

**UNL FACULTY SENATE MEETING MINUTES**  
**City Campus Union, Auditorium**  
**November 4, 2014**  
**Presidents Nickerson and Bender, Presiding**

**1.0 Call to Order**

President Nickerson called the meeting to order at 2:34 p.m.

**2.0 Announcements**

**2.1 Best Practices in Course Scheduling Document**

President Nickerson reported that the document is coming from the Enrollment Management Council and the Council is seeking feedback from the Senators and all faculty members on the ideas suggested in the document. He noted that he is interested in whether or not the problem that exists with courses scheduled back-to-back on East Campus and City Campus can be resolved. He stated that the Executive Committee has questioned whether some of the best practices are in the best interest of UNL. He stated that he thinks each department should have a designated individual that reserves rooms for classes. He asked Senators to talk about the document with their colleagues and to provide feedback either to himself ([knickerson1@unl.edu](mailto:knickerson1@unl.edu)) or Professor Sollars, Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences ([patricia.sollars@unl.edu](mailto:patricia.sollars@unl.edu)), the Senate representative on the Enrollment Management Council.

**2.2 Student Absence Form**

President Nickerson stated that the University Health Center (UHC) has requested that there be a change in policy regarding providing absence notes to students who do not seek medical attention. He reported that the UHC is no longer willing to provide these absence notes. He stated that the Senate Executive Committee is sympathetic with the UHC's request and has arranged for a student absence form to be available online. He reported that the form will be on the UHC website, and hopefully Student Affairs' website. He pointed out that use of the form will be optional, and it does not over ride the instructor's policy that is stated in a course syllabus. He stated that the form requires a counter signature of someone who can verify that the student has been ill, although the form is not fool proof. He pointed out that if the student goes to the UHC for treatment a note can be provided.

**2.3 Pound Howard Award Nominations**

President Nickerson reported that nominations for the Louise Pound-George Howard Distinguished Career Service award are due on December 12. He noted that the nominations materials must be sent electronically to Coordinator Griffin at [kgriffin2@unl.edu](mailto:kgriffin2@unl.edu). He stated that the award recognizes a person who has had a distinguished career and has proved exceptional service to UNL. The individual can be a faculty member, administrator, or a staff member and their contributions can be in teaching, research, or service. He noted that on the Senate website (<http://www.unl.edu/facultysenate/louise-pound-george-howard-distinguished-career-service-award>) there is a list of the recipients of the award along with the guidelines and the nomination form.

**3.0 Director of Benefits Greg Clayton**

Director Clayton reported that the annual NUFlex enrollment will begin on November 17 and concludes on December 5. He stated that full-time employees are fortunate in that there will be no increase in medical or dental costs, although part-time employees will see some change. He noted that the University has to implement the Affordable Care Act and one of the changes with the Act is that employees who have a .75 FTE or higher can enroll in the bronze plan. He pointed out that this is the absolute minimum plan and he thinks most employees will not sign up for it. He noted that all employees with .50 FTE or greater are offered insured benefits.

Director Clayton stated that everyone will need to go through Firefly to make any changes, and each time you go into the NUFlex enrollment through Firefly you will receive a confirmation statement. He reported that the informational meetings scheduled for November 17 and November 25 will be available through Adobe Connect and they will be recorded for access later on.

Director Clayton stated that employees are being asked to complete the wellness profile which only provides cumulative data, not individual data. He pointed out that the cumulative data allows them to see where improvements are needed. He stated that incentives for completing the wellness profile include \$300 for each family member's annual physical exam. He noted that employees who order generic drugs through

Caremark's mail service can get the drugs for free.

Director Clayton reported that Blue Cross/Blue Shield and the Catholic Health Initiatives still have not reached an agreement. He pointed out that we are committed through 2015 to honor CHI claims, but he is not sure what will happen in the future. He noted that most of the doctors are still under the preferred physicians with BCBS. He pointed out that the issue is really outside of the university's control, but we are encouraging them to work things out.

Director Clayton stated that a change in the medical plan is coverage for autism. He noted that this change was made at the state level and residential mental health facilities will be added. He reported that prescription drug coverage will not change either and deductibles will remain the same.

Director Clayton stated that the flexible spending account has been increased to \$2550 which is a limit that is dictated by the IRS. He noted that the University is still using Wage Works as its program to manage the flexible spending accounts. He reported that the debit card from Wage Works is good for three years.

Director Clayton stated that employees will need to go into NUFlex to complete the smoker's form, complete the health risk assessment if they wish to do so, and they will need to sign up again for the flexible spending account. Otherwise everything else will remain the same and will roll over from last year unless you want to make changes.

Director Clayton stated that long term disability is not changing, but employees can increase their life insurance if they wish. If they do this they will need to complete the evidence form. He stated that there is no change in the accidental death and dismemberment coverage.

Director Clayton reported that the limits on the 403b and 457 plans are going up. He noted that these plans allow employees to put additional money away for retirement. He stated that the plans can either be a Roth or a tax shelter plan and the 403b plan must be maxed out before an employee can open a 457 plan.

Director Clayton stated that one thing of concern for the University is health coverage for graduate students. He pointed out that the Affordable Health Care states that if someone works 30 hours or more they have to be offered the bronze plan which must be affordable. He noted that graduate students can still participate in the student health plan, which is a much better plan for them, but they will be offered the bronze plan as well. He stated that faculty members should let graduate students know that they can call the Benefits Office for help if they need assistance in determining which plan will be best for them.

Director Clayton reported that after the open NUFlex enrollment a survey will be conducted to see how well the process worked for people and whether they want any changes. He asked that everyone respond to the survey so they can make the open enrollment better.

Professor Handa, College of Architecture, said that she noticed that there are no benefits for the flu shot. Director Clayton stated that the wellness plan will cover the flu shot unless you have used up your \$250 which is allotted for health services during the year. He stated that a claim can be made to BCBS to cover the flu shot. Professor Purcell, Southeast Research & Extension Center, stated that the flu shot is covered through the medical portion of the health coverage, not the pharmacy part of the plan.

Professor Schleck, English, inquired if there is the ability to be reimbursed for the \$250 wellness plan. She also asked if the survey will only provide aggregate data or whether the survey will help shape wellness on campus. She pointed out that the food in the vending machines is designed to promote heart attacks, not prevent them, and it is difficult to get healthy food on campus. Director Clayton agreed that the vending machines are not oriented for good health and he will relay this information to Kim Barrett, Assistant Director for Well Services and Fitness Programs. He stated that he does not know how much flexibility there will be with the survey this year, but wondered if questions could be put into the survey for next year. Professor Li, Civil Engineering, asked if the \$250 wellness plan can be used to cover the cost of the Rec Center fees. Director Clayton stated that the \$250 can only go towards a doctor's visit.

Professor Bradford, Law, noted that a couple of years ago the government allowed the money in a flexible spending account to carry over into the following year. He asked if the University is following the practices yet. Director Clayton stated that the University is not doing this yet. He pointed out that there is only a small amount of money left over and this is being used to cover forfeitures that occur with the reimbursement accounts. He reported that forfeitures occur if an employee leaves the university early, but uses all of the

money they are allowed to contribute to the flexible spending account before they have put in the full amount. He stated that the money leftover in the flexible spending accounts covers these shortfalls. He noted that Central Administration has looked at this every year, but has not decided to make any changes to the flexible spending accounts.

Director Clayton thanked the Senate for allowing him to speak and stated that anyone with questions should contact the Benefits Office.

#### **4.0 Approval of October 7, 2014 Minutes**

President Nickerson called for approval of the minutes. Professor Vakilzadian, Electrical Engineering, moved for approval of the minutes. The motion was seconded by Professor Peterson, Agricultural Economics. The motion was approved.

#### **5.0 Committee Reports**

##### **5.1 Research Council (Professor Awada)**

Professor Awada stated that the main responsibility of the Research Council is to provide input to the Vice Chancellor of Research and Economic Development on internal grants relating to research. She reported that the Council also selects the speakers for the Nebraska Lecture Series. She noted that the twelve faculty members of the Council represent different disciplines around the campus and each year four new faculty members replace outgoing members.

Professor Awada reported that a retreat with the Research Council took place this year and the retreat focused on how to review criteria for internal grants and implemented the evaluation of funding proposals by using scoring rubrics for each proposal category. She noted that 68 applications requesting funding were received last year, and 37 grants totaling \$299,475 were awarded.

Professor Awada reported that the two Nebraska Lecture Series speakers were Dr. Stephen Behrendt from English and Dr. Dennis Molfese, Director of the Brain, Biology, and Behavior Center.

Professor Awada stated that the Research Council will continue to work on evaluating the efficacy of the new system for proposal review and will continue discussions on how to improve research and scholarly contributions at UNL and faculty mentoring.

#### **6.0 Honorary Degrees Ballot**

President Nickerson stated that the Honorary Degrees Committee forwarded two nominations to the Faculty Senate for honorary degrees. He asked the Senate to keep the name of the nominees confidential as approval of the candidates by the Senate is only one step in the approval process, and even after all approvals are made the individual's name can be placed in a pool of potential honorary degree recipients for several years. The Senate then voted on the nominated individuals.

#### **7.0 Unfinished Business**

No unfinished business was discussed.

#### **8.0 New Business**

##### **8.1 Open Mic Session – Technology in the Classroom, The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly**

President Nickerson reported that ideas for an open mic session were solicited and the overall topic of the discussion is the influence of technology in the classroom and how it impacts learning. He noted that over the years he has seen a very steady performance level in his Intro to Microbiology course until this past spring where he saw some significant decline in the students' performance. He pointed out that he has not made any real changes to the exams and quizzes he gives, but the grades have been lower. He stated that in discussions with colleagues he learned that they were experiencing similar problems with their students. Yet, at the same time the campus has been informed that the ACT scores of incoming students is rising. He reported that he had a conversation with a new faculty member who suggested that the decrease in performance could be associated with the use of laptops in the classroom because students may act more like a stenographer without digesting the impact of what the instructor is saying. He noted that he cited references to research that is looking into this issue in the recent President's newsletter. He stated that he discussed the issue with the Senate Presidents of UNO and UNK who said that they have experienced some of the same problems.

President Nickerson reported that he has received responses from faculty members informing him that they have also seen class performance being subpar and he wanted to find out what other peoples' experiences are with students. He noted that he knows of some colleagues who have banned the use of any technology in the

classroom while others insist that the students have interaction with technology. He stated that Professor Olmanson from Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, has been invited to speak to the Senate on the subject.

Professor Weissling, Special Education and Communication Disorders, noted that people seem to consolidate more information when they are writing rather than typing. She pointed out that if students do not want to pay attention in class and would rather look at social media online it will be reflected in their grades.

Professor Olmanson noted that learning comes through struggling on the right things and what could pre-empt note taking for students may be the lecture slides that are provided online for students. He noted that students are making the decision whether to fully attend a class or whether to look at social media while in class. He stated that there is some evidence that shows that students who view other students using social media during a class will also have impeded learning.

Professor Foley, School of Music, reported that if she catches a student using social media in class she will call them out afterwards and tell them not to bother attending class. Professor Olmanson noted that when students daydream it is easier for them to refocus their attention back to the class, but technology is engineered to get a person's attention and it is more difficult to ignore. He pointed out that the college experience for students is staying connected through social media.

Professor Olmanson asked if faculty members post class notes and overheads on Blackboard before or after the class. Professor Adams, Plant Pathology, stated that if they can be posted ahead of time the students can take notes on the slides. President Nickerson stated that he has heard some faculty members saying that the notes should only be posted afterwards. Professor LaDunga, Statistics, reported that he posts PDFs before the class and tells the students that it would be a good idea for them to take notes since he can sometimes have 50-60 slides in a class.

Professor Foley pointed out that students have grown up for a good part of their lives using technology and they are used to handling it, although for some students using technology in the classroom could be a problem.

Professor Farrell, Agricultural Leadership, asked if President Nickerson knows whether students taking notes electronically is the reason why so many students are not doing well. Professor Nickerson stated that he does not know for sure and there have been suggestions that the exams are more rigorous. He noted that there could be a number of reasons why the grades have gone down.

Professor Swidler, Teaching, Learning & Teacher Education, pointed out that the real problem could be how instructors are teaching. He noted that technology could now be magnifying teaching difficulties, particularly if they are still using traditional lectures.

Professor Foley stated that laptops can be used for more than just note taking in a classroom and there is a real push in music and art to incorporate computers in the classroom. She stated that multi-media platforms can work very well in teaching.

Professor Farrell noted that he teaches a class in digital imaging and has found that the students tend to be very versed in visual learning, but not in writing. He pointed out that we now have a generation of students who have grown up in a visual world, not a verbal world.

Professor Babchuck, Anthropology, reported that he is conducting a study at UNL about social media and the impacts of its use on students' learning. He noted that, to date, 100% of the students who have responded state that social media is a distraction for them. Professor Foley stated that she has heard from students that they do not want to use a tablet because they find it be more enjoyable as an entertainment tool and they do not want to associate the tablet with being in class. Professor LaDunga stated that students need to decide whether to be professional or not and they have to realize that the tablet is not for entertainment use while in a class. Professor Olmanson pointed out that students have a lot of things happening at one time and they may not have the ability to decide what is important. He noted that there are a lot of different studies being conducted now which shows that non-academic internet use in the classroom has negative impacts, and even if someone is sitting next to you and using the internet it can negatively impact how well you do in class.

Professor Olmanson stated that the idea of multi-tasking is becoming very common and it can offer emotional gratification, but it degrades your ability to decide what you should be focusing on. He suggested that instructors should have a brief conversation with the students at the start of the course about the use of

technology in the classroom. He suggested that instructors need to re-think how they are delivering their information in a class. He noted that students with higher aptitudes felt that they could multi-task better, but research has shown that this is untrue.

Professor Foley suggested that it would be beneficial to have a series of training sessions on how to use technology effectively in the classroom. She pointed out that the notion of multi-tasking is a misnomer because it is really quick tasking, switching from doing one thing to another. Professor Olmanson reported that there is technology specifically for large lecture rooms which allows students to weigh in and vote questions up or down electronically and it allows the class to be more interactive.

Professor Archer, School of Natural Resources, noted that data gets captured through the keyboard on computers and he wondered if there is research on equipment from a student's computer that can take photos of images that are projected on a screen. He suspects that those kinds of devices removes the students further from learning. Professor Olmanson noted that students will use their smartphones to take pictures of slides in a class.

Professor Krug pointed out that the part of the problem with students' learning is that they just go to Wikipedia when they want to find out information, but this is not really learning. He stated that this relates back to the Lincoln Journal Star article on whether technology is making us more ignorant. The attitude is why learn anything when you can just google it. Professor Olmanson pointed out that synthesizing the material is the issue. He noted that in small groups synthesis occurs and it can provide enough social interaction for students that they don't feel the need to check their phones. Professor Hancock, Panhandle Research & Extension Center, suggested that students can be more engaged in the learning process if they can look at the class materials at home. Professor Foley noted that it is interesting how some students who feel comfortable in making comments through twitter will not get up in class to speak. Professor Olmanson stated that tweets can be pulled into a Powerpoint presentation

Professor Adams reported that in his experience in teaching senior level courses that grades would fluctuate sometimes and he found that in speaking with chairs that the students who did not perform well did not take notes or read the books. He noted that the students were not tasked to take notes or read the books in previous courses. President Nickerson reported that he was told by the Dean of Students that if he didn't ask homework questions on each assignment the students would not read the assignments. Professor Kamble, Entomology, asked if we have similar problems with graduate students. Professor Adams stated that he had graduate students come to class not ready to take notes and had to inform them that they needed to take notes if they wanted to do well in the class.

Professor Sollars noted that this has been a great opportunity to talk and get different perspectives on the issue. She suggested that another possible topic for discussion at a future meeting is on business centers and their functioning and how much work is being done to satisfy auditors. President Nickerson asked the Senate to let him or the Executive Committee know of other topics they would like to see discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:59 p.m. The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, December 2, 2014, at 2:30 p.m. in the East Campus Union, Arbor Suite. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator, and Tad Wysocki, Secretary.