



Northeastern University

Office of the Faculty Senate

TO: Faculty Senate
FROM: Secretary, Faculty Senate
SUBJECT: Minutes, 04 November, 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, Poe, Smith, Spencer, Stephens, Vollmer, Wertheim, Wood, Zulick

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

Absent: (Professors) Su, Stowell
(Administrators)

CALL TO ORDER: 11:45 a.m.

The October 21, 2020 minutes were approved.

I. SAC REPORT

- Prof. Erdogmus report that since the last Senate meeting, the Senate Agenda Committee (SAC) met twice and worked with elected senators (via email and at an elected senators meeting) to discuss the faculty response to the announced Spring 2021 remote work policy. SAC continued to gather input from faculty and senators regarding caregiving challenges faced by faculty.

SAC met with Provost Madigan & Sr. Vice Provost Deb Franko once, in addition to other communications. Topics of discussion included:

- Faculty remote work policy for Spring 2021
 - Upcoming faculty handbook NTT faculty dismissal module
 - Sustainability and Resilience Advisory Team report dated June 2019
 - Improving communication between administration and faculty
 - Accessing data necessary for the charges of FT-NTT Faculty Com. and Financial Affairs Com.
- Prof. Erdogmus noted widespread concerns around the Spring 2021 remote work policy.
 - He reported that a group of elected senators prepared an open letter that had received 762 signatures as of 9:47 p.m. on Nov. 3, 2020. The letter emphasizes the following in the context of the Spring 2021 remote work policy: concerns from a public health and civic responsibility perspectives and (faculty/staff) caregiving crisis among other concerns. (Open Letter: <https://sites.google.com/view/open-letter-on-remote-work-neu/home>.)
 - Prof. Erdogmus referenced a memorandum regarding SOL faculty thoughts on the teaching on-campus policy that was sent to the Faculty Senate by Prof. Hemanth Gundavaram (also a Senator &

Parliamentarian). The memorandum summarized various thoughts and concerns Prof. Gundavaram received from SOL faculty, including:

- Prof. Erdogmus noted a memorandum that was sent on Oct. 28, 2020 from NUParents to Provost Madigan and others in the administration as a response to Provost Madigan's email entitled 'Spring 2021 Term: Faculty COVID-19 Temporary Remote Work Policy' and was shared with SAC and senators.

The memorandum summarized various challenges for parents struggling to balance work and family responsibilities.

Suggestions to enable faculty/staff to better manage work/family balance challenges included:

- Consistent stable long-term care-giving assistance, not temporary/emergency care assistance.
- Lower work/course-load expectation, spread course load for spring into summer, flexible on/off daily schedules
- Childcare stipends, paid family leave, mental health days, family testing at NU.
- Virtual adult-sitting, virtual pre-school, more support through NU daycare (including support for <29 months)
- Pay attention to faculty with especially unique conditions (e.g. clinical faculty co-funded by a hospital).
- Extend the March 2021 deadline for flexible spending accounts (FSA).
- Flexible enrollment for FSA, dependent care accounts for next year (another open enrollment in mid-2021).

Prof. Erdogmus shared that the Student Government Association passed a resolution SR-FA-20-102 regarding the University's pass/fail policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution called for:

- a policy allowing students to opt-in for pass/fail grades for all classes,
- and extending the opt-in deadline to the last day of instruction (December 9th).

The entire SAC report can be found on the Faculty Senate website:

<https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/meetings/2020-2021/>.

PROVOST REPORT:

- The Provost acknowledged that this has been an extraordinary semester. He said students are very appreciative of what faculty are doing. He said there are many modalities of success with a lot of innovation in ways people are teaching and participating in research. The Provost emphasized that the campus is safe and remains safe.
- The Provost acknowledged that the message sent to faculty regarding remote work policy for spring semester caused a lot of consternation and anxiety, and the Provost apologized for that. He said the message was bad in terms of tone and in terms of lack of consultation with SAC. He said there is much in the Faculty open letter that he agrees with. He committed to consult more frequently with SAC.
- The Provost said they are also working on a FAQ sheet that should prove helpful in addressing concerns.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Prof. Cisewski asked if the Nov. 6th deadline for faculty to submit plans for spring is still valid?

Provost Madigan said Nov. 6th was still the deadline, but it is not binding. The administration needs to know what people's intentions are for planning purposes.

- Prof. Stephens returned to a process issue in terms of consultation and shared governance with the senate in terms of the Oct. 22nd message from the Provost. Prof. Stephens hoped going forward the administration will reach out and work collaboratively with the faculty senate. In relation to the Nov. 6 deadline, Prof. Stephens also asked what does "in person" mean and will the testing map to what faculty declare on 11/6, or will there be flexibility as there has been this Fall.

Provost Madigan said the testing cadence is not tied to what faculty submit by 11/6. Not requesting 100% remote work could mean 1-5 days per week on campus. It does not mean that a faculty person needs to be here every day necessarily.

Regarding the Oct. 22nd message that was not previewed or mentioned at the Oct. 21st Faculty Senate meeting, the Provost understands the optics. He assured the Senate there was no intent to manipulate. He is committed to not having this occur again.

- Prof. Poe asked if staff concerns would be addressed in the FAQ document being drafted? And she asked for an update on the hardship concern process.

Provost Madigan said in regards to process individuals can send a request to unit chair or relative person and the request will be routed to the Provost. No reasonable request will be denied is the approach the Provost's office is planning to take. Provost Madigan wants requests sent to his office because there were some inconsistencies in that process for the Fall semester.

- Prof Stephens asked if all reasonable requests will be approved, why not make it an opt in or opt out system. Why does anyone have to provide any information? The issue here surrounds the lack of criteria around what constitutes "reasonable."

Provost Madigan said requests need to be reviewed because some requests would be deemed frivolous, such as: I want to live in my house on the Cape. This would not be considered an appropriate justification.

II. **DIANE LEVIN, UNIVERSITY OMBUDS FOR FACULTY AND STAFF PRESENTATION – THE VIEW FROM THE OMBUDS OFFICE: TRENDS IN 2020**

The presentation can be found on the Faculty Senate website:
<https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/meetings/2020-2021/>.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

- Prof. Dennerlein asked how much could be shared with the Senate about how issues raised with Diane Levin are addressed to promulgate change?

Diane Levin responded that given the sensitive nature of the work and faculty and staff desire for anonymity this was difficult. She said she can pass feedback along but has no power to enforce.

III. MICHELE GRAZULIS, VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER, SUSAN UHL-MILLER, ASSOC. VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, LISA BRODERICK, BENEFITS DIR. OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources representatives provided a brief overview of Northeastern's new Enhanced Paid Leave Program that goes into effect on January 1, 2021.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Prof. Erdogmus asked what aspects of Northeastern's Enhanced Paid Leave go above and beyond what MA law mandates? Why not make the extra four weeks 100% benefits versus 80% as stated?

Because this enhanced plan is new, Vice President Grazulis said they plan to implement the benefits this year as stated and then reevaluate.

Vice President Uhl-Miller said the Northeastern policy is more generous in terms of level of pay replacement in different types of leaves. She said they aimed for an easy way to explain and understand describing the level of pay replacement received during the pay period. She said if they adopted what the state requires, the computation is complicated. It was that that drove their decision making.

- Prof. Laboy said that many faculty are on 8-9 month contracts, so full pay for 4 weeks would help for those whose eligibility turns on and off based on contract length.

Vice President Grazulis thanked Prof. Laboy for that nuance and said the group would take that information under advisement.

- Vice President Grazulis said Care.com extension into new calendar year – yes, this will carry forward through 2021. And added that the university cannot extend FSA benefits, as this is mandated by the IRS.
- Prof. Erdogmus asked how does NU use the leftover funds in the FSA accounts? Is there a way for faculty to benefit from leftover funds in March?

Forfeited funds for dependent care go back to the childcare center. And forfeited funds for healthcare can go to various healthy/wellness activities.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

Prof. Erdogmus read the following and Prof. Caracoglia seconded.

Whereas COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Boston, in Massachusetts, and throughout the country, public health experts are recommending staying home and reducing in-person contact;
Whereas the recently announced Spring 2021 remote work policy is clearly in contradiction with current trends in virus proliferation and public safety in the greater Boston area;

Whereas most state and local agencies, and school districts are postponing phased re-opening or in-person activities;

Whereas the numbers of positive cases at Northeastern's Boston campus are currently low principally because of low face-to-face interaction and low density due to a limited number of people coming from off-campus;

Whereas the faculty and campus community at Northeastern University will be exposed to unnecessary physical health risks on-and off-campus by a premature return to in-person instruction and their department offices and suites, where space does not allow maintaining social distance at the regular occupancy levels;

Whereas a forced return to campus can exacerbate mental health conditions of the faculty and campus community;

Whereas faculty and staff have significant additional burdens of caregiving during the pandemic, and most have been unable to find caregivers to help;

Whereas faculty have invested substantial effort and time to adapt their instruction and introduced significant pedagogical innovations catered to the remote format, and mandating NUFlex-only mode of instruction reduces the quality of instruction for many interactive and discussion-based courses;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends extension of the option that allows faculty and staff members to teach courses, provide service, and conduct research remotely through Spring 2021; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends that approval and authorization process for remote work be directly administered by College Deans and Unit Heads, following the Fall 2020 guidelines of "Option 2" designated by the University Administration.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Prof. Vollmer expressed concern that this comes off as tone deaf to the students. He said the front end is focused on risk, whereas this resolution seems to focus more on flexibility. Is it possible to amend the front end of this document?
- Prof. Erdogmus said amendment proposals can be submitted and discussed.
- Prof. Vollmer said he was not sure about the value of the various "whereas" statements.
- Prof. Board said the drive behind this resolution was to highlight the flexibility provided to the students by the university, but that flexibility has not been extended to faculty as well.
- Prof. Stephens suggested modifying the last section of the resolution to say faculty can opt for what works best for them without justification of reason.
- Prof. Dennerlein suggested that maybe a proposed amendment could use language such as "good faith" to promote trust between faculty and administration to minimize any punitive feelings.

- Prof. Caracoglia said he was concerned about not requiring any justification at all for opting to work 100% remotely for transparency, as well as incorporating a good faith spirit.
- Prof. Board seconded what Prof. Caracoglia was saying. For transparency, there needs to be some sort of justification, which would also allow for data tracking for reasons behind what requests are being submitted.
 - Provost Madigan said that currently, the Provost Office has been committed to destroying the requests right after review.
 - Prof. Board said collected data could be aggregated, completely de-identified.

Prof. Poe proposed the following friendly amendment and Prof. Dennerlein seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends extension of the option that allows faculty and staff members to teach courses, provide service, and conduct research remotely, partially remotely, or in person through Spring 2021; and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT faculty may switch among these modalities, as allowed in fall 2020; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends that approval and authorization process for remote work be directly administered by College Deans and Unit Heads, following the Fall 2020 guidelines of "Option 2" designated by the University Administration. The Provost Office will collect but not adjudicate these requests.

The VOTE was taken. The friendly amendment PASSED: 22-0-1.

- Prof. Vollmer proposed deleting all aspects of the resolution up to the first "BE IT RESOLVED...". Dean Isaacs seconded.

The VOTE was taken. The proposal FAILED: 13-6-11.

- Prof. Board proposed closing discussion. Prof. McNabb seconded.

The VOTE to end discussion and call the question PASSED: 23-0-0.

- Prof. Stephens proposed a motion to vote on the following revised resolution and Prof. Erdogmus seconded.

Whereas COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Boston, in Massachusetts, and throughout the country, public health experts are recommending staying home and reducing in-person contact;

Whereas the recently announced Spring 2021 remote work policy is clearly in contradiction with current trends in virus proliferation and public safety in the greater Boston area;

Whereas most state and local agencies, and school districts are postponing phased re-opening or in-person activities;

Whereas the numbers of positive cases at Northeastern's Boston campus are currently low principally because of low face-to-face interaction and low density due to a limited number of people coming from off-campus;

Whereas the faculty and campus community at Northeastern University will be exposed to unnecessary physical health risks on-and off-campus by a premature return to in-person instruction and their department offices and suites, where space does not allow maintaining social distance at the regular occupancy levels;

Whereas a forced return to campus can exacerbate mental health conditions of the faculty and campus community;

Whereas faculty and staff have significant additional burdens of caregiving during the pandemic, and most have been unable to find caregivers to help;

Whereas faculty have invested substantial effort and time to adapt their instruction and introduced significant pedagogical innovations catered to the remote format, and mandating NUFlex-only mode of instruction reduces the quality of instruction for many interactive and discussion-based courses;

Be it resolved that the Senate recommends extension of the option that allows faculty and staff members to teach courses, provide service, and conduct research remotely, partially remotely, or in person through Spring 2021;

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends that approval and authorization process for remote work be directly administered by College Deans and Unit Heads, following the Fall 2020 guidelines of "Option 2" designated by the University Administration. The Provost Office will collect but not adjudicate these requests.

The VOTE was taken. The resolution PASSED: 25-1-4.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,
Michael Gonyeau, Senate Secretary