



Northeastern University Faculty Senate

TO: The Faculty Senate
FROM: Secretary of the Faculty Senate
SUBJECT: Minutes, 30 October 2024

Present: Professors Adams, Alexis, Bhutta, Bloom, Carr, Chiou, Di Credico, Diani, DiBattista, Dicristina, Eckelman, Godoy-Carter, Hamandi, Herron, Hill, Hodeghatta, Homan, Ingemi, Ivanova, Kahn, Kevoe Feldman, Lahr, Landsmark, Lowrey, Lykourino, Mellette, Molnar, Parameswaran, Rappaport, Rawson, Rejtar, Shrivastava, Sivak, Spencer, Stefanik, Strange, Tjiptowidjojo, Toledano Laredo, Triest, Un, Viola, Walker J., Walker L., West.

Administrators: Madigan, De Cremer, Dyal-Chand, Isaacs, Gallagher, Jackson, Tsai.

Absent: (Administrators)
(Professors)

CALL TO ORDER: 11:45 a.m.

Professor Heidi Kevoe-Feldman noted this meeting was dedicated to Academic Freedom.

OPENING REMARKS BY PROFESSOR DEE SPENCER

(Professor Spencer's detailed presentation is posted to the Senate website.)

Professor Spencer gave a broad overview of the work on the Senate and the Senate Agenda Committee. She noted differences between the policies delineated in the Faculty Handbook and the Northeastern University Policy Oversight Committee. She reviewed the Academic Freedom module of the Faculty Handbook and how the AAUP describes Academic Freedom.

Professor Spencer noted that a great deal of consternation resulted from the "Safe Campuses, Civil Discourse: Frequently Asked Questions" site. She noted that the site is being updated and much of the language that faculty find objectionable will be removed.

REMARKS BY PROVOST MADIGAN

Provost Madigan said there are mature processes for updating both the Faculty Handbook and the University policies, thus this type of discussion is appropriate.

He indicated that the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are not policy and that every major university has FAQs.

Provost Madigan deferred to Senior Vice President for External Affairs, Michael Armini, to discuss the intent of the FAQs.

Senior Vice President Armini indicated that any time the University deals with a high-profile issue, it fields hundreds of emails and calls. His team aggregates responses to the most frequently asked questions. He noted the administration's response to COVID as an example: a robust FAQ site was created to deal with the enormous inquiries about mask policies, testing and distancing.

Senior Vice President Armini indicated that the "Safe Campuses, Civil Discourse: Frequently Asked Questions" site (FAQ) was posted approximately 10 months ago, in response to receiving hundreds of inquiries from a variety of constituencies, including parents of undergraduate students and alumni.

Senior Vice President Armini said that the purpose of the FAQs is to explain the University's position in clear language. He said that the Faculty Handbook is the governing document, but it is not user friendly. Every FAQ is time stamped when a change is made. He suggested that if faculty see anything in a university FAQ that is disconcerting, they should email him, so that his group can look into the concern promptly.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Professor Daynard expressed concern about the extent to which the Provost has discretion (without specific standards) regarding the approval demonstrations.

Provost Madigan said that standards exist, but they are buried in the student handbook and should be relocated. Demonstrations are approved if they are deemed to be safe and will not disrupt University business. Approval has nothing to do with the subject of the protest.

Professor Shrivvastava, COE senator, asked if there were faculty on the Policy Oversight Committee

Professor Kevoe-Feldman affirmed that there are no faculty members on that Policy Oversight Committee, and the Senate should discuss this.

Provost Madigan indicated that Sr. Vice Provost Franko serves on the committee. He noted that she is also an administrator and that there could be faculty representation on the committee as well.

Professor Matthew Smith, CSSH, expressed his belief that there is a tension between the University's potentially hostile stance towards free speech and the broader faculty's commitment to free speech, which can have a chilling effect on speech, inside and outside of the classroom, and on research projects.

Professor Rosenbloom, SOL, acknowledged that some changes had been made to the FAQs since the last Faculty Senate meeting and indicated that those are steps in the right direction.

However, she was concerned about the signals the university is sending out. She said that a senior member of the administration made an intimidating statement to at least two faculty members last spring. In response, faculty wrote to leadership, but received no response.

Senior Vice President Armini replied that this encounter has been mischaracterized and that the administrator in question is on his staff, and has been the subject of abuse, harassment, and

bullying, to the extent that she required police protection.

Professor Kahn, SOL senator, indicated that he understood the necessity of having FAQs and appreciated that changes had been made. Going forward, he urged greater care in the development of external communications.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

Professor Walker, CSSH senator, proposed a resolution for a vote.

****Whereas:****

1. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression are foundational commitments of the university, essential to the protection of democratic values, academic excellence, and the nurturing of a non-punitive and inclusive environment for learning and research.
2. Recent administrative actions regarding the formulation and publication of policies related to Freedom of Speech have raised serious concerns among faculty due to the lack of meaningful consultation, transparency, and clarity about enforcement, creating an atmosphere that risks chilling free expression within the university community.
3. These new policy changes could lead to inequitable burdens on the most vulnerable members of the community, including those with less secure employment, women, and people of color, by fostering a surveillance atmosphere that could hamper faculty and staff's core roles in research, teaching, and democratic discourse.
4. Existing policy language on Freedom of Speech in the University Handbook is outdated, weak, and inconsistent with established standards, such as those of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which robustly protect academic and extramural speech, controversial discourse, and peaceful protest.

****Be It Resolved:****

1. The University Faculty Senate calls for a transparent and inclusive review process for all policies affecting Freedom of Speech, with a commitment to meaningful faculty consultation to ensure alignment with democratic values and academic freedom principles.
2. The University Faculty Senate affirms its commitment to defending faculty, staff, and students' rights to freedom of speech, association, and assembly, both within the academic setting and as participants in wider societal discourse, without fear of retaliation, surveillance, or disciplinary measures.
3. The University Faculty Senate calls for the immediate strengthening of policy language in the University Handbook on Freedom of Speech, aligning it with "bright-line" standards of the AAUP to ensure protection for all forms of academic expression and to prevent undue administrative interference in areas of teaching, research, and faculty autonomy.

Professor Lykourinou seconded the motion.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Professor Spencer indicated that she had not previously seen this motion and was therefore uncomfortable voting on it. She asked to postpone the vote on the resolution so that faculty could properly digest it. Professor Spencer indicated that she had some questions about intent and language and would be happy to work with Professor Walker to clarify both.

Professor Kahn, SOL senator and Parliamentarian, moved to postpone consideration of this motion to a later date.

Professor Ted Landsmark seconded this motion.

Professor Carr, CAMD senator, asked to specify the consideration date.

Professor Lahr, Mills senator, suggested the resolution be discussed at the Nov. 6th Elected Senator meeting.

A motion to consider a revised academic freedom resolution during the November 20 Faculty Senate meeting

The motion PASSED: 38-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Professor Dee Spencer