



# Northeastern University Faculty Senate

TO: FACULTY SENATE  
FROM: Secretary, Faculty Senate  
SUBJECT: Minutes, February 28, 2024

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

Administrators: Madigan, Abowd, Amidon, Isaacs, Pollastri, Sceppa.

Absent: (Professors) Jaeggli, Kitagawa, Lowrey, Molnar, Moore, Oet, Rivera, Walker J.,  
(Administrators) Wadia-Fascetti.

**CALL TO ORDER:** 11:45 a.m.

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

Prof. Landsmark noted that since the 2\_14\_24 Senate meeting, SAC has met twice and has met with the Provost Office once. SAC held an elected senator meeting on 2\_21\_24.

Recent faculty concerns/topics submitted to SAC include issues around TRACE, salary differentials, faculty burnout, faculty/staff tuition benefits and Mills program proposals. Where appropriate, SAC shares these concerns with the Provost Office. Regarding TRACE, SAC will be staffing a TRACE ad hoc committee in fall 2024.

**QUESTIONS:**

Prof. Strange asked when would there be a call for volunteers for the TRACE ad hoc committee?

Prof. Landsmark said the call would be issued shortly. SAC hopes to work quickly to staff that committee.

II. **PROVOST REPORT:**

Provost Madigan welcomed Kellee Tsai, new CSSH Dean, who was present at the meeting.

Addressing budget concerns, Provost Madigan said the university is in a very strong financial position. The university has had a record number of both undergraduate and graduate applications and has record research revenue. There has been an extraordinary record of success over an extended period of time going back to the 2000's.

Provost Madigan said on Jan. 31, 2024, the senate heard from Tom Nedell, CFO, as he highlighted the university's sustained growth over a lengthy period of time and a compound average growth rate of 8.1%. He also highlighted some numbers like our liquidity that is north of a half billion dollars.

Net debt has fallen year after year and is now at 19%. Northeastern's growth has been sustainable and must be sustainable going forward.

To achieve sustainable growth, expense growth cannot exceed revenue growth. We have to control expenses so they do not grow faster than revenue grows. In the last couple of months as we began to zero in on the precise details for the forecast for the coming year, it became clear we need to make some adjustments to expenses. In some of the submitted budgets, expenses were growing somewhat faster than forecast revenues.

Right now they are going through a university wide process of making some adjustments so that expense growth does not exceed our revenue growth. It is good financial hygiene in terms of the management of the university. The university will continue to make investments in student services and student support and faculty. This is not a simple thing but doable and will allow us to sustain our growth into the future. For the coming FY '25, we are again projecting very robust growth across the entire university.

#### **QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:**

Prof. Toledano Laredo asked the Provost if he could say a few words on what is driving this uptick in expenses.

Provost Madigan said there is expense growth every year. We're growing faculty; we're growing staff to support that faculty and to support students.

The primary focus now is on the budget for next year – the fiscal year beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>. The forecast for next year's expense growth was higher than the forecast revenue number. It is across the board and in all categories. It isn't one thing. The overall expense growth needs to be tapered a little bit.

Prof. Toledano Laredo asked if there were examples of two or three items that were driving, if not explaining the situation.

Provost Madigan said revenue growth is very robust. We're forecasting revenue growth for this coming year that is slightly below last year. We are just being conservative in terms of our forecast for revenue growth.

And then on expense growth, it's driven by many things. Faculty hiring is a significant piece of it and we need faculty to teach in these programs. We will need to trim a little bit in many categories in order to ensure sustainable growth.

Prof. Landsmark asked does the addition of new campuses show up in this budget growth?

Provost Madigan said sure. As we grow the global university system, that contributes to our revenue growth and our expense growth. As a whole, if you look at the global network, it is a large positive contributor to the university's budget in total. One of the reasons we're in the strong financial position we're in is the success of the campus network.

Prof. Henderson said so we're talking about a slowdown in growth, not absolute cuts. But could you put any percentages on either of those? How much do we expect revenue to go up and how much less should we expect to spend?

Provost Madigan said we are not spending less. Across the colleges, the budgets are all growing but they can't grow faster than the revenue. University wide 8.1% has been the historical revenue growth rate. Next year we should be well above that.

Prof. Robertson asked for more specificity on those numbers. Is the solution to this that you are asking deans to cut budgets in colleges? What will be the effect on faculty searches that are ongoing for the next academic year?

Provost Madigan said that for the coming academic year it is not cuts per se, it is that the expense growth can't exceed the revenue growth. In some of the cases for some colleges there isn't enough to basically hire all of the faculty that we're searching for at the moment. And so some of the searches will have to be deferred or delayed in order for the expenses to be less than revenue.

Prof. Strange asked if the Provost could talk about other types of things that won't grow as fast.

Provost Madigan said we are trying to protect what is core to our mission. We are scrutinizing things like non-essential travel and non-essential events. We are scrutinizing contractual arrangements and consulting services to see if we can limit those.

Prof. Smith asked how will this process unfold and what will faculty know about it?

Provost Madigan said he is working closely with the deans. Deans are working closely with their staffs to model this and right size it for the year. He added as we move to finalize the budget for FY24/ FY25, there is a cadence to this. The budget goes to the Board and so we are working towards the late March Board meeting. And we need to have the budget finalized approximately 2 weeks before that so the Board has time to study it.

Prof. Godoy Carter said she is in a faculty search and it is a lot of work. Will we know in the next two weeks or so if we will have the money to hire this faculty person?

Provost Madigan said he is working very closely with the deans to try finalize this part of the process quickly so that questioned can be answered.

Prof. West asked if there are any cuts to operating budgets for this fiscal year. He said there seems to be an element of surprise to this. A lot of these search committees were approved a while ago. Why is there a feeling of surprise?

Provost Madigan said the sequencing of events is not optimal. We have to authorize searches long before we have clear visibility into the budget and in a sense, that's what causes the problem. Regarding the current year, we are also looking at things we can avoid expenditures on for the remainder of this financial year.

Prof. West asked is this a kind of 1 year adjustment or precautionary measure or is this kind of changing the longer-term expansion plans?

Provost Madigan said we will continue to grow and take advantage of new opportunities but going forward we will limit the expense growth so that it doesn't exceed revenue growth.

Prof. DiBattista said she was thinking about the COS and the people we need to hire to teach our courses that are in very high demand. To what extent does the revenue generated by the classes we teach offset the expense of hiring a faculty member?

Provost Madigan said 100%. The vast bulk of the of the revenue, not all of it, but the vast bulk of the revenue comes from tuition. We are a tuition dependent organization. The good news is we have astonishing demand. We have more applications for our undergraduate program this year than any private university in the country. The growth on the revenue side is clearly sustainable. We just have to manage our expenses to not grow faster than revenue. Revenue growth forecast for FY25 is 8.5% -- that is the current number.

Prof. Lin asked will faculty annual raises be impacted by this.

Provost Madigan said no – we don't anticipate that merit will be impacted but – the actual merit amount is not decided yet. There will be a merit pool.

Provost Madigan said if faculty have other thoughts they should feel free to shoot him an email.

### III. PRESENTATION:

#### **JOE LALLEY, ASSOC. VICE PRESIDENT FOR FACILITIES OPERATIONS** ***OVERVIEW OF ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT AT NU***

V.P. Lalley gave a high-level overview of asbestos management at the 4 MA campuses and Oakland.

V.P. Lalley said that there are two important dates faculty should keep in mind: 1970 when the Clean Air Act classifies asbestos as hazardous and gives the EPA the power to regulate it. And then 1989 when there was a ban on use of asbestos for flooring felt, rollboard, commercial paper, corrugated paper and specialty paper and new uses of asbestos.

The United Realty Buildings (UR) are quite old in comparison to those dates.

Meserve Hall built in 1893.

Holmes Hall built in 1910.

Lake Hall built in 1910.

Nightingale Hall built in 1911.

V.P. Lalley said that they always presume asbestos is present until proven otherwise even in buildings built after 1989. There were materials in the supply chain that could have been installed in new buildings

As a matter of course, when we're doing renovation or if we get a report or a concern, we will engage a third party to come in and do testing of the site or the material.

Our strategies that are done by a licensed abatement contractor are remove or encapsulate. Both of those are very acceptable strategies. We earmark about \$800,000 a year for this.

When someone's renovating an office space, or if there's a small project in the building, besides the testing, if we've confirmed asbestos is there, we do our best to see that it goes away in the right way and done by the right people.

#### **QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:**

Prof. Toledano Laredo said he was one of the senators who asked about this issue. His Department of Mathematics lives in the United Realty Building, so they are directly concerned about this. He has been at Northeastern since 2006 that's going on 18 years. In those years, at least as far as his floors 5 and 4 of Nightingale and Lake Hall are concerned there's been no abatement that he is aware of and no, PCM training, at least as far as our teaching faculty is concerned.

He said he was hoping for some sort of status report or declaration saying floors 5 and 4, and, ideally, all of United Realty are clear of asbestos or all asbestos has been encapsulated.

V.P. Lalley said he can't make a generic statement like that but noted a couple of specific instances. For example, in Nightingale Hall, they abated lead paint that was peeling in room 528. A pipe installation on the 1st floor hallway was dealt with in our history.

They are typically doing the testing as part of a proposed renovation or upgrade to a space. If they find it, they remove it.

Prof. Toledano Laredo said a number of his colleagues who have been at Northeastern for a number of years and have not had their offices renovated wonder if there is asbestos in their specific offices.

V.P. Lalley said he would schedule a meeting with Prof. Toledano to get specific questions. He said in general, there is asbestos in these buildings. It is generally encapsulated into things like floor tile or in the case of mastic that's used to glue down tiles or carpet and then encapsulated by the presence of the carpet or the tile on top of it. It is also present in mechanical rooms which is why we keep them locked.

Where we see damaged insulation that is a concern in the older buildings because it's friable asbestos and can get into the air so we either want to encapsulate with an airtight cover or try to remove it where we can.

Prof. Toledano Laredo said in their offices there's a ceiling which is very low that is a kind of styrofoam and then the actual ceiling that is much higher. But between those two, there are big pipes.

Some of those big pipes could have been painted using fire retardant paints that do contain asbestos. Prof. Toledano Laredo said he didn't know that for a fact. But he wondered if this has been looked into in a systematic manner and, if so, encapsulated?

V.P. Lalley said he couldn't answer that question but would work to get an answer. He said he didn't know the building that well and he didn't know the projects that have been done but he could look into that.

Prof. Mellette said he is in the English Department in Holmes and Lake and it would be helpful to know how to get information about individual offices.

Prof. Triest said he is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Lake and Holmes. He said he shared some of the concerns that have been raised. He wondered if it would make sense and if it would be feasible for there to be inspections of the United Realty complex to look for things like cracked floor tiles or loose insulation so potential issues could be proactively addressed. He added he recognized the irony of bringing this up after they had just discussed budget problems.

V.P. Lalley said they have contract cleaners in the building and part of their training is to be aware of possible asbestos issues. There are also Northeastern employees who are superintendents who inspect the buildings for cleanliness and also check for those kinds of things. We have lots of eyes on things as part of our day-to-day business.

Prof. Triest asked if it would make sense to hire someone who is trained for looking for asbestos hazards to come into the United Realty complex and more systematically look over the whole building.

V.P. Lalley said as part of their building inspection program they do have people who are looking at the buildings just about every business day.

Prof. Toledano Laredo said one of the first things that was said today was that because asbestos used to be extensively used, the operating model for the older buildings is to presume it is present. But then it seems that the operational mode is reactive rather than proactive.

Isn't Northeastern as our employer, beholden to make sure that we are all working in healthy conditions, which would, speak to doing as Prof. Triest was suggesting -- make a thorough inspection of the buildings -- floor by floor -- and certify that the building is okay?

He said he understood he was talking about a lot of money, but EXP cost \$400 million. We're talking about people's lives and health here.

V.P. Lalley said it is an OSHA requirement that an employer provide a safe worker environment and we do that. Just because asbestos is in a building does not mean that it's necessarily causing a hazard. Every day building cleaners, building superintendents, tradespeople are walking the building regularly and have been trained to identify hazards and immediately report them so that we can determine whether or not there's an immediate threat to health and safety.

Prof. Kevoe Feldman said that in her past life before she became an academic she was a hazardous waste specialist and did asbestos abatement for construction and the government. She said she gets the things he is saying – as long as it is airtight there shouldn't be any particles.

She said in Holmes Hall, their garbage cans are put outside the offices. The cleaners don't come in. She said for the health and morale of faculty and staff, the concern is really the whole building.

If there is a way to do air monitoring in every building, office, floor for extra reassurance, faculty would really appreciate that. And she would argue that would be an essential expense. If this has already been done, let faculty know.

V.P. Lalley thanked Prof. Kevoe Feldman for the suggestion.

Prof. Diani said she knew the focus was on United Realty buildings but wanted to add Robinson to the conversation. For many years, there has been concern about asbestos in Robinson. She said that this summer there are renovations in Robinson in clinical and rehab sciences. Given what you have said, can we assure colleagues that as part of this renovation there will be an asbestos evaluation?

V.P. Lalley said there is a lot of work going on in Robinson. There is the replacement of the two-pipe system that failed causing the flooding over on the east basement side. We are touching about every space in that building and probably testing every space and an outcome of that should be a good assessment of what remains in that building.

We know that there is asbestos in Robinson. We have known about it for years.

Prof. Landsmark said this is a systemic issue.

V.P. Lalley said he will look into seeing what it might take to put together a program to address the concerns he heard today. The Environmental Compliance Office and the Occupational Safety Office are in my organization. He said he would be talking to our senior director after this meeting.

#### **IV. REPORT OF THE RESEARCH POLICY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (PROFESSOR BUDIL).**

(The RPOC report and presentation are posted to the Senate website.)

Prof. Budil reviewed the committee's charges and noted that this year many RPOC committee members were new with just one committee member from last year's committee. This year the committee's mission has largely been carrying on the recommendations of the last year's committee.

#### **QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:**

Prof. West said a number of Chemical Engineering colleagues have talked to him about wanting stockrooms so he was surprised there was no demand for this. For small things like disposable gloves, instead of Amazon Priming it, a stockroom would be convenient.

Prof. Landsmark wondered how to explain the discrepancy.

Prof. Budil said they didn't do an actual survey. They went to the Dean's offices in the colleges and asked what their position on this was.

Prof. West said since many faculty do seem to want a stockroom who should faculty communicate this to. He said he would tell his colleagues if you want a stockroom, this is who you need to tell.

Prof. Budil said his conversation was with Sam Inman, Associate Dean for Finance in COS who said he was open to the idea but they had no specific requests for anything like that.

He said he was sure there were advantages and cost savings associated with stocking something and having an item immediately available. There is overhead associated with ordering things on

the internet. But that has to be compared to the actual cost of finding space and a manager and maintaining a stockroom. He said he would advise people to form a group and build a use case.

Prof. Homan said she teaches in the teaching labs Behrakis. She said there are lab managers in Behrakis that are in charge of space and making sure the labs run smoothly. She asked if the committee did any ad hoc interviews with the lab management staff?

Prof. Budil said they only did interview in EXP and not in Behrakis but said they probably should have. He said the chemistry/teaching labs in EXP, do actually maintain local stocks and they are for the purpose of teaching as well. He said Brian D'Amico was the person they interviewed there who's responsible for basically running all the instructional labs.

Prof. Budil asked Prof. Homan if there were particular concerns.

Prof. Homan she wondered if the committee had captured any of the opinions of lab management staff/faculty in terms of what their needs might be for a good shared space. And from a teaching perspective, are students having a good experience in the teaching labs.

Prof. Budil said the committee did not comprehensively interview every such lab manager on campus. This might be a suggestion for next year's committee. Future surveys of shared space should include staff and postdocs and Prof. Homan's suggestions would align with that.

Prof. Landsmark thanked the committee for their extensive work on this.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by  
Prof. Yingzi Lin, Senate Secretary