



**Northeastern University**  
*Office of the Faculty Senate*

**TO: Faculty Senate**  
**FROM: George Alverson, Secretary, Faculty Senate**  
**SUBJECT: Minutes, 15 October 2014**

---

Present: (Professors) Alverson, Bickmore, Carrier, Charles, Cokely, Craig, Crittenden, Daynard, De Ritis, Devlin, Fitzgerald, Hajjar, Hanson, Howard, King, Kruger, Leslie, Nelson, McGushin, Rabrenovic, Strasser, Suciu,

(Administrators) Ambrose, Aubry, Brodley, Courtney, Director, Fulmer, Gibson, Loeffelholz, Poiger, Ronkin

Absent: Professors Caligiuri, Gouldstone, Lerner, Makriyannis, Metghalchi, Piret, Rappaport, and Young; Vice Provost Ambrose; Dean Fulmer

The Senate convened at 11:46 AM

- I. The 1 October minutes were approved as written.
- II. Professor Daynard reported that SAC had met twice since the last Senate meeting and twice with the senior leadership team. The latter meetings take place approximately once per month; the last two discussions concerned benefits. At the last meeting, SAC was shown a PowerPoint presentation of the booklet and made suggestions concerning rollout. It was a day later that SAC realized how dramatic the changes were. SAC concluded that this is a breach of the social contract between administration and faculty which is heavily relied upon and is an understanding between parties on how we deal with each other, in particular the understanding that major changes such as these will not be undertaken without faculty input and discussion. Professor Daynard hopes that some changes can be reconsidered and that other benefits will be made available. The University contribution is being cut to 70% of the Core Plan only; the Dental Plan has changed significantly; and there has been an entirely gratuitous cut in life insurance.
- III. The provost asked Vice President Pendergast to respond after first remarking that any change in benefits affects both faculty and staff. Vice President Pendergast explained that the Affordable Care Act is changing the [medical] landscape and will penalize high cost plans. The University will maintain a 70% contribution to the [new] Core Plan and provide fixed contributions to the other two plans. Had no changes been undertaken, the current plans would have seen a five to seven percent increase; instead 2 of the three plans will have lower costs. Some of the difference in total cost to the University will be directed to wellness programs. Northeastern will provide life insurance at one times the employee's salary which the Vice President said is generous, comparable to Tufts and better than MIT. Starting in 2015/16, there will be a \$20K contribution for health accounts for starting retirees above a cutoff age.

#### IV. Questions and discussion.

Professor Parekh questioned why changes were made in dental coverage and life insurance. The Vice President responded that the life insurance change was an investment decision and changes in dental coverage were in order to offer more choice.

Professor Kruger thanked Professor Daynard for representing faculty and staff on these matters as both constituencies have expressed concern. It is troubling that the Senate was not included in the conversation. The [Faculty Handbook](#) clearly states that decisions such as these should be shared.

Professor Dickens was recognized and asked Vice President Pendergast what the total cost to the University would be. She did not know. He then asked about the cap and the projected cost to the University. The Vice President responded that the penalty is 40% and that all current plans will exceed the cap. A faculty member pointed out that the cap is \$27,000 per family. Vice President Pendergast stated she would review this number.

Professor Nelson asked how much Northeastern is saving by offering reduced life insurance and where the savings are being distributed. Vice President Pendergast replied that some monies will be distributed toward retiree medical coverage and some to “wellness” programs. The University makes decisions on investments. In addition, the life insurance was not in line with what other universities offer. The amount saved is approximately \$300,000. Professor Nelson responded that it is a small price to pay for the extra coverage and Professor Crittenden added that it seems like a reduction in pay.

The Vice President confirmed that the dental program compares to other universities. She also explained that the University chose to look at life insurance at the same time the medical benefits were undergoing extensive review.

Professor Zahopoulos was recognized and queried what additional life insurance would cost. The Vice President was not sure but noted that University employees, should they choose to purchase the additional life insurance, would be offered group rates based on age and with no medical review.

Professor Sitkovsky was recognized and proposed a rapid deployment faculty advisory council to assist administration in making decisions. Professor Daynard responded that SAC will consider the suggestion.

Brief discussion took place regarding the tuition benefit which the Senate was assured has not changed. Vice President Pendergast explained that, while admission standards have risen, Admissions is able to work with students who may not be immediately suitable.

#### V. President Aoun. Where is Northeastern in the world of higher education and how is Northeastern attempting to position itself?

The educational landscape such that it is catering to 15% of students; 85% are non-traditional. This latter number has been increasing over the years. Is there opportunity to take care of these non-traditional students? 1) DMSB has created programs for professionals; SOE created opportunity in past via television; CPS has created many opportunities. NU has recently decided to begin focusing on *Global Education*. 2)

Technology is changing in two ways: MOOCs and data analytics. Northeastern has invested in the latter although higher education in general is far behind in this area. For-profits have been investing much to analyze the learner. There have been advances in the way in which education understands learners and NU needs to develop adaptive approaches.

Outcomes. Higher education has focused on input measures (GPAs, SATs, etc.) and has been largely reluctant to look at outcomes, i.e. jobs and opportunities. Presently, the government and the public are focusing on outcomes. Northeastern has been in a position to focus on this area due to experiential education, however, Northeastern's model is being duplicated and can no longer be taken for granted.

Flexibility and customization. Recent MIT reports on undergraduate education foresee students spending two years elsewhere and navigating the system in a totally different manner. This will engender a push toward personalization and customization for the individual learner. The co-op model is a form of personalization and positions us to think about personalization and customization. The domain will shift to that of faculty is coach.

Regulations. The government has provided higher education much support in the form of financial aid and the federal government has compensated for cuts by state governments. The cost is increased regulations and these will not disappear. The federal government wants to define return on investment.

Disaggregation. The notion of a diploma is being questioned by learners and industry. In some countries, large companies take students for two years and retrain them for their own uses. What higher education takes for granted vis-à-vis providing credentials, is now being taken for granted.

No one can predict what the future holds but on a short-term basis, five to ten years, there will be a shift to customization coupled with outcomes. Unfortunately for higher education, liberal arts colleges are now struggling and some universities below a certain threshold have open seats, even around Boston. Professor Clayton Christensen [predicts](#) a certain number will survive, perhaps 20. The remainder will have depressed tuition and will not be sustained. While it presents opportunity for Northeastern, our powerful learning approach is being heavily copied. The opportunity therefore is to move to customization and personalization and Northeastern must lead. This requires thinking about furthering our understanding of learning via data analytics. The future will allow the learner to learn at their own pace and the implications for society are enormous. As a nation, our attainment is low and this administration has a goal of moving the United States back to the top. It cannot be done by purely traditional methods.

#### Questions

Professor De Ritis asked how the faculty will change. President Aoun responded that change must be driven by the faculty. For instance, the School of Law has looked at their endeavors in total toward furthering experiential education, how to position for the new economy, and how to offer degrees that are not only for lawyers. A fundamental re-think is required.

In response to a question about focus, the President noted that Northeastern has seen advances in working on the learning sciences through work led by Vice Provost Ambrose. Learning advances from cognition and the neural sciences need to be integrated.

Professor Sitkovsky suggested the creation of a rapid deployment scientific advisory board. The President expressed appreciation noting that Northeastern must move in all directions in terms of excellence: learning, pedagogy, etc. The new science and research complex will lift the entire University by extending its footprint. Places that will survive will be leaders.

The President exited at 12:55 PM whereupon the Senate adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

George Alverson, Secretary  
Faculty Senate