



# Northeastern University

## Office of the Faculty Senate

**TO:** FACULTY SENATE  
**FROM:** Secretary, Faculty Senate  
**SUBJECT:** Minutes, March 2, 2022

Present: Professors: Avalon, Beighley, Board, Caracoglia, Carr, Chiou, Cisewski, Dennerlein, Ergun, Gonyeau, Gundavaram, Herlihy, Hertz, Landsmark, Mages, Marano, McSherry, Molnar, Mukerjee, Musselman, Rappaport, Smith, Spencer, Strange, Wood, Zimmerman, Zulick

Administrators: Madigan, Abowd, Cohen, Gallagher, Reid, Ronkin, Sceppa

Absent: (Professors) (Professors) Beighley, Bourns, Dau, Nieves, Toledano Laredo, Vollmer, Willey  
(Administrators)

**CALL TO ORDER:** 11:50 a.m.

I. The minutes for the 2.16.22 Senate meeting were approved.

II. **SAC REPORT:**

- Prof. Gonyeau noted that since the last Senate meeting, SAC has met twice. One meeting included Diane Levin, NU Ombuds for an update.
- SAC continues scheduling committee reports and presentations for the remaining senate meetings.
- SAC is working to constitute search committees:  
Chair, Physical Therapy and Movement Rehabilitation Sciences  
Chair, Bioengineering
- SAC is working on senate election procedures for AY '22-'23.
- SAC has met with Provost Madigan, Chancellor Henderson and Sr. Vice Provost Franko.  
Topics have included:
  - Follow up on past senate resolutions
  - Communication strategies
  - Mills college updates
  - Faculty concerns
- SAC has continued discussion of items communicated to them by senators and faculty. These include academic integrity issues like Coursehero. One of number of websites out there for students to share course materials. There is not much that can be done from a legal perspective but continuing the dialogue.  
Issues brought forth by the Ombuds including low morale, issues of trust in leadership and anxiety related to finances and inflation. SAC will work with Provost's office on these areas to discuss actionable items.  
The SAC report can be found on the Faculty Senate website.

### III. PROVOST REPORT:

- Provost Madigan said there is a lot going on with faculty hiring and he thanked all involved. The University is getting fantastic candidates.
- Regarding Impact engines, there is a lot going on behind the scenes.
- There are two dean searches going on – CSSH, DMSB. The goal is to have a permanent dean in place by July 1.
- For Mills College, the main focus is on the teach-out of the current students. After the merger, there is no such thing as a “continuing Mills program”, all students become NU students but do not need to come to Boston. The major goal is to minimally disrupt their paths.

### QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:

- Prof. Wood noted some people have expressed concern and puzzlement around a lack of statement from President Aoun about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Provost Madigan noted that the President would need to speak for himself. The Provost said we have approximately 30 students from Ukraine and about 80 from Russia. NU has reached out to all those students to offer resources and support. But he does not know if a NU announcement will be coming out.

- Prof. Gonyeau recognized Prof. Stephens. Prof. Stephens asked about the lifting of the mask mandate – particularly in regards to faculty with small children who cannot be vaccinated and are uncomfortable with this new policy. Can faculty ask students to wear masks in the classroom? There are still various risks/situations for many. What recommendations are there from the administration for faculty to adjust to new guidelines?

Provost Madigan said the university has been in lockstep with Boston Public Health all along and continues to receive scientific advice. Any instructor can wear a mask. Faculty can't tell students they have to wear a mask. That is problematic. Then we would have two different policies.

- Prof. Dennerlein wondered if the university can provide guidelines about the choice of wearing masks in certain situations. Something that can be suggestions and not mandates.

Provost Madigan said this was a good idea and will take this to the team.

- Prof. Gundavaram asked a similar question in regards to language around masks. Instead of saying students are required to wear masks can we say we “prefer” they wear a mask?

Vice Provost Franko said she didn't know about the legal side, but she discussed with deans this morning that when a faculty member says to their class, I would “prefer” that you wear masks for whatever reason – that the power differential between faculty and students is present. Students may hear “must” and worry about the consequences.

- Prof. Chiou said with spring break upcoming, there is a concern that students may come back positive. Should the university pause a mask mandate until after that time?

Provost Madigan said it is problematic to raise a mask mandate when it is not anywhere else. He said we are in a different situation than we were 3 months ago.

- Prof. Arnold Mages said his daughter is a freshmen this year at NU. The student body is uniformly

excited about the lifting of the mask mandate. He said he was sympathetic to what a lot of people are bringing up today. Could the university provide guidance about having a discussion with students that doesn't come off as coercive. Could we have that produced in next few days?

Provost Madigan said this was consistent with the other request about developing guidelines.

- Prof. Rappaport wondered about allowing students to vote on whether to wear masks.

Provost Madigan said this was tricky issue. What if they vote in favor 15 to 14 – then what? We have a university policy that masks are optional. How do you enforce that?

- Prof. Ergun said in regards to graduate admissions, over last couple of weeks, the process of sending admission notices has been slowed down. Now there is a requirement for checking all self-reported GPAs with official records.

She asked for some explanation of when this is going to end. What are the goals of this policy? What happens if a discrepancy is noticed? As a department that has a huge graduate program, we are exceptionally concerned. She also wanted to put in a plug for exceptions for PhD admissions. A lot of deadlines are in April. We need to send admission decisions very quickly. And for every PhD applicant, the committee looked at these very carefully. Often the candidate is interviewed more than once. Really no reason to check the GPA of this applicant.

Provost Madigan said there has been a tightening of checking documents; he will take back to the team to ensure there are no unwarranted delays.

- Dean Abowd said this is really only relevant to COE, Khoury and CPS because they do not use an external service that students have to pay for to validate the GPA. He said for next year, this validation process has to be done much earlier. It takes about 2 hours per applicant to do the way we are currently doing it.

#### IV. NEW BUSINESS:

##### PRESENTATION:

##### BY TOM NEDELL, SR. VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE AND TREASURER

##### *The Current Financial State of the University*

Sr. Vice President Nedell reported that the University is in very strong and ever strengthening financial situation. The University successfully navigated the early days of the pandemic and did not have layoffs or have to suspend retirement contributions.

He noted that it is not by accident that we are successful in strengthening the university. It comes from a disciplined approach. Academic quality, leadership and strategic investments are core inputs to financial health. Highlights of the presentation include:

- The growth and diversification of our tuition driven programs and research builds resilience into our financial model that in times like COVID we can rely on.
- We are tuition dependent. Only small amount of total operating budget comes from endowment (2%). Would like more from that. Our reinvestment – over 1 billion dollars – helps advance our ambitions.
- We fully fund our depreciation so that we can make investments into core items so that we don't

get a backlog.

- In regards to asset monetization, the University has been active in thinking about how we use other people's money, such as in housing.
- In regards to the debt portfolio, when interest rates are low, allows for leveraging investments for greater impact.
- Revenue growth chart indicates average growth 7.1% versus other private institutions (monitored by Moody's). Our Moody rating is A1 – very healthy.
- Growth in Professional Programs diversifies our tuition revenue with an average of 11% growth rate.
- Research award growth is similar with a 10% average growth rate.
- Philanthropy has been a fantastic story with a 16% average growth.
- Balance sheet metrics are also strengthened. There was growth in net assets to \$2.7 billion. And long-term debt has been strategically increased as well and used that means of funding to invest in things like ISEC.
- Endowment reached all-time high in October of \$1.49 billion.
- Liquidity/operating cash has grown from \$76M to \$542M (2006 to 2021). This is substantial and what helped get us through COVID.
- Balance sheet metrics: net debt: total outstanding debt minus outstanding liquidity – ratio has gone down, which is good, from 55% to 21%.
- EXP is on time and on budget. It has a \$400M budget. Targeting summer 2023 for completion.
- 840 Columbus Avenue is a proposed project that would be a combination student housing and 5 floors of university space. This is next to Renaissance parking garage. Currently delayed due to the changing Boston political landscape with a new mayor.

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

- Prof. Chiou asked with elevated inflation, how does Vice President Nedell's office control inflating expenses? And related to financial markets, with interest rates in market going to increase, how can we control financial costs?

Vice President Nedell said the vast majority of our debt is fixed rate debt and so we have very little exposure if interest rates rise.

As we prepare to take on additional debt, which we will be doing in the next year to complete the construction of EXP, the long end of the debt curve has not been increasing substantially. Long term rates are still at almost historic lows. Most of our investments to date are with fixed-rates.

Regarding inflation, as we plan for new construction, we have locked in pricing for EXP before inflationary trends. In very short term, we have no other investments of that scale. We are a people-driven enterprise, so unlike businesses with day to day response, we look at compensation on a yearly increment. Market will determine if there will be wage inflation, but doesn't appear at this point to impact us.

- Prof. Spencer said maybe this was more for the Provost, but given this strong financial health and that faculty are feeling overworked and underpaid and given reports that NU faculty are paid less than close competition schools and inflation – what is the university stance on implementing the 8% raise recommended by FAC a couple of weeks ago?

Vice President Nedell said it is not for him to say. He said faculty salary information can have different stories depending on the numbers being presented.

Provost Madigan said it's a complex process with many inputs into this. These discussions are just beginning.

- Prof. Stephens asked with this financial health and wealth, what are we going to be doing with this? In response to new research on role of universities in their communities and society in general there is this idea that universities are supposed to be for public good and some not doing that. We are tax exempt. Will we give back more to the close communities here? How to translate this?

Vice President Nedell said there is not a simple answer. We take seriously our role as member of community and have extensive dialogues with community on our projects. For example, with 840 Columbus development, this housing on NU land is so that students will have more housing and have more students come out of Mission Hill. We have increased Pilot over time in the last 10 years, but debating the formula that the city uses, we think in different terms with the services we give them. We acknowledge we need to be good citizens.

- Prof. Rappaport asked in regards to international debt and investments, do we do anything with Russia?

Vice President Nedell said not in terms of debt. NU does not own any individual investments. As an institution it holds blended funds and some are international.

## V. PRESENTATION:

### BY PROF. HEMANTH GUNDAVARAM, SCHOOL OF LAW

#### *Comments on IP and Copyright Policy*

Prof. Gundavaram reviewed the modules in the Faculty Handbook that would be impacted by IP and Copyright Policy including Patent and Copyright, Instructional Media.

Prof. Gonyeau explained that this presentation is related to a request to remove a policy that is related to intellectual property that currently exists in the Faculty Handbook in the module on Patent and Copyright. The request came because the Intellectual Property policy actually applies to the entire university community and not just faculty.

SAC asked colleagues in SOL to take a look at this to provide some guidance and feedback about this. The current plan is to take a vote on a resolution of this type at the next senate meeting.

Prof. Gundavaram said he thinks this topic is most pertinent to the section of the Faculty Handbook: Rights in Teaching, Research and Scholarship and he recommended all faculty should review this section.

Other issues highlighted in Prof. Gundavaram's presentation included:

- Work made for hire: not everything we do should be considered owned by the employer but authored. Policy seems to be saying our work for hire is NU property but will not assert copyright ownership over certain work products. They recommend this language be made stronger.
- Conflicts with other agreements: for ex. with publishing, most journals want copyright but can it be done if NU "owns" it? The current phrasing brings up questions given the previous issue of work for hire.
- Equity and reasonable pricing: old and new policies do not address any of fair access terms, especially for inventions for low-income people (ex. health product).
- Instructional media: consistent concerns with recording of faculty lectures. Also. concerns with university and media companies work.

- Royalty fees: conflict with NU owning materials yet section about revenue from materials need to be apportioned.
- Other contractual agreements: instruction media partners and platforms some issues.
- Major concern that policy by someone in NU and whether faculty being treated as assets rather than partners. Suggestion that outside counsel in this area contribute to the document/policies.

**QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION:**

Lisa Sinclair from OGC said this was an update of an old module that faculty worked on together back in 2018, including faculty from the School of Law. She said she is happy to entertain any comments from faculty and to adjust this policy to make it work for everybody in the best interests of all.

Lisa Sinclair added that in regards to the reference to the Instructional Media Policy the original thinking about this was to lift the patent and copyright policies and split them in two and lift out of the Faculty Handbook and put up as an institution wide policy because it applies to everyone at the university.

Because the Instructional Media Policy is more faculty focused is it something that is updated and remains solely in the Faculty Handbook or do we intend it to be considered an institutional policy as well?

Prof. Gonyeau agreed that is a good question and something the senate can discuss more.

Prof. Musselman said in her program they have recently been paying attention to CourseHero that seems to intersect how NU sees our work and what the university can do to get the materials to be taken off CourseHero.

This topic will be continued at a later Senate meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Prof. Rhonda Board  
Senate Secretary