



Northeastern University Faculty Senate

TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: Secretary, Faculty Senate
SUBJECT: Minutes, January 31, 2024

Present: Professors Adams, Alexis, Chen, Chiou, Diani, DiBattista, Di Credico, Godoy-Carter, Henderson, Herron, Homan, Ingemi, Kahn, Kitagawa, Krishnamoorthy, Lahr, Landsmark, Lin, Mellette, Molnar, Moore, Oet, Rappaport, Rawson, Rejtar, Saczynski, Sivak, Smith, Strange, Toledano Laredo, Triest, Viola, Walker L., West.

Administrators: Madigan, Isaacs, Pollastri, Sceppa, Wadia-Fascetti

Absent: (Professors) Folmar, Jaeggli, Rivera, Shrivastava, Walker J.
(Administrators) Brown.

CALL TO ORDER: 11:45 a.m.

I. **SAC REPORT:** (SAC Report has been posted to Senate website.)

Prof. Landsmark noted that since the 12_6_23 Senate meeting, SAC has met four times.

SAC has met with the Provost Office twice and has held an elected senators meeting on 1_24_24.

SAC has launched the Spring 2024 Faculty Salary Equity Survey and Senate Committee Questions Survey. Deadline is Friday, Feb. 2, 2024.

SAC members have been meeting with Senate committee chairs to check on committee progress.

The Senate will distribute Election letters in mid-February.

The 2022_2023 Resolution Report from the Provost has been posted to the Senate website.

President Aoun will give his annual address to the Senate on February 14.

QUESTIONS:

There were no questions.

II. **PROVOST REPORT:**

Provost Madigan noted that faculty hiring season is underway and said this is an important task for the future of the institution. He thanked everyone in advance for all their work on this endeavor.

Provost Madigan said he was asked by SAC to say something about the role of the Provost regarding boundary issues in program launches and disciplines. He views one of the roles of the Provost is to adjudicate problems when conflicts arise and work through those issues.

At the last senate meeting a question came up about snow days. After a lot of discussion, it was determined that going forward if there is a snow day, the university will take the old-fashioned approach and classes will be cancelled. There will not be virtual snow days.

There is an interesting initiative underway involving 9 Boston universities. It is a panel series called Dialogue and Action in the Age of Divides. It features faculty from the various institutions. The Provost encouraged faculty to attend as they are able. Next event is Feb. 13th.

Link for more information: <https://dialogueandaction.northeastern.edu>.

Provost Madigan said that when Northeastern merged with Mills College the Mills Institute was created. It focuses on women's leadership and racial and gender justice issues. This institute which is based in Oakland is now up and running. Christie Chung has now been appointed as the director. She should come to the Senate to discuss the institute's activities.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

Prof. Mellette said two years ago in January 2022 Northeastern launched a partnership with Landed which was a startup that worked to provide down payment assistance to faculty. Prof. Mellette was recently telling a new colleague about this and he couldn't find information about this partnership. Does the University still have a partnership with Landed? And are there other thoughts on housing assistance for faculty?

Provost Madigan said that basically the Landed deal fell apart. It had to do with interest rates. We are constantly looking at ways to deal with this.

Sr. Vice President Tom Nedell said Landed paused underwriting new loans I think for fear of the market. They took a stand that they would not execute any new deals.

Prof. Rawson said we've started to see some news about the record number of applicants to Northeastern. Some colleagues have expressed concerns about the benefit of tuition remission and concerns for their children, possibly not getting admitted as Northeastern becomes more competitive. He asked if that conversation has been continuing at all.

Provost Madigan said the number of applications is more this year than last year.

He said he didn't have the statistics at his fingertips but with regards to faculty and staff children we try to accommodate as many as we can so long as those children are qualified and would succeed at Northeastern. They also offer contracts. Provost Madigan said nothing has fundamentally changed and that the statistics are stable.

Sr. Vice President Tom Nedell added that it is almost universal that there is a pathway for faculty and staff dependents.

Prof. Rawson said it might be helpful communicating that more to offer re-assurances to parents.

Prof. Ingemi added that this was a charge assigned to the Enrollment Admissions Policy Committee (EAPC). They will be giving a report on that next month.

III. PRESENTATION:

BY TOM NEDELL, OFFICE OF THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR FINANCE AND TREASURER

THE CURRENT FINANCIAL STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY

(Below are some highlights of the presentation.)

Senior Vice President Nedell gave some general updates and directional indicators that indicate Northeastern continues to be financially strong and ever improving. Northeastern is in a strong position to pursue and achieve the objectives of the academic plan.

He said it is a thoughtful and disciplined approach Northeastern takes regarding the financial health of the university. Financial health, like academic quality and leadership are essential in achieving our goals.

Northeastern's model which is a largely tuition dependent model that is dependent on the educational model and not an endowment or philanthropic dependent model.

For us as a tuition revenue dependent institution we need to be cognizant of our margin. Our margin gets reinvested into the enterprise to fund largely one-time capital projects.

Similarly, unlike many institutions, Northeastern has a long-held practice of fully -funding our depreciation. It is a goal to maintain the campus in a positive state.

We also think about what businesses do we need to to be in. What properties do we need to own and if there are non-core things, perhaps those resources can be better utilized in support of our enterprise.

Vice President Nedell said the university's debt portfolio is a deliberate portfolio, meaning the construction and amount of our debt and the horizon by which we pay things off is both measured and conservative and we look for opportunities to rebalance things.

This approach positions us to invest and to grow. Since 2006 , the growth rate of our revenue base has had an average growth rate of 8.1% compared to all of the other private institutions that Moody's accounts for and rates and over this period of time. This growth provides resilience for us.

In regards to revenue streams, the composition between graduate and undergraduate has shifted to be more balanced. In particular, the graduate professional programs have expanded. This is another dimension that provides resiliency for us.

In regards to research award growth, one of the core dimensions of our mission here at the university, similarly had an 11% annual average growth rate over this period from 2006 through the last fiscal year. This is a very consistent upward trajectory with a pause during impact of COVID in 2020 2021 period. This is why we are building new facilities like EXP.

Philanthropy is area where we have benefited very materially from a financial perspective from an increased commitment from our donors. Based on results so far, fiscal year '24 is looking very positive.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

Prof. Smith said one of the earlier numbers you were talking about was the change in the makeup of undergraduate versus graduate tuition, and you gave them in terms of net revenue.

How is that defined since presumably one thing we think about is the different cost of teaching various programs? Is the net measure an attempt to normalize for that, or can you say a little bit more about how you think about that?

Vice President Nedell said net there is just a reference to financial aid and scholarships that are being deducted. So undergraduate aid, we have a much larger percentage that is given back off of the sticker price. It's roughly on average 35% on the dollar gets given back in the form of need based and academic based aid. The graduate revenues have a much smaller percentage that is discounted, if you will. So that net really just means net of financial aid, not a net program cost.

Prof. Rappaport said his perception is that academia is having financial challenges across the board. So Northeastern looks good in comparison. Is it the case that the average academic institution is actually struggling a little bit?

Vice President Nedell said that he thinks that is a fair case. He thinks there has been a widening of schools that have been successful and can continue to be.

There will be a separation in his mind of smaller and middle tier schools from the larger schools and ones that have high quality. He thinks that that separation has been exacerbated by COVID. Any federal monies have been running out and those realities of living in a more constrained environment are more present now for a lot of mid-tier and smaller institutions. So your hypothesis is right. He thinks that will show up in Northeastern's growth rate and how we are differentiating from others. He thinks over time we're going to see that widen because the growth rate of other institutions is going to be more muted going forward.

Prof. Krishnamoorthy said there is some chatter about decline in the number of undergraduate students over the next few years due to demographics. From a fiscal standpoint, how is Northeastern preparing for that potential decline?

Vice President Nedell said that he thinks the demographic shift will be most impactful in lower and mid-tier institutions. Northeastern has such a demand from super high quality students, that we are to some degree a bit insulated from those demographic changes at the undergraduate level.

Even if there are some fewer 1400 or 1500 SAT students out there, we have plenty more qualified students in our pipeline that are part of that 98,000 applicant pool that we saw this past year for next fall. We can fill our target class again, meaning, 100% more, if we had the capacity to house and serve them from a physical constraint and a faculty resource constraint perspective.

There are geographical shifts that our global network allows us to be responsive to. We have a strong interest at the masters level from international students and Northeastern is very consciously looking to continue to diversify that stream

Prof. Landsmark asked what gives you pause or any concern?

Vice President Nedell said in his opening statement he referenced the triad of qualities that we need, academic excellence and academic quality, leadership and financial strength. So certainly anything that undermined any of those would be a concern for us. He said he feels very confident about each of those three.

If he had to look at those things that are not as directly in our control, the pipeline of graduate students coming to us, being impacted by a new administration, or a foreign entity might be concerns.

Prof. Triest said financials look impressive and asked if he could say something about what's happened to financial aid during this period of rising tuition revenue. Have we been able to keep up with the amount of aid we provide, especially to our undergrads, and what's happening to access for low to moderate income students who are applying to our institution?

Vice President Nedell said the share of economically challenged students, as defined as Pell Grant eligible has gone up in each of the last several years. So from an access perspective, we are serving a higher percentage of Pell students today than we were several years ago.

So yes, aide has continued to go up. We try and target those who need it the most and not give away dollars to those for just vanity scholarships.

Over the last seven or eight years, there has been a steady decline in the average undergraduate borrowing rate of federal loans.

Prof. Wertheim asked what he sees what do you see in the impact in our declining use of office space with people working remotely.

Vice President Nedell said it is interesting that during these years of growth we have been able to absorb the growth in faculty and staff that comes with a larger student body and a larger research portfolio in part by being a smarter about the space we have.

There's an insatiable demand from students for recreation space and gathering space. We've had plenty of examples where cubicles have been repurposed into student space. Education is an in person enterprise for us. And so we, we need to strike that balance of having people, both faculty and staff, present for our students and yet realize those opportunities for efficiency of use of that space.

Prof. Toledano asked a follow up question to one he asked last year. Perhaps three years ago the Senate passed a resolution asking that Northeastern divest itself from fossil fuels.

Last year you said that Northeastern did not have the ability to pick and choose stock.

Is that still the case? Is Northeastern still not able to individually pick stocks? And if so, I assume that some outside company manages Northeastern's investments, is it not possible to direct this company to say there are such things as green funds and direct them towards green funds.

Vice President Nedell said that in the construction of Northeastern's portfolio they don't own any individual stock or entity. Think about a blended fund of the S&P 500 fund that is a just a common vehicle out there, to the extent that there is an oil or gas company embedded in that S&P 500 fund, you can't individually go out and take a stock or two out of that index.

That's not to say there aren't vehicles to be able to invest in sustainable, focused investments, and Northeastern has done that. Back in 2014, Northeastern made a commitment to invest \$25 million of the endowment in sustainably focused investments.

In 2014, the University set a bit of a direction saying we want to invest where we can without disrupting the approach to long term returns. So there was an invest versus divest sort of directional orientation and we were focused on where we could have the most impact.

He believes we can have the most impact in the research that all faculty do, the teaching that is provided to our students and the way that we operate our campuses.

III. PRESENTATION

DIANE LEVIN, UNIVERSITY OMBUDS

TRENDS IN FACULTY AND STAFF CONCERNS: SPRING 2024 UPDATE FROM THE OMBUDS OFFICE

(The presentation is posted to the Faculty Senate website.)

Diane Levin noted that there are two ombuds at Northeastern. She is responsible for faculty and staff and all employees across the global network. Her colleague, Kimberly Wong, supports our graduate and PhD students.

She said confidentiality is the foundation of their work and it encompasses not only communications with our offices, but also the very identity of office visitors subject to one narrow exception, the imminent threat of serious harm. Their independence ensures that their offices represent safe spaces for our constituents to come and raise and explore their concerns.

They don't take sides and don't advocate for any office or any individual. Their informality means that conversations with them are off the record and don't trigger notice to the university in any way. They offer early disputed intervention and importantly they track broad trends to spot, address, and neutralize problems.

Diane said that faculty have communicated to her that when they reach out to their faculty Senate reps, the feedback she hears is that those experiences have been really positive. Faculty feel senators take their concerns seriously, listen to them, and offer discretion and privacy.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

Prof. Rappaport asked if there had been any issues with politics on campus. Is there any uncertainty or ethical issues associated with the interesting political climate we find ourselves in?

Diane Levin said that this year she decided that one of the risks that she wanted to start tracking was negative impact on diversity goals.

She did that before October 7th and would say that she has heard from people on all sides of the conversation who have been dismayed by how the university has responded.

She thinks there has been a hope and an expectation that we might do more.

So many people want to feel safe, respected, welcomed at Northeastern and are feeling a real sense of loss and an absence of connection.

Prof. Walker asked Diane Levin to speak to any change in direction in the issues that people are bringing to her office. Does this year's snapshot look different from previous years?

Diane Levin said many issues have persisted. For example, the ones involving organizational climate and leadership have persisted since the pandemic started.

Issues within hierarchical relationships, those have been among the top three concerns categories since I started here.

And then comparing notes with colleagues at other ombuds at R1 institutions, they see the same thing.

She said some of the differences that she has seen has included a significant drop in people who are experiencing workplace stress that have required referrals to the EAP or to behavioral health services. During fiscal year '21, the height of COVID, 25% of office visitors required referrals there.

Now she thinks 1% of office visitors report experiencing workplace stress to that level.

There's has also been a decrease in bullying among faculty. She knows that there have been colleges that have launched programs to raise awareness and to address bullying as an issue, so she is hearing less of that.

Maybe that's an encouraging sign, but overall, there are certainly things that have persisted over time.

The meeting adjourned at 1:27 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by
Prof. Yingzi Lin, Senate Secretary