

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Absent:

Date: Tuesday, January 23, 2024

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 2:30 p.m.

2.0 Chancellor Bennett/EVC Ankerson/VC Boehm

2.1 Has Central Administration provided any additional information regarding UNL's portion of the budget reduction and the timeline for addressing those reductions?

Chancellor Bennett reported that Interim President Kabourek told him this morning that the system has not identified a specific number yet for UNL to reduce its budget. He considers this to be Phase II of the reductions and noted that going forward it will need to include some level of review of academic programs. He pointed out that he told Interim President Kabourek that he would like to start having conversations with the APC and the Senate Executive Committee and told him that it will take time to work through the budget reduction process and that there cannot be the expectation that the campus will be able to quickly address the budget reductions. He reported that Interim President Kabourek pointed out in their meeting this morning that areas that are underperforming will be at risk, but he told the Interim President that we will need to figure out comprehensively how to handle the reductions and where we want to go, especially in terms of getting readmitted to the AAU.

EVC Ankerson pointed out that even though we may not begin the budget reduction process immediately, we need to be proactive and ready to address the reductions. She reported that the Postsecondary Coordinating Commission for Secondary Education has a threshold standard for programs. She said that programs must meet the following minimum enrollment for programs; undergraduate programs must have a minimum of seven students, master programs five students, and Ph.D. programs three students. She stated that another metric being considered is the number of student credit hours per instructional faculty. She pointed out that we need to be making sure that we are investing in programs to move the campus forward.

Eklund stated that his department had to justify its Ph.D. in music education and pointed out that he is supervising eleven graduate students and all of the students that have

recently graduated from the program have left with a job waiting for them. He stated that they are now down two faculty members, one of which was cut and the other that left. He asked who makes the decisions allowing a department to hire new faculty. EVC Ankerson stated that the decisions are made within the college, but each college is slightly different in terms of how it handles these decisions. She noted that the decisions about what courses will be taught are made by the department or college leadership. Eklund stated that the process is not well communicated and that there is real concern that the needed courses will not be staffed for his graduate students. EVC Ankerson pointed out that one of the directives about cutting courses or programs is that we are not obstructing the path of our existing students to finish their degree. She stated that there are many ways to achieve instructional efficiency, for instance, teaching a course every other year if it is not in high demand rather than offering it every year.

Tschetter asked what would happen with programs that may not have any majors but are a support program to other programs. She asked if they would be judged differently. EVC Ankerson stated that the CCPE is concerned with the number of students in a program, but for support programs consideration is given whether it is still needed to support other programs. She noted that we need to be efficient and effective, and many factors need to be considered.

2.2 Do you anticipate that the second round of budget reductions will focus on academic programs? If so, what will be your vision and strategy for making these reductions while also focusing on how we can move the campus forward?

Chancellor Bennett stated that any reductions going forward will be looked at comprehensively but will probably include some academic programs. He pointed out that we need to be intentional about what we are doing with the reductions.

Baesu reported that there is a large problem with some programs being starved for faculty members and she worries that some programs will simply die because they are not able to hire. She asked if there would be some preference for allowing faculty members to be hired when a core program is losing faculty members due to retirement. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that he does not believe we are in a true hiring freeze, because he has to approve any new hires and he has probably approved over 400 positions across the campus since he started on July 1 and he has only denied a small number of the requests. He noted that the Chancellor's office is not holding up hiring.

EVC Ankerson reported that before the Chancellor receives a request for approval of a hire it has come through each of the levels in a particular unit. She stated that issues of trying to retain a faculty member are usually dealt with quickly. She noted that any of the colleges that report to the EVC have a strategic team processing the hire requests. She stated that colleges look at the future and essential nature of particular areas when hiring requests come forward. She stated that she has pre-meetings with the Deans about potential hires and sometimes the meetings include the VCIANR and VC of ORED. She suggested that if there are any faculty openings that may be coming up to be sure you

communicate this need with your department head and the dean, so they are aware of the upcoming openings.

2.3 Based on current enrollments and retention rates, what would in-state undergraduate tuition need to be in order to nullify UNL's \$12 million budget deficit?

EVC Ankerson noted that she reached out to Business and Finance to obtain this information and stated that to arrive at \$12 million we would need to have an increase of 1,480 students. She stated that with our existing enrollment tuition increases of 6.7% would be needed. VC Boehm noted that last June there was a 3% increase in tuition.

Chancellor Bennett reported that currently our year-to-date enrollment is looking good, and we have a high number of deposits even before we have issued our scholarship award letters yet. EVC Ankerson pointed out that those students who applied by November 1 will be notified on February 1 of their scholarship package.

Vakilzadian asked if the State makes up for some of the costs with the Nebraska Promise program. EVC Ankerson noted that Nebraska Promise helps with social mobility by allowing students whose family gross income is less than \$65,000 to attend the university. She noted that it is not a funded mandate. Kopocis asked if we also receive some Pell grant money from the Nebraska Promise students. EVC Ankerson stated that we do receive some Pell grant funds, so the Nebraska Promise ends up being a net positive. VC Boehm noted that we want Pell grant students because that is funding that comes to us. He noted that there is a total cost with these students because they are also living in resident halls and using the dining facilities which brings revenue in. EVC Ankerson reported that about 25% of our students are first-generation students.

2.5 What is the strategy for how departments/colleges will staff courses identified for the fall semester after the instructional efficiency reduction is made? Would it be possible, in the interest of future course planning, to open a wait list for all courses to better determine courses that are not able to serve the student population for better course planning in the spring?

EVC Ankerson reported that once the instructional efficiency measures are put into place it will be up to the colleges to think carefully how to approach these reductions, but they need to keep in mind that current students need to be able to complete their program. She noted that we will need to be thinking about pedagogy and what could be effective for students to achieve the learning outcomes for a course. She stated that one possibility is to have graduate research assistants funded through more grants. She pointed out the departments need to look at their course offerings to see how often a course is offered and what the demands are of the course. She noted that many departments have wait lists for courses to see where the demand is. She stated that there is a group looking to see if there are other effective ways to achieve the learning goals we are trying to meet. She pointed out that consideration needs to be given before a course is not offered to see if it could impact other programs and colleges.

Vakilzadian stated that there should be more flexibility with not offering elective courses frequently rather than prerequisite and required courses. EVC Ankerson stated that the prerequisite courses need to be offered enough so students can then take the required course as they progress towards graduation. She reported that collectively there has been a strong effort to make sure the prerequisites are still relevant and that there is enough capacity to meet the enrollment demands. She noted that departments are continually looking at their curriculum to make sure they are correct.

2.6 Since January 1, there have been news articles in which the interim NU system president suggests more investments in Regents Scholars and Athletics, and additional cuts to academic budgets. We've heard that the Legislature is considering a bill regarding the elimination of tenure, and the Governor, in his State of the State address, suggested dissatisfaction with Nebraska's post-secondary institutions. In addition, the campus was notified of UNL's \$12 million budget reduction which included more than \$2 million in reductions that the Academic Planning Committee voted against. In light of all of these things, what can you offer faculty so that they feel hopeful and/or respected?

Chancellor Bennett reported that there has been some discussion by Central Administration and the Board of Regents about how the Regents scholarship could be enhanced to make it more competitive with scholarships offered at other universities so we could retain students in the state with perfect ACT scores. He pointed out that those involved in the discussions have been very sensitive to any expenditure of funds right now.

Chancellor Bennett noted that two bills have been introduced in the Legislature for consideration; one is about tenure and the other is about discontinuing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. He reported that Associate VP for Government Relations Kristen Hassebrook and her staff are closely monitoring these bills, and he noted that there will be a hearing on the tenure bill in February where he believes Interim President Kabourek will speak. He noted that he told the system office that members of the UNL community want him as Chancellor to speak on the tenure bill and he said Interim President Kabourek is taking this under advisement.

Chancellor Bennett noted he gave a great deal of thought to the last question of this agenda item and pointed out that UNL has been carrying a structural deficit for several years and we were at the point that either we addressed it, or budget decisions would be made for us at the system level. He stated that while the campus is currently dealing with the difficulties of reducing the structural deficit by \$12 million, these efforts will allow us to move forward in the future and enable us to build our future on a stronger foundation.

Minter pointed out that faculty morale is low, and she is concerned that as we face these challenges that we find ways to not just do the same old platitudes. She noted that we have had a budget reduction for five of the past six years and it doesn't play well that we have ignored our budget deficit for several years. Chancellor Bennett reported that the previous budget reductions were made by using alternative funding sources, dipping into our cash reserve, and using other funding mechanisms. He noted that these measures

have reduced our flexibility greatly and the Board of Regents stated that the deficit could no longer be handled this way and that the campus needed to address some of the core issues generating the deficit. Minter pointed out that many faculty are buying their own printer paper and toner cartridges, and many faculty members no longer have phones in their offices. She stated that it doesn't feel like Central Administration is taking responsibility for their role in contributing to the system deficit. She pointed out that freezing tuition and increasing scholarships is beneficial to the students, but the campuses are absorbing the cost of these decisions without any increase to their budgets. Chancellor Bennett noted that when there have been discussions at the system level to enhance the Regents scholarship, he pointed out that the system must help carry out the cost of these initiatives rather than expecting the campuses to cover the costs. Kopocis asked if there was an opportunity to use philanthropic money to support the Regents or other scholarships. Chancellor Bennett noted that the Foundation must be careful with what they are asking for to avoid donor fatigue.

Bouma asked if the tuition initiatives tie into the proposed tenure bill. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that every state he has worked in has had debates about tenure and noted that we are fighting the misconception some people have that faculty members don't work very many hours when in fact most of them work much longer hours than the average person. He stated that we cannot even get started with rejoining the AAU if we don't have tenure. Zuckerman pointed out that tenure exists to protect academic freedom and allows faculty to create new knowledge in areas that might be considered controversial. She stated that it allows faculty to be innovative and allows them to teach students on the cutting-edge of knowledge. She noted that there are many people who are in positions where tenure is not available, but it should be because it would create a better workplace and would provide protections for everyone.

Chancellor Bennett stated that should the DEI bill go through the Legislature it would have numerous impacts. Kopocis stated that it is her understanding that the Law College has a required course on diversity, equity and inclusion that must be taken by students otherwise they would not be able to take the bar exam. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that there are multiple ways the requirement could be satisfied, and he has been speaking with Dean Moberly about this.

Shrader asked if the leadership at the system level understands that the university runs the risk of losing the support of the faculty and staff if we don't wrangle the external narrative on issues like the budget, tenure, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Chancellor Bennett pointed out that our faculty leadership has been very patient with how the university wants to handle these issues, but there comes a point where that will cease. Shrader noted that rejoining the AAU will require a significant financial investment. Chancellor Bennett agreed and reported that he informed Interim President Kabourek that a number of things will have to get into alignment in order for us to be readmitted to the AAU. He noted that it is not just a matter of combining UNL and UNMC research work.

VC Boehm pointed out that the Chancellor's assessment of where we are at with Central Administration is spot on and he appreciates the partnership with the leadership team, the

faculty, staff and students and the hard work that is being done as we grapple with these challenging times.

Chancellor Boehm noted that we will need to be patient this spring as we have an Interim President and an ongoing search for a new President. He pointed out that there could be a new management approach with a new President and things could change. He reported that he is working very well with the Interim President, and they have good communications. He stated that he would be open to receiving feedback from the Senate so he can convey concerns of the Senate to Interim President Kabourek. He noted that he will continue to engage with the Faculty Senate, APC, Staff Senate and ASUN and stated that transparency and relationships are very important as we deal with the issues that are currently challenging us and as we move the campus forward.

3.0 Announcements

3.1 Faculty Senate Representative Needed for the Council on Inclusive Excellence and Diversity

Kopocis reported that she received an email message from VC Barker seeking a representative from the Faculty Senate to serve on the Council on Inclusive Excellence and Diversity. Griffin and Minter suggested that an email message be sent to the Senators seeking volunteers to serve on the CIED.

4.0 Approval of December 12, 2023 Minutes

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

5.0 Unfinished Business

No unfinished business was discussed.

6.0 New Business

6.1 Concern About Deadlines for Submitting Final Grades

Kopocis noted that an email message was sent from a faculty member regarding concern on the timeline for submitting final grades. In the email it was pointed out that final exams given on a Monday require grades to be submitted by Saturday but final grades for exams given on Tuesday are not required until the following Monday. In the email it was noted that the general policy is to submit grades five days after the final exam or project is due. Kopocis asked if any of the Executive Committee members have heard faculty raising this same concern. None of the Executive Committee members were aware of any concerns about the timeline for submitting final grades.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:56 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be on Tuesday, January 30, 2024, 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.