

Recommendations of Faculty Development Committee (FDC) 2024-2025

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2024-2025 Charges to FDC

Charge 1:

Explore how to create a faculty information page offering a single resource specific to faculty interests. Working in conjunction with the IT, gather a list of all NEU websites that pertain to faculty-related resources such as provost updates, financial benefits, parking coupons, childcare resources, mental health resources, development funds, research development, teaching resources, academic calendars, etc., and create a webpage accessible from the provost's website for more straightforward navigation to these resources.

Charge 2:

Follow up on the FDC recommendations from 2023-24 charge #2d and survey the faculty on what kind of transparency, accountability, and evidence of being heard they are seeking. Create a plan for a way to streamline this two-way communication process and its management to help bridge this gap between administration and faculty.

Charge 3:

Refer to the FDC 2023-24, charge #2, on communicating FDC findings and recommendations with college deans on best practices for communicating with faculty.

Charge 4:

Provide recommended language to define a “Northeastern University One Faculty” Model. This language will then be reviewed by the 2024-25 Academic Policy Committee and Faculty Handbook Committee, revised as necessary, and then presented to the Senate for adoption as a Faculty Handbook module. The Model shall consider criteria recommended by the 2023-2024 FTNTTC for all faculty–Appendix D.

The FDC2024-2025 will not provide any recommendations for this charge.

Approach

The 2024-25 FDC committee comprises five members and one ex-officio from various colleges, each bringing diverse perspectives. The committee's first meeting took place on October 2, 2024, with subsequent meetings held every two weeks. To gather the necessary information for the recommendations, the committee consulted a range of sources.

Charge 1:

An online search was conducted to gather several helpful resources for faculty. Additionally, Northeastern University's IT department was contacted for technical support. However, the most valuable information was provided by the Provost Faculty Affairs Office. A summary of the collected information can be found in Appendix A.

Charge 2:

To collect faculty feedback, the committee prepared a set of 15 questions for a university-wide survey. These questions included a mix of Likert Scale and open-response questions on various topics, as detailed in Appendix B. The Faculty Senate administered the survey at the end of the Fall 2024 semester, and responses were received from faculty across multiple departments and ranks, sharing their views on transparency, accountability, and their desire for evidence of being heard, among other issues.

Charge 3:

This charge is primarily based on the FDC 2023-24 Charge 2, which is presented in Appendix C. The FDC 2024 report highlighted key survey results, which were used to identify best practices for communication between college administration and faculty.

Charge 4:

Northeastern University's One Faculty Model is an ongoing initiative. It builds on the work from the FDC 2023-24 and offers a more in-depth analysis of the findings. Relevant information is included in Appendix D and further details can be found in the FDC 2023-24 report.

The FDC2024-2025 will not provide any recommendations for this charge.

Analysis Approach

The data gathered for Charges 1, 3, and 4 come from various sources, as detailed in the appendices. Most of the recommendations for these charges are based on the committee's thorough analysis of the collected information. For Charge 2, the Faculty Senate administered the survey using the questions outlined in Appendix B and shared the results with the FDC. The survey results are self-explanatory and do not require figure captions. Instead of providing a general recommendation for all four charges, we have listed the recommendations separately for each individual charge.

Recommendations for Charge 1

With all the necessary resource links available, as outlined in Appendix A, and given the growing importance of evolving technologies like AI, we recommend that the Provost's Office collaborate with the IT department to implement the following strategies.

1. Use AI to personalize resource suggestions for faculty

An AI-driven recommendation system could be integrated into the faculty information page to enhance the user experience. By leveraging machine learning algorithms, the system would analyze faculty preferences and browsing behavior to provide personalized resource suggestions. For instance, if a faculty member regularly accesses research funding opportunities or tuition assistance, the system would highlight those resources or suggest related content. This approach not only saves time but also increases engagement by ensuring faculty members quickly find the most relevant resources.

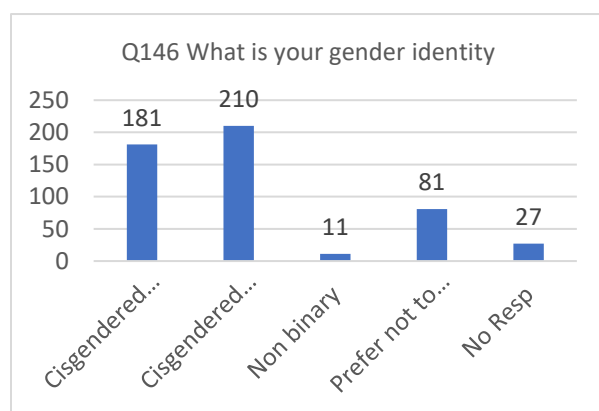
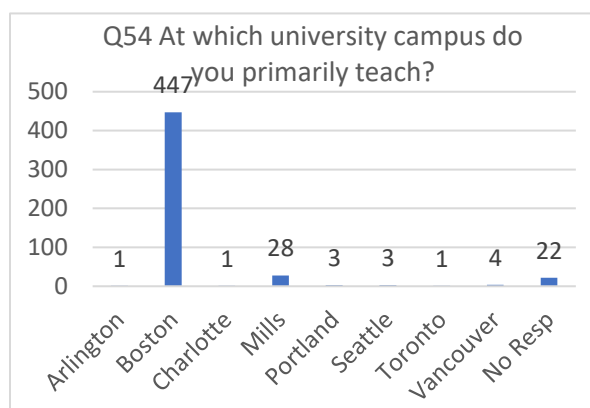
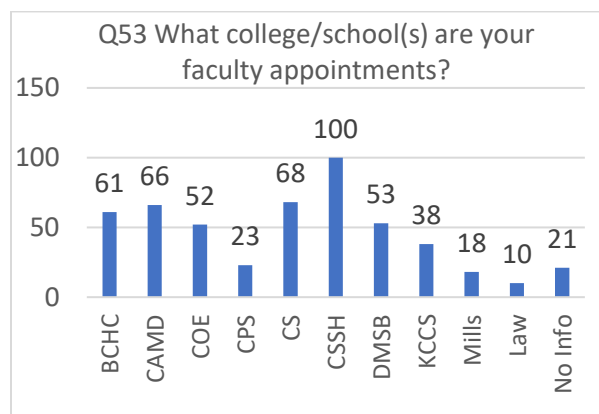
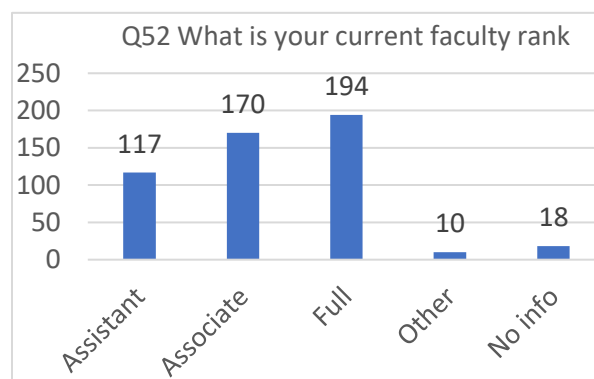
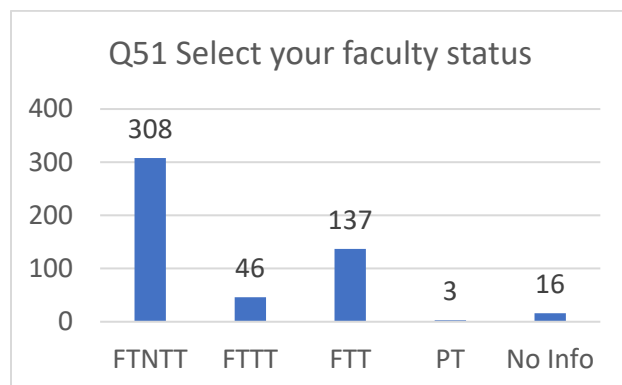
2. Implement AI-Powered Search with Contextual Understanding

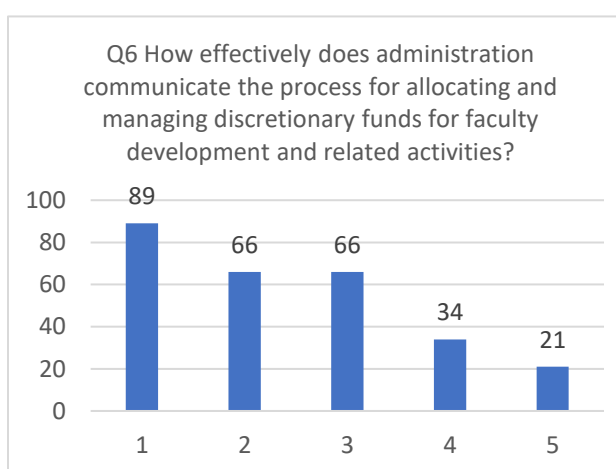
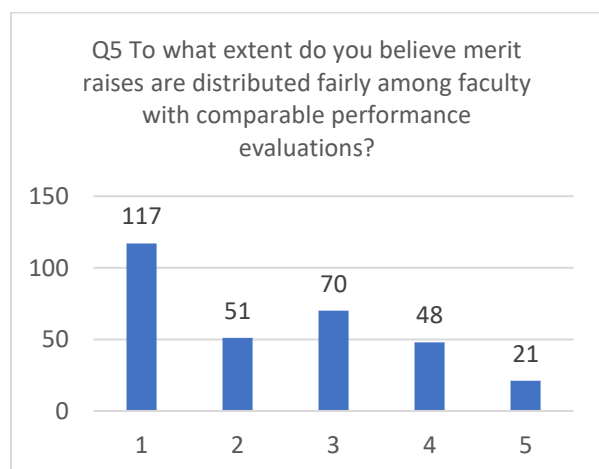
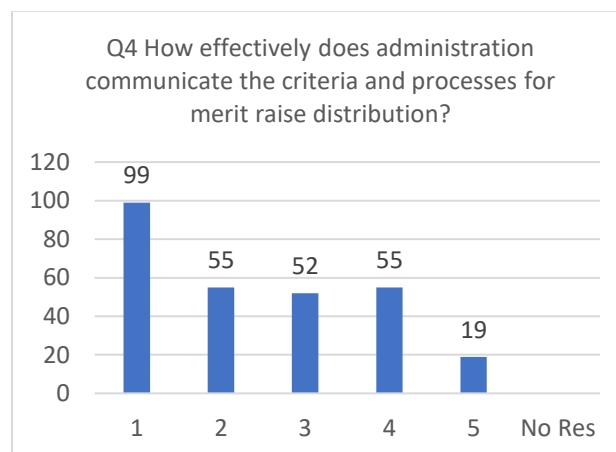
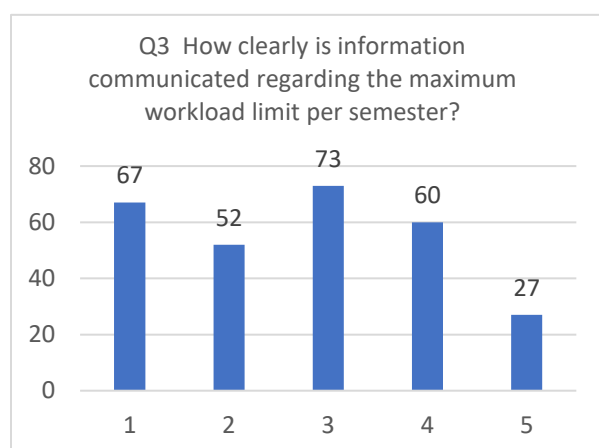
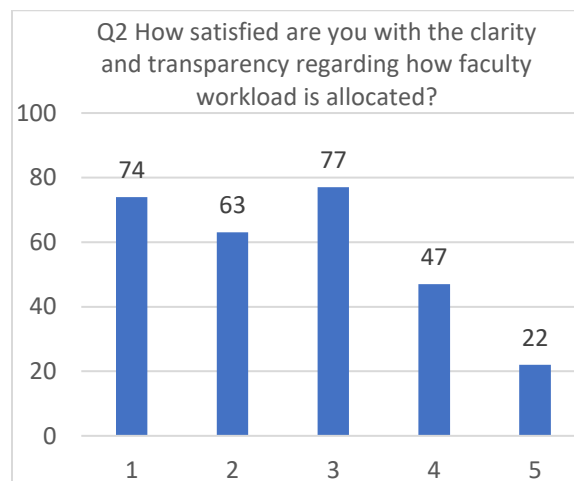
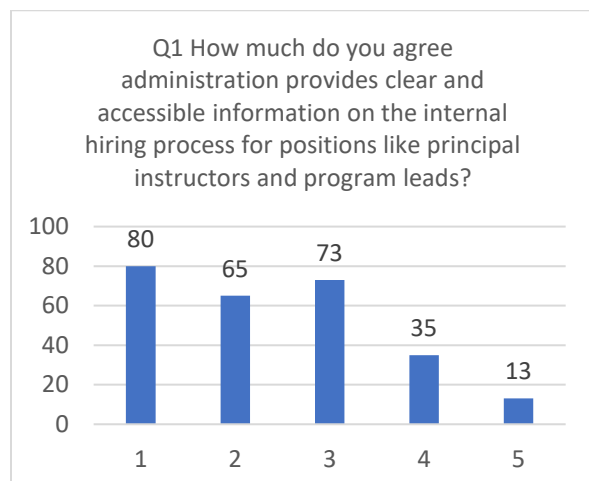
To make it easier to find resources, an AI-powered search should be added to the website. Using natural language processing (NLP), the search can understand what users are looking for and give more accurate results. For example, if a faculty member searches for “mental health support,” the AI will show results for faculty-specific counseling and wellness programs. This will help faculty find what they need more quickly and accurately.

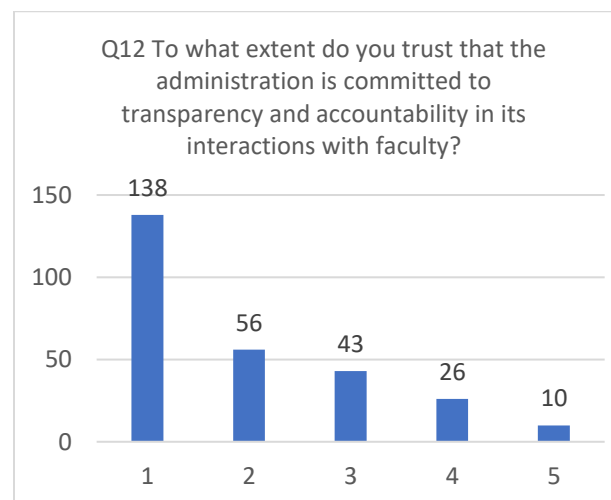
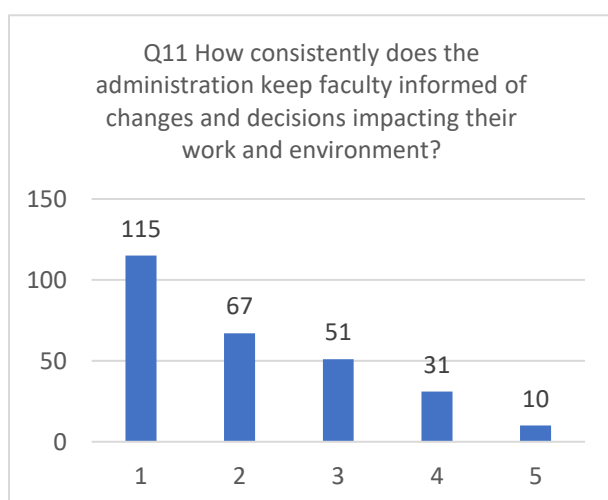
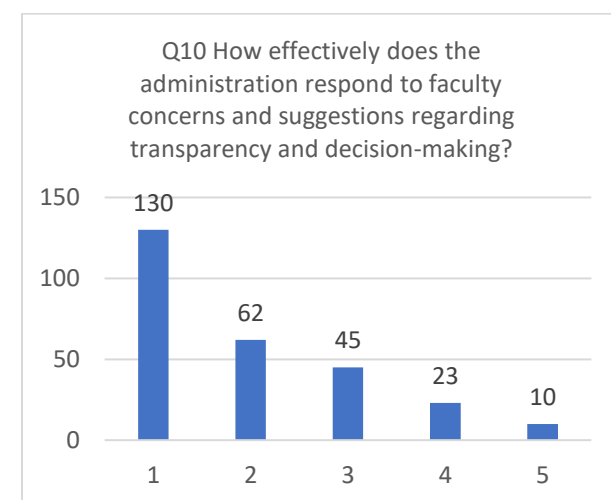
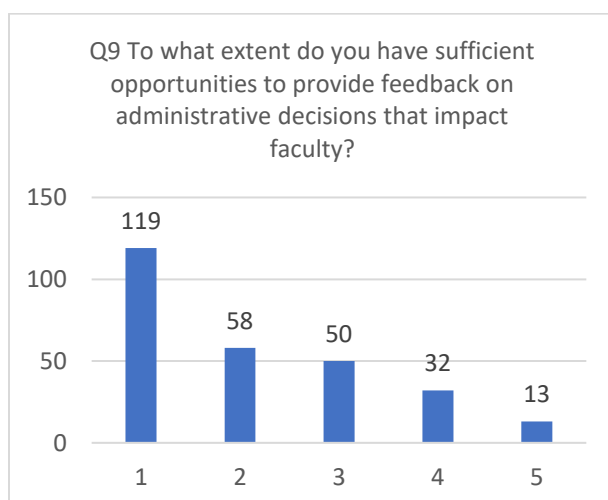
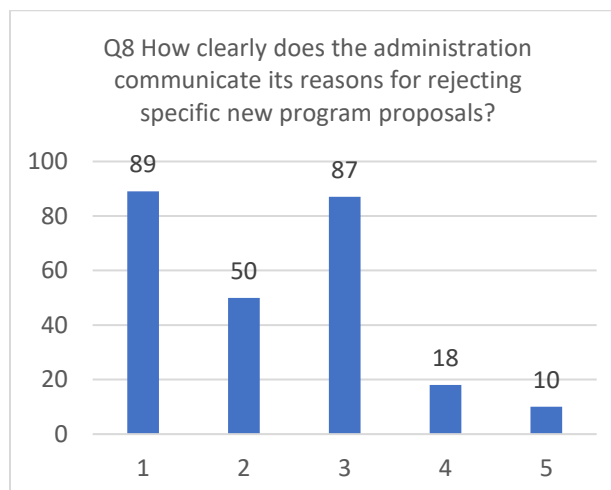
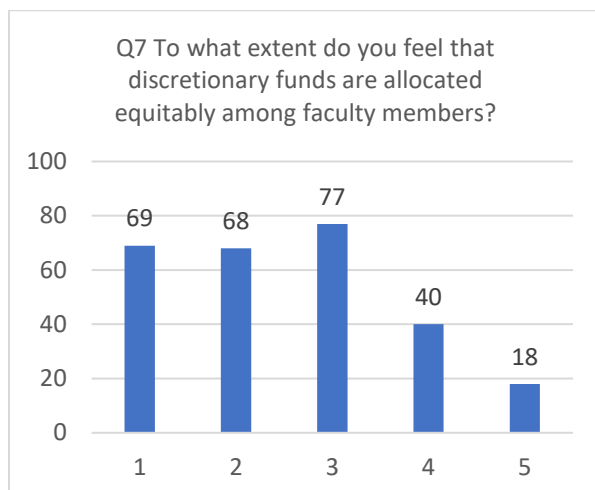
3. AI-Driven Resource Organization and Real-Time Updates

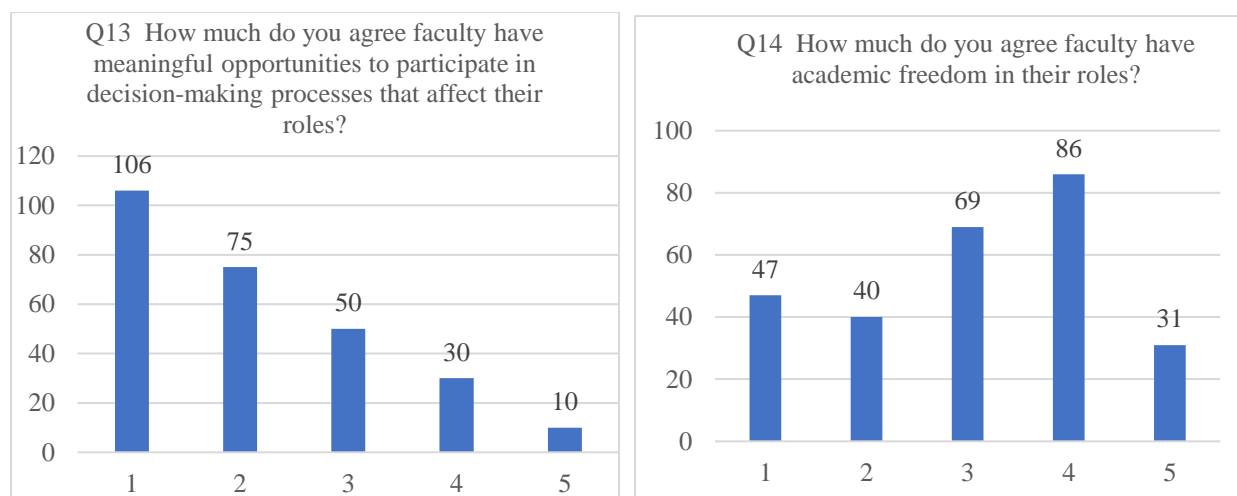
To keep the website up-to-date and active, AI can help by automatically managing and updating content. It can monitor linked pages, flag outdated or new resources, and alert administrators to review them. AI can also track user activity to find missing resources or suggest better ways to organize the content. This will ensure the site stays relevant and meets the changing needs of faculty.

Charge2 – Survey Results:









One open ended question asked respondents, “Please share any additional thoughts or specific examples of how the administration’s communication and transparency practices have positively or negatively impacted your experience as a faculty member.” Below is a summary of comments that highlight widespread dissatisfaction with the administration at Northeastern University (NU), focusing on transparency, fairness, and communication issues.

- **Lack of Transparency:** Many faculty members feel there is insufficient clarity on critical matters like salary raises, merit reviews, hiring processes, and decision-making. Administrative decisions are perceived as a top-down approach, with limited consultation or input from faculty, leading to frustration over uncommunicated or opaque policies and actions.
- **Academic Freedom Concerns:** There are significant concerns about the erosion of academic freedom, with some faculty expressing fear of repercussions for certain academic content or political involvement. The administration’s control over faculty decisions and curriculum is viewed as stifling creativity and autonomy.
- **Inequities and Unfair Practices:** Several comments mention unequal treatment in pay, merit reviews, and workload distribution. There is a perception that some faculty are unfairly favored, while others, particularly non-tenure track (NTT) faculty, face disparities in recognition and resources. The merit system is criticized for being opaque and not tied to actual performance.
- **Faculty Disempowerment:** Faculty report feeling like "disposable cogs" in the system, with little say in important decisions affecting their work or the university’s direction. Hiring processes, departmental leadership changes, and curriculum decisions are often made without meaningful input from the faculty.
- **Communication and Support Issues:** Faculty express frustration over a lack of clear, timely communication and support from administrators. Many report feeling out of the loop, with no clear mechanisms for faculty to voice concerns or have their input genuinely considered.
- **Perception of Admin's Focus:** Some comments point to a perceived prioritization of PR, external perceptions, and short-term goals over the university’s academic

mission, with faculty feeling that the administration's decisions are often driven by external pressures rather than the well-being of the academic community.

- **Policy and Procedure Challenges:** Policies on workload, course load reductions, and equity adjustments are seen as inconsistent or poorly communicated, further undermining trust in the administration.

In summary, there is a pervasive sense of mistrust and disillusionment among faculty toward the administration, driven by concerns about transparency, equity, academic freedom, and decision-making processes. Faculty members feel marginalized and excluded from critical discussions and decisions that directly impact their work and the university's academic environment.

Conclusion

The feedback from faculty at Northeastern University reveals a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the administration, highlighting significant concerns about transparency, fairness, communication, and academic freedom. Faculty members feel disempowered and excluded from important decisions, which fosters frustration and mistrust. Issues such as opaque decision-making processes, inequities in pay and merit reviews, and the erosion of academic freedom contribute to a growing sense of alienation.

Additionally, the administration's perceived focus on external image and short-term goals over the academic mission further exacerbates the divide. To rebuild trust and morale, it is crucial for the administration to foster a more inclusive, transparent, and supportive environment that genuinely values faculty input and prioritizes the long-term well-being of the academic community.

Recommendations for Charge 2

To address the widespread dissatisfaction and concerns among faculty at Northeastern University, the administration should consider implementing the following improvements:

1. Increase Transparency in Decision-Making:

The administration should provide clear, accessible communication on important decisions, such as salary raises, merit reviews, and hiring processes. Establish regular updates or town hall meetings where faculty can ask questions and engage directly with leadership to understand the reasoning behind key decisions.

2. Safeguard Academic Freedom and Faculty Autonomy:

Reaffirm the university's commitment to academic freedom by creating policies that protect faculty from retaliation for expressing diverse viewpoints in teaching and research. Involve faculty in decisions related to curriculum development, ensuring their expertise guides academic offerings.

3. Promote Fairness and Equity Across All Faculty:

Implement a transparent and equitable merit review system that is clearly tied to performance, not favoritism. Ensure that non-tenure track faculty are given fair recognition, resources, and opportunities for professional development, addressing disparities in pay and workload distribution.

4. Foster Faculty Engagement in Governance:

Empower faculty by involving them in important university decisions such as hiring processes, leadership changes, and curriculum development. Establish committees or advisory groups that allow faculty to have a voice in shaping the university's direction and policies.

5. Improve Communication and Support Systems:

Create effective channels for faculty to provide feedback and raise concerns. Ensure that communication from the administration is timely, clear, and two-way, with regular opportunities for faculty to engage in dialogue with leadership and have their input meaningfully considered.

By implementing these changes, the university can rebuild trust, foster a more collaborative environment, and better align administrative actions with the needs and values of its academic community.

Recommendations for Charge 3

The following are recommendations for Charge 3 to improve communication between college administration and faculty members:

1. Improve Transparency and Address Faculty Concerns:

Deans should communicate clear expectations regarding faculty working conditions, including available resources, benefits, and contract obligations (e.g., eight-month contracts and off-term expectations). Additionally, clear action plans should be communicated regarding reported workplace hazards or other unresolved faculty concerns, reinforcing trust and accountability.

2. Establish Regular, Predictable Communication:

Based on faculty preference and survey data, the Dean's Office should send bimonthly or monthly emails to faculty. These communications should provide updates on faculty development, shared governance, and administrative decisions, ensuring transparency and reducing the perception of unilateral decision-making.

3. Implement and Act on Anonymous Feedback Mechanisms:

Support the Faculty Senate in creating multiple avenues for faculty to provide anonymized feedback (emails, surveys, forums, etc.), ensuring that input reaches unit heads, deans, and upper administration. Deans should regularly review and publicly address key themes from this feedback to demonstrate accountability and responsiveness.

4. Strengthen Faculty Governance in Communication Channels:

Work with the Faculty Senate to develop a college-wide email list that is controlled by the Faculty Senate, ensuring direct and unfiltered communication between faculty and their representatives. This allows faculty concerns to be heard at all administrative levels and fosters a sense of shared governance.

Appendix A

<https://provost.northeastern.edu/faculty-affairs/>

Additional helpful links:

<https://learning.northeastern.edu/>

<https://faculty.northeastern.edu/advance/>

<https://nu-res.research.northeastern.edu/>

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/>

Faculty Benefit Guides

<https://assets.hrm.northeastern.edu/pdfs/benefits/Benefits-Guide.pdf>

Human Recourse

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/benefits/>

Health Benefits

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/benefits/health-benefits/>

Tuition Assistance

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/benefits/tuition-assistance/>

Retirement

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/benefits/retirement/>

Family Care

<https://assets.hrm.northeastern.edu/pdfs/benefits/NU-Childrens-Center-Brochure.pdf>

Commuting-transportation

<https://hr.northeastern.edu/benefits/commuting-transportation/>

Parking

<https://offcampus.housing.northeastern.edu/parking-transportation/>

Office of the Provost

<https://provost.northeastern.edu/>

Provost Announcements

<https://provost.northeastern.edu/announcements-and-events/>

Mental health

<https://uhcs.northeastern.edu/health-and-wellness/supporting-student-mental-health/>

Health and Counseling

<https://catalog.northeastern.edu/graduate/information-entering-students/campus-resources/university-health-and-counseling-services/>

Internal Grants

<https://resdev.northeastern.edu/internalgrants/>

Find funding for your research

<https://resdev.northeastern.edu/home/find-funding/>

Research Development Resources

<https://resdev.northeastern.edu/resources/>

Resources for Teaching and Learning

<https://learning.northeastern.edu/explore/university-resources/>

CATLR

<https://learning.northeastern.edu/>

Learning Experiences with Technology

<https://at.its.northeastern.edu/>

Academic Calendar

<https://cps.northeastern.edu/current-students/academic-calendar/>

Appendix B

Likert Scale Survey Questions: Bridging the Gap Between Administration and Faculty Bridging the Gap Between Administration and Faculty

Likert Scale Survey Questions

1. How much do you agree administration provides clear and accessible information on the internal hiring process for positions like principal instructors and program leads? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
2. How satisfied are you with the clarity and transparency regarding how faculty workload is allocated? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
3. How clearly is information communicated regarding the maximum workload limit per semester? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
4. How effectively does administration communicate the criteria and processes for merit raise distribution? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
5. To what extent do you believe merit raises are distributed fairly among faculty with comparable performance evaluations? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
6. How effectively does administration communicate the process for allocating and managing discretionary funds for faculty development and related activities? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
7. To what extent do you feel that discretionary funds are allocated equitably among faculty members? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
8. How clearly does the administration communicate its reasons for rejecting specific new program proposals? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
9. To what extent do you have sufficient opportunities to provide feedback on administrative decisions that impact faculty? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
10. How effectively does the administration respond to faculty concerns and suggestions regarding transparency and decision-making? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
11. How consistently does the administration keep faculty informed of changes and decisions impacting their work and environment? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
12. To what extent do you trust that the administration is committed to transparency and accountability in its interactions with faculty? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)
13. How much do you agree faculty have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that affect their roles? (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)
14. How much do you agree faculty have academic freedom in their roles? (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)

SHORT ANSWER

15. Please share any additional thoughts or specific examples of how the administration's communication and transparency practices have positively or negatively impacted your experience as a faculty member.

Appendix C

FDC2023-24: Charge 2 in 4 sub-charges

Informed by data collected in the 2022–23 FDC Final Report, undertake the following:

- a. Survey faculty to understand their perception of the effectiveness of communications and opportunities for feedback within their College and the University at large.
- b. Collaborate with the Ombuds Office to survey the extent to which the lack of effective communications might contribute to faculty disenfranchisement.
- c. Develop recommendations for how all Colleges might schedule regular outbound communications on topics related to faculty development and shared governance.
- d. Develop recommendations for how all Colleges might establish formal methods of inbound communications, including anonymized methods, to solicit feedback, concerns, and ideas from the faculty. Considerations should include how faculty can be regularly reminded of these available methods and resources via the Ombuds Office

Appendix D

The Model shall consider criteria recommended by the 2023-2024 FTNTTC for all faculty (faculty shall be defined herein as “fulltime, benefits-eligible faculty”):

Sabbatical

- Terms, conditions, and expectations for sabbatical leave shall be consistent for all faculty.
- Funding should be consistently provided for sabbatical leaves for all eligible faculty.

Salaries

- Salary ranges should be added to all job descriptions across all campuses.
- In conjunction with the Provost’s Office and the Vice Provost of Data & Analytics, salary ranges should be reviewed every 2 years to ensure that salary ranges are relatively equal based on cost of living by campus, rank, and faculty position. Any discrepancies should be reviewed and evaluated with reasons provided on the differences.

Office Space

- On-campus office space should be provided at the same rate for all faculty affiliated with a college and campus location. The type of office space accommodation should also be provided at the same rate for all faculty a affiliated with a college and campus location.

Faculty Titles

- Faculty titles should be applied consistently across all campuses.

Evaluation, leadership and advancement

- Evaluation, leadership and advancement processes, criteria and opportunities should be consistent for all faculty. The FDC shall review the leadership positions for which NTT faculty are currently ineligible at each college. The FDC shall work with the FHC to determine lists of such leadership positions, then contact those colleges to determine whether the colleges are amenable to making those positions eligible for NTT faculty. The FDC shall report back its findings to SAC.

Additional Considerations

- Consider whether conversion of full-time non-tenure track faculty to a tenure-track faculty is possible at Northeastern University; In 2021, WPI adopted a policy to convert teaching faculty to tenure track.

(<https://www.wpi.edu/sites/default/files/facultygovernance/SummaryofOurWork-September12021.pdf>)