Nebraska. Chancellor Bennett stated that we need to debate whether it is worth pursuing readmittance into the AAU at the expense of other things that we do. He noted that he indicated in his letter of application that he wrote about his interest in having UNL gain membership again in the AAU.

EVC Ankerson pointed out that one of the benefits of talking about AAU membership is that it reignites discussions about who we are. She noted that there were robust conversations with the N150 and N2025 plans, but a great deal has changed since then, and it is probably time for us to have discussion about what our aspirations for enrollment, retention, and research are for 2030.

2.2 What will happen with the 5-point budget plan now that President Carter has announced his departure? Are we still on track to improve our research visibility and rankings given the President's announcement?

Chancellor Bennett stated that currently we do not have any further information from Central Administration about the 5-point plan and that he would report back to the Executive Committee when information is provided.

Chancellor Bennett reported that he spoke with APC Chair Vuran about whether the deadline for submitting budget recommendations, December 31, will still be held, but that we should at least have a draft of the recommendations by the end of the year. He noted that in his discussion with Chair Vuran he stated that he wants the APC to be more actively involved with the academic side of the budget recommendations and that he plans to make whatever data sets are needed available to the APC for it to be able to come up with recommendations. He pointed out that he wants the process to be as transparent as possible.

2.3 Rather than looking to hire outside faculty who are members of national academies, can we focus on helping some of our current faculty members get into these academies?

Chancellor Bennett reported that in a recent leadership meeting there was conversation about the cost of hiring faculty members who are members of a national academy versus growing our own and whether we have faculty members who are deep in their careers who could be voted into a national academy. He stated that we are talking about how to invest more in the people that we have here.

2.4 Fall enrollment numbers. Are the 6-day census numbers available? What is the state of the incentive-based budget model? No updates on it have been provided, particularly in how it is affecting the colleges.

EVC Ankerson reported that as of midnight actual numbers have been obtained although over the next week validation of the numbers will be confirmed. She noted that earlier in the year there was a prediction that we would be down 1.5% in enrollment, but we are now looking at a .9% decrease in enrollment. She stated that graduate and professional enrollment has increased and that we should have an increase in first-time freshmen. She

offered to invite AVC Volkmer to a meeting to give a presentation on our enrollment strategy.

EVC Ankerson stated that our themed focus is on student retention and pointed out that there are many factors leading to successful retention. DFW rates in classes are one and we have some courses that also have large equity gaps in the DFW rates. She reported that we have a comprehensive plan that we will start implementing to help with retention rates. She stated that another component is reviewing the complexity of a degree program and analyzing it in comparison to other Big Ten degrees is another tool to increase retention and graduation success.

Eklund pointed out that he visited 44 different high schools last year but received absolutely no help from Admissions. He stated that in order to improve our enrollment rates Admissions needs to provide some help for faculty members who are actively engaged in recruiting students. He pointed out that we also need to offer in-state tuition rates, like UNO does, for students from other states and we continue to have flunk-out classes which need to be examined. EVC Ankerson stated that AVC Volkmer is discussing in having a townhall meeting about recruitment and what the faculty role can be in the process.

Shrader asked if the recent lower retention rates in 3rd and 4th year students a trend. EVC Ankerson reported that we focus a lot of effort on 1st and 2nd year students and the Husker Power survey helps identify challenges students are facing. Chancellor Bennett noted that historically other universities experience this decrease in retention by 3–4-year students and the cause usually center arounds finances. He stated that another tool to help us retain students is to get faculty more involved with the students because they can talk about their department better than anyone else. He pointed out that the Director of Admissions position that we are seeking to fill will need to address how our faculty can help address declining enrollment.

Chancellor Bennett stated that he does not believe tuition rates should be increased just for the sake of increasing them, but the university has fixed costs that increase every year. He stated that his experience has been to work very closely with the student government body to make sure they know why an increase is needed and what percentage of increase would be required to address the increased costs. He pointed out that when this is done, they usually partner with the decision.

Kopocis asked if students are ever asked why they don't return. EVC Ankerson reported that our advisors and academic navigators are consistently reaching out to the students and noted that sometimes students have an academic hold, or a tuition hold which prevents them from enrolling for courses, sometimes it is financial, and sometimes personal reasons. Baesu stated that in the College of Engineering there was a discussion about retention and there used to be a form asking the students why they left the college. She noted that some said it wasn't the degree they were seeking, but the overwhelming response was that they could get their degree cheaper because they didn't think the quality of the education mattered. EVC Ankerson noted that this is part of understanding

the value proposition that would be addressed in the plan she spoke about. Baesu stated that having a pipeline with companies is helpful in retaining students and suggested that our career fairs could be improved considerably.

Minter noted that she teaches general education courses, and she is surprised with the number of students that need extra help in organizing their academic work. She asked if there is anything we could do help these students, perhaps by providing them with some guidance. EVC Ankerson reported that this is part of the retention plan. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that he believes strongly that some of our support services for students cannot be recommended for budget reductions.

Chancellor Bennett thanked the Executive Committee and stated that he will not be successful if he doesn't have the support of the Executive Committee and the Faculty Senate and the faculty's involvement is needed.

3.0 AVC Walker

3.1 Proposed Revisions to the Guidelines for Evaluation of Faculty

AVC Walker pointed out that the current document is over twenty years old and needed major updating and changes. She reported that in December 2021 she, along with AVC Bischoff, and then Faculty Senate President Kolbe charged the Faculty Evaluation Guidelines Update Committee to conduct research on and propose recommendations for a new guiding document outlining effective and equitable evaluation of faculty across the UNL campus. She noted that fifteen faculty members served on the committee.

AVC Walker stated that she, AVC Bischoff, and the new Faculty Senate President Minter felt the committee's initial revisions did not go far enough and they made suggestions for further revisions which were shared with the committee. She reported that the next draft of the proposed revisions was then shared with the Senate Executive Committee, the Senate's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the Deans' Council, and the Academic Affairs leadership team. She noted that further revisions were suggested and incorporated into the draft which was vetted multiple times with the General Counsel's office. She pointed out that what needs to happen next is for it to go to the Faculty Senate for approval before going to the Chancellor for approval.

Vakilzadian noted that the Faculty Senate will need to approve the proposed revisions but suggested that the document be sent to all faculty for review. AVC Walker, Kopocis, and Griffin pointed out that the Faculty Senate is the elected governing body for the faculty and Senators have a month to discuss the proposed revisions with their colleagues. AVC Walker stated that minor revisions such as a typo or grammatical corrections would be easily accepted, but any substantial revisions would require the changes to go back to the committee and to General Counsel for review.

AVC Walker noted that one major change to the document is that the mandatory processes for promotion and tenure have been combined and are now clearer. Another change is the insertion of the post-tenure review process. She stated that faculty who are promotable but who are not tenure-track have been defined as "specialized faculty"

although they are still distinguished from tenure-track faculty. She stated that another change has to do with the language about going up for early tenure with the new language stating that “the candidate has built and sustained a record of high-level performance equaling or surpassing that expected over the normal probationary period.”

Zuckerman stated that it was depressing to read that merit raises are not necessarily always available, and that promotion to the rank of full professor should not be necessarily expected for everyone. AVC Walker pointed out that receiving raises is not the only reason for evaluating the work of the faculty. She stated that if a faculty member is doing excellent work that lines up with what their unit is doing, the faculty member should be promoted.

Dawes stated that she saw that the seven years waiting until you become a full professor was deleted in the revisions. She asked if this was removed because it wasn't consistent across the departments or was the idea not to put a definitive year for when promotion could occur. AVC Walker stated that it was removed because it is inaccurate and faculty members can go up earlier or later than seven years. She noted that it was not clear what the purpose of the seven-year statement was.

Kopocis asked if there was a motion to have the proposed revisions to the Guidelines for Faculty Evaluation be presented to the Faculty Senate for consideration. Minter moved to present the motion to the full Senate. Motion seconded by Tschetter and then approved by the Executive Committee.

3.2 Changes to Campus-Wide Professorships

AVC Walker reported that some changes are being made to the Cather/Bessey and the Weaver/Douglas Professorships. She noted that these are state-funded professorships which were started about 20 years ago and are managed by the EVC's office. She stated that there is a university professorship committee which reviews recommendations and nominations for faculty members to receive one of these professorships and the committee is concerned that there are many faculty members deserving of these professorships but there are not enough that can be awarded. As a result, the committee recommended some changes to have more of our highly deserving faculty recognized, providing greater diversity. She reported that the proposed change has been accepted by the EVC and the major change is that the reviewing process will be changed for those faculty members who will be newly awarded with a professorship. She stated that currently professorships are renewable every five years although a summary of the accomplishments must be reviewed by the professorship committee. With the change, after five years the individual must be renominated by the individual's unit. She pointed out that this change will not apply to those with an existing professorship. She also stated that explicit instructions will be provided for the nominator and seconder when a faculty member is nominated.

3.3 Faculty Exit/Retention Interview Process

AVC Walker stated that Academic Affairs is collaborating with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to start an initiative to do exit interviews of faculty members who resign

from the University to see why they are leaving. She noted that these would be people who are leaving the University to take a position elsewhere, not those who are retiring. She reported that an interview will also be conducted with faculty members who are offered a job elsewhere but who decide to stay at UNL. She stated that there is concern over faculty retention and the plan is to gather the information, put it in aggregate form, and then report it to the Deans' Council.

Bearnes noted that Extension has been conducting exit interviews for a long time and thought it was being done with campus faculty as well. She asked when the last time exit interviews on campus were conducted. AVC Walker stated that she believed it ended in 2021-22. She stated that we were part of the COACHE initiative out of Harvard which provided a massive amount of data, but which was not very actionable. She pointed out that it has been done in an ad hoc way in some units, and noted that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will conduct the interviews since that office is not involved in the chain of reporting of deans and faculty members.

AVC Walker asked what is happening with the Faculty Code of Conduct. Kopocis reported that she and Minter recently worked on some edits to the proposed document. AVC Walker offered to review the document again if needed.

4.0 Approval of August 22, 2023 Minutes

Kopocis asked if there were any further revisions to the minutes. Hearing none she asked for approval. Tschetter moved to approve the minutes. Motion seconded by Baesu and approved by the Executive Committee.

5.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Faculty Senate Meeting

The Executive Committee discussed the agenda for the upcoming Senate meeting.

6.2 Co-sponsoring Academic Freedom Presentation

Zuckerman stated that she is asking the Executive Committee whether the Faculty Senate would co-sponsor a speech about academic freedom given by a faculty member in her unit. She stated that no financial support is required, and the request is to just get the message out to the campus about the speech. Minter pointed out that the downside would be that the Faculty Senate could be asked to co-sponsor many different things relating to higher education or faculty governance. The Executive Committee agreed not to co-sponsor the event.

Griffin pointed out that an announcement can be made in the Faculty Senate meeting on Tuesday and that Zuckerman could make an announcement in the Executive Committee meetings prior to the event and the information would be recorded in the minutes.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 2:30 pm. The meeting will be held in 203 Alexander Building. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator and Signe Boudreau, Secretary.