

2024-2025 Year-End Committee Report

Committee:	Student Affairs
Charge:	Collaborates with Northwestern student governance associations on issues involving faculty-student interaction and considers University-wide policies related to both undergraduate and graduate students
Chair:	Ana Maria Acosta, PhD
# of Meetings:	5

Completed Business and/or Accomplishments

The committee continued the work from prior years seeking to get an up-to-date view of the student experience at Northwestern. The work of the committee was impacted early on by the 2024 election of Donald Trump to the Presidency and the executive actions/orders impacting higher education and students at Northwestern in the following main areas:

- 1) DEI/Civil Rights (Dear Colleague letter about Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Feb '25)
- 2) Immigration
- 3) Federal funding

DEI/Civil Rights

A number of directives from the government resulted in changes to how the University presents its DEI work ranging from changes in language to public facing documents to changes in procedure for student activities or even admissions (the main changes were implemented in 2023 with the SCOTUS decision on affirmative action in higher education). The following are the main areas of student life that were impacted:

- Websites – DEI language were eliminated or substituted, e.g. the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is now the Office of Community Enrichment.
- Student facing offices/groups – Mostly impacting undergraduate students, a thorough review of offices and groups was carried out to identify areas that did not comply with the new government directives toward DEI.
- Student organizations/activities – Most affinity groups and other DEI related groups continue business at Northwestern with the caveat that they must be student led and run with no formal connection to the University. For example, affinity group ceremonies during graduation of the Class of 2025 were allowed, but only if they did not include official University activities like awarding of degrees.

- Admissions – Changes to admissions across the University were implemented in 2023 following the SCOTUS decision on affirmative action in higher education. These changes did not have noticeable impact on the recruitment of a diverse undergraduate Class of 2028, which is now being investigated by the Trump administration. However, graduate school admissions were impacted with a less diverse cohort enrolling in 2025.
- Vulnerable groups – A few groups have been the most impacted by these executive actions and directives, including transgender, undocumented and international students.

Immigration

- Termination of SEVIS records and visa revocations (mostly targeting students involved in protests/anti-semitism investigations)
- Department of State Pause for Visa Interviews for J, F, and M visitors (students are on F or J visas). Visa interviews resumed but application scrutiny is now at a higher level including of social media accounts.
- Chinese students are being targeted in other institutions:
 - Visa revocation - connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields
 - Enhanced scrutiny of all future visa applications

Federal Funding – Graduate Students

- University will honor the 5-year funding commitment for all graduate students
 - Students on NIH and other federal grants (training and research) will continue to receive bridge funding from Northwestern
- Admitted Cohort 2025-26 reduced by 20% over prior year – TGS justified reduction based on the increased stipend costs since unionization in 2024
- New budgeting model – direct student allocation from Office of Budget Planning directly to Individual Schools instead of The Graduate School

Faculty Concerns

The committee members and other senators expressed concerns related to student wellbeing resulting from all the changes and actions taken by the federal government. The following items summarize the main concerns:

- How is the university upholding its values when those values are under attack at the federal level?
- Communication with all stakeholders – especially around immigration. In general, faculty feel that the information passed onto students and faculty has been insufficient and inadequate.
 - UG – information passed through different offices and organizations
 - G – TGS organized townhalls on both campuses (reception not widely positive among graduate students)

- International students traveling abroad for personal/ academic reasons – faculty are very concerned on the implications of travel for international students and not being allowed to re-enter the country. No one can provide guarantees, thereby leaving students with a difficult decision that in some cases is driven by personal circumstances.

Unfinished/Continuing Business

The committee will try to resume unfinished business from 2023-24 that was put aside to deal with the pressing issues of the moment:

- Access to recreation and intramural sports: how is it related (or not) to athletics, funding model, etc.
- Community service opportunities for students (and faculty): students are very interested in pursuing these opportunities, but it is difficult to get information and find faculty that can support them. The committee is interested in learning about the different offices on campus that are dedicated to community service to facilitate access for students.

New Business for Next Year

The committee continues its interest in expanding the availability of community service opportunities for students at Northwestern and partner with other faculty senate committees that are also interested in the topic from a social responsibilities and faculty perspectives. This may become a larger project that involves comparing to what our peer institutions are doing in this arena.

The committee will also continue to monitor the status of the issues introduced with the executive actions and directives from the Trump administration and their impact on our students.