



Northeastern University
Office of the Faculty Senate

TO: Faculty Senate
FROM: Secretary, Faculty Senate
SUBJECT: Minutes, 07 October, 2020

Present: (Professors) Bart, Beighley, Board, Bormann, Caracoglia, Carr, Chai, Cisewski, Dau, Dennerlein, Desnoyers, Erdogmus, Ergun, Gonyeau, Gundavaram, Herlihy, Laboy, Lorette, Mages, McNabb, Mountain, Mukerjee, Musselman, Smith, Spencer, Stephens, Stowell, Su, Vollmer, Wertheim, Wood

Administrators: Madigan, Gallagher, Isaacs, Loeffelholz, Poiger, Ronkin, Sive

Absent: (Professors) Poe, Zulick

CALL TO ORDER: 11:45 a.m.

The September 16, 2020 Senate minutes were approved.

(Due to the President's address and in consideration of time, the Provost Report and Senate Agenda Committee Report were presented after the President's address.)

PRESENTATION BY PRESIDENT AOUN

In his address to the Senate, President Aoun discussed the effects of Covid-19 on higher education in general, Northeastern in particular and Northeastern's plans to move forward.

The President said due to the work of hundreds of colleagues, faculty and staff the fall reopening is going extremely well with very low positive rates. The President noted Northeastern's testing is more advanced than testing at other universities. Everyone is being tested at a very high frequency. The President said we are extremely safe and from the beginning this was our goal – to have a safe and healthy community. He said some people have told him that they are coming to campus because it is the safest place to be in Massachusetts.

The President invited those who have not yet come to campus to come and see what is happening. He said the students want you and need you. He said the campus environment is vibrant and safe and the wellness of the community will remain paramount.

He compared where Northeastern is with higher education in general.

The President noted that following the emergence of Covid-19, universities moved by brute force into remote learning. Universities had to close in the spring and the summer semesters as well. During this period, people at large started wondering what is the value of a residential

model of learning and what is the value of remote learning. He added it is clear that the families and students want a residential experience that goes beyond any remote learning no matter how sophisticated it is. He said they still believe the residential model is the gold standard.

Covid-19 is also redefining the way people are looking at research. More than ever people are looking at research as a solution to the problems society at large is facing. Whether problems around the pandemic, inequality or systemic racism.

Research at Northeastern is a model of research that is user inspired, relevant and impactful. This is demonstrated on a daily basis when our colleagues are quoted often on issues that are paramount to society.

The President said clearly Covid-19 impacted the university but that was not the only factor. It is clear that the Black Lives Matter movement and issues of systemic racism and inequality became paramount and caught universities flatfooted – including Northeastern. He said it was a wakeup call. He said we now have the community working on clear action items that will allow us to transform the university and impact society. He added we will hear more about that from the Presidential Commission, the Provost, senior officers, and every Dean and unit on campus.

Looking briefly at how higher education has fared in this environment, the President said higher education has been extremely challenged. Universities with large endowments retrenched putting a freeze on salaries and salary increases. They stopped retirement contributions and froze faculty and staff recruitment. Public universities at large are challenged because the states don't have the means to support them. With small colleges, we are seeing waives of mergers and closures.

During this period, Northeastern froze salaries. We didn't stop contributions to retirement. And we hope we won't have to do that. Noting that Northeastern is a tuition dependent institution, the President said our livelihood depends on students wanting to be with us.

The President said on the undergraduate level there is a strong class. The President said the professional MA programs have been challenged because many have a large number of international students. Many new international students couldn't join us because the US embassies were closed.

In this environment, the campuses in Canada and London are helping us and providing resilience.

And in a period of retrenchment where nationalism is coming to the fore in many countries, the fact that we are a global university system with a network of campuses is helping us.

Overall, when he looks at the financial situation for the year, there were many expenses for safety and wellness at all levels. This is why we have to work hard together to provide best experience for our learners. The President added, this is why the University needs you on campus.

The President said it is not going to be a great financial year for any university. He said he hopes they will be able to continue to make contributions to retirement plans but cautioned not to take anything for granted. Everything is changing on a daily basis.

Noting the world has changed, the President said that even if a vaccine is approved by April 2021, we won't see this vaccine distributed widely before 16-18 months. That means that the situation we are facing is going to be lasting 18-24 more months.

The President said the future is good and bright but added it is not a given. He emphasized we are a tuition dependent institution. He said if we continue to serve the learners well at the Undergraduate, Professional Masters, and Lifelong learning levels and move forward with impactful research we will be in great shape. But, he added, the University needs you to be here to lead this effort.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

- Provost Madigan said he was interested in the President's personal view on the campus network and the global print of our University. What would that look like 5-10 years from now? President Aoun responded that education is changing at all levels. The University is focusing on the customization and personalization of higher education. It is going to focus on the learner. Looking forward our students are telling us they want to finish in 3 or 3.5 years. This personalization is going to require more flexibility. We can't tell students this curriculum is for 5 years. Students want to shape their own journey.

The President said he sees another change in respect to mobility. He said we can't assume a student will be here in Boston for 2 or 4 years. Students are excited on the graduate level of spending a semester at one of our many campuses.

He said the populations of the United States, Canada and England are aging. The number of undergraduate students is shrinking. He added the growth is going to be in life-long learning.

The President said moving forward, we continue to build a global university system that gives us resilience and differentiation. It is attractive to learners, employers and in terms of research.

- Prof. Stephens said for certain kinds of classes the in-class experience with masks might be inferior to the online experience. Shouldn't we be more nuanced about our thinking about faculty in person for all classes?

President Aoun responded that the barometer is our students. Students want to be with faculty. Faculty are the magnet for the students. The residential experience is still the gold standard because students and learners tasted the pure online experience and said they don't want it.

- Prof. Spencer asked if faculty who are afraid to return to campus will be required to do so in the spring.

Provost Madigan responded that they had a very liberal policy in the fall. They are currently formulating the policy for the spring and are factoring into that thinking the fact that the campus is demonstrably safe.

President Aoun added that many of our students are coming from challenging socio-economic backgrounds and are saying they need to be on campus. They need to be in an environment that is providing them with room and board and interaction.

- In a follow-up question from Prof. David Herlihy, Provost Madigan said the medical option for those at high risk with underlying conditions will certainly continue for the spring.
- Provost Madigan read a question from Prof. Caracoglia. If students are envisioned to become global learners, it would be worth exploring opportunities for faculty to be global as well, i.e. to allow them not to be on campus only but go global for professional development (with appropriate investments). The NUflex opportunities may possibly be used to facilitate this.

President Aoun responded that we love it and we are doing it. He said in Seattle, there are faculty teaching and doing research there.

He said research and teaching are global and that the network is here to help.

The Provost and Chancellor are envisioning the launch of an intercession between fall and spring where we are going to have the Dialogues of Civilization offered over a 3 week period. The President said that Covid-19 is changing the equation, inequality is on the rise and systemic racism is with us. We have an opportunity to be engaged wherever we are.

- Provost Madigan read two related financial questions. Prof. Arnold Mages asked if the virus continues for the next 24 months, how well positioned is the University to deal with that? And Prof. Wertheim asked in the current financial year with the University facing a significant shortfall, how are we dealing with that?

President Aoun said it is the same answer to both. First and foremost, we are a tuition dependent institution. Therefore, we have to continue to offer what our learners at all levels are asking us to do. We have to offer a customized, differentiated, and experiential education.

In terms of research, even during this challenging period our community has been able to over perform in terms of research.

We have to continue and double down on our differentiation and continue to serve our students.

He added the answer to your question is in our hands. Every time we have an exciting vision or idea that will bring the grants and bring the students that makes a difference.

The students are coming because of the human factor. That is why we need the community to be here in every campus.

SAC REPORT

Prof. Erdogmus reported that since 16 September 2020 SAC met 3 times and finalized the members and charges for senate committees. SAC also met with Provost Madigan & Sr. Vice Provost Deb Franko twice, and with the Officers (formerly SLT) once. Topics of discussion included Spring 2021 plans, FT-NTT Dismissal Module draft, merit raises, assistance to faculty during COVID pandemic times, and progress on housing benefits. SAC liaisons started having kick-off meetings with senate committees.

Prof. Erdogmus said there was one curriculum update. CPS has decided to inactivate the Criminal Justice MS Program due to decreased enrollment.

SAC appointed two members to the standing University Classroom Advisory Committee (UCAC), which started working. SAC helped appoint a replacement student member for the COE Dean Search Committee.

PROVOST REPORT

Provost Madigan reported that with regard to faculty hiring this year, we are in a kind of funny situation. This is an incredible year with so many opportunities since many universities are not hiring. We are beginning to authorize faculty searches. The tricky bit is that while the financial state of the university is strong but there are some challenges. We still don't know the full picture for the year. We have dramatic expenses in regards to Covid.

The Provost said that Sr. V. P. and Treasurer Tom Nedell is saying by the turn of the calendar year, there should be a better idea of what the financial picture will be. We will know then how vigorously we can pursue faculty hiring. We have to be cautious as things evolve.

The search for new Dean of COE is proceeding. The Provost hopes to be able to report something on that by the end of the semester.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Prof. Amato asked as part of the next strategic plan is Northeastern going to look more specifically at where we might want expand geographically? Or is that open for discussion?

Provost Madigan responded this would definitely be part of the strategic planning. He said he will follow the blueprint from the last time. They will set up a number of groups that will hold broad, inclusive Town Halls. He said there will be a group related to our global plans that will review what Northeastern intends to do with our existing campus network and what we intend to do about expanding our campus network.

The Provost added there are interesting questions we need to think through. What is our strategy in the long run with these global campuses?

- Prof. Stephens said that the President mentioned a couple of times the crisis of structural racism and higher education being caught flat footed. Are there any updates on the workstreams that worked on this over the summer?

Provost Madigan said in June President Aoun sent a message to the community saying we need to change the way we do business and need to be proactive. He laid out a number of areas where we need to do better. Many were around representation and others around cultural competence. Pursuant to that message, a number of working groups were set up over the summer to do a deep dive on these issues and come up with goals that are tangible and can be measured.

One of things developed over summer was a dashboard to see how we are doing with these metrics.

The Provost said they are close to making a major announcement about what we are going to do in relation to these goals. The next stage is the implementation of these goals.

- Prof. Stephens asked if there is any kind of community or cultural training would be part of that?

Provost Madigan said two of the workstreams are focusing on that.

Prof. Erdogan said that the Senate Agenda Committee recently noticed our graduate by-laws prevent NTTF from being MA thesis chairs or PhD dissertation chairs for graduate students. We wanted to change the laws on books so our NTTF can advise graduate students.

Prof. Erdogan asked if Provost Madigan had any thoughts on this on the administrative level.

Provost Madigan said this is not something he has spoken about to the President or his colleagues and what he was about to say was his personal opinion. At his previous institution, they voted to denote NTTF and lecturers as faculty members. Provost Madigan said he believes in this deeply. It is a question of diversity of faculty. He said he thinks it is enormously healthy for institution.

Provost Madigan asked if anyone has a divergent opinion.

Sr. Vice Provost for Curriculum and Programs, Tom Sheahan joined in saying the graduate bylaws do allow for others beyond T/TT faculty to be the chair of committees. Right now it is approval by exception. He said maybe we should consider whether this should be more generally institutionalized in the bylaws.

Prof. Erdogmus said as the number of research faculty increases, he thinks it would be cumbersome for each of those faculty to request permission. He added he didn't think it was in the spirit of one faculty.

Sr. Vice Provost Franko added that it was important to remember we have all different titles in NTTF and that we have different workload policies for each of these. She said research faculty are externally funded and that this topic may require a more nuanced conversation on how best to go forward.

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Michael Gonyeau, Senate Secretary