

Northwestern University  
Minutes of the Faculty Senate  
Videoconference  
March 10, 2021

---

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held its standing monthly meeting on March 10, 2021, over Zoom videoconference. President Therese McGuire called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the February 10, 2021 meeting were approved and entered into the record.

The president then began her report.

The president announced the search for the new Chief Investment Officer concluded successfully. Amy Falls, currently the CIO at Rockefeller University, was chosen to lead Northwestern's endowment. The president noted that during her interviews she expressed an eagerness to work with students and faculty. She will officially begin on May 1.

The search committee for the ombudsperson officially completed its work at the end of February. The committee forwarded the names of three finalists to the Provost Office. The hope is that by the end of the spring quarter an ombudsperson will be named.

Three senators—Harris Feinsod, Carol Heimer, and Regan Thomson—have agreed to serve on an ad hoc committee commissioned by the Provost Office to assess the effectiveness and the reach of the services provided by the Graduate School.

Finally, the president said the meetings on March 4 with the Board of Trustees were very successful. Participants engaged meaningfully with the topic of diversifying the university and offered examples and insights of the challenges and opportunities they have faced in their respective fields. She asked senators with specific feedback from their session to share it with their Senate table leader, with her, or with Secretary Jared Spitz.

The president then presented a [document](#) detailing the Senate's engagement in shared governance. This document was created by the Senate leadership, she said, with a desire to be more transparent, to dispel confusion over the extent of consultation between the Faculty Senate and the central administration, and to improve communications. She indicated that it is a living document and will be updated, as necessary.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Kyle Henry said he liked the design of the shared governance document. He compared it to the onboarding documents senators receive when they are elected and said this would be a simple and transparent supplement to that text. He also wondered if there might be a directional route tree for how individual faculty could interact with the Senate. The president appreciated the suggestion.

Senator Karen Alter said she was unaware she was supposed to share the minutes. She was, however, engaging in two-way communication with her colleagues. She asked for clarity on exactly what she should be sharing with her constituents. The president said what Senator Alter was doing was sufficient. The president reiterated that sharing the substantive work of the Senate with constituents is key.

Senator Luís Amaral wondered how senators know what their colleagues prefer. He said he is associated with different departments and the level and type of communication within each department varies greatly. He said he also thought it might be helpful to find out what faculty know about the Senate and what they would like to know about the Senate.

Past President Lois Hedman noted that the minutes are available to any faculty member on the Senate website. She said she provides bullet points to her constituents and a link to the minutes if faculty want more detail. She also stressed that faculty are welcome to reach out to anyone in the Senate, including their senator, the president, or any of the committee chairs. She said it might be worthwhile for a senator to find out what their constituents want, be it a brief overview or sharing the minutes directly with them.

Senator Judy Franks asked for more clarity about what obligations central administration has to inquire with the Senate about policies being administered. Past President Hedman responded that the Senate's role is to advise in the creation of policies, to report back to their constituents, and to consult on all other matters.

President-Elect Bob Holmgren said another example of policy influence is through the senator on the Policy Review Committee. Recently, a draft policy under consideration by the PRC was referred to two of the Senate's standing committees for comment, and, importantly, this was before a policy was implemented.

Senator Bob Hariman said the Senate's capacity for influence follows a spectrum: at the top is the Faculty Handbook, the general contract between the faculty and the University and a joint product of the Senate and the Provost Office. At the other end are personal relationships as they develop among the Senate leadership or any senator who serves on committees. In between, he said, there were varied forms of committee service and consultation, many of them involving a vote; when he has served on a University committee—as a senator or otherwise—he has always had a vote. He noted that there are many different opportunities be they direct legislation, consultation, or simply communication, but all are valuable.

Senator Henry said that he sends quick emails to his faculty if there might be an area of concern, or if a vote might be taken, this way faculty in his department can share their feedback and he brings their views with him as a representative.

Senator Hariman added one final point which was that many of the mechanisms described in the document did not exist just a few years ago. He said additional ideas for how to strengthen the relationship and influence with the administration are welcome. And he too cited the Senate's representation on the Policy Review Committee, which did not have faculty representation four years ago.

Senator Amaral said he found it extraordinary the kind of impact the Faculty Senate has and continues to have. Again, he felt polling the faculty would be a good idea and would strengthen the faculty's voice

and influence. He noted the variability in how departments select representatives as a sign of different degrees in importance to the department, and this was something he felt could be improved.

President-Elect Bob Holmgren said departmental selection is an important factor in the Senate's success. Without willing and engaged senators, the Senate will fail, he said. The key is to point out the policies the Senate is influencing, and if departments elect strong senators, those policies and the Senate's strength will improve even more.

Senator Noshir Contractor said he has appointments in three different departments and schools. At the school level, the dean at the School of Communication invites the Senate representative to report on the Senate meeting. He said he has not seen that in Kellogg or McCormick. Likewise, there are certain departments who share the minutes, and yet others do not.

Senator Henry shared a positive note by saying members of his department are incredibly interested in what is going on in the Faculty Senate.

Senator Ravi Jagannathan said he also does not circulate the minutes, but he does solicit the views of all the faculty in his department if an item comes up for a vote.

The president made a motion to switch item four and five on the agenda to accommodate Senator Bob Gordon, who was teaching a class at the time. The Senate agreed.

The president gave a brief history of faculty response to the cheer team incidents, including a letter to President Schapiro and Provost Hagerly signed by over eighty women faculty, who have since received responses from the Provost Office. The president introduced Senator David Schoenbrun, who brought the following resolution before the Senate:

Whereas, given the seriousness of the recent allegations of racist and sexist practices regarding Northwestern's Cheer Team and further allegations that the University did not sufficiently support the students,

Be it RESOLVED that the University, with input from the Faculty Senate, conduct a comprehensive, swift, and transparent review of the situation, and

Be it further RESOLVED that the University ensure an environment for the Cheer Team that is free from discrimination and harassment, that provides support for students, and that guarantees effective oversight of the program, and

To ensure that the faculty is informed, be it further RESOLVED that the Administration report to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee on a quarterly basis on the status of the situation and the actions taken.

Senator Schoenbrun drew the Senate's attention to the substance of the resolution and also the process faculty hope will be used moving forward. He added that the spirit of the resolution is to seek more information: what happened, what is being done to address the issues, with faculty involvement throughout. Senator Schoenbrun then made a motion for the Senate to approve the above resolution. The motion was seconded, and the floor was then opened for discussion by the president.

Senator Amaral said he was supportive of the resolution. He did express a concern about the response as it related to the litigation. He wondered if the University would disclose what is happening in a closed session.

Senator Alter said she also supported the resolution. She was one of the faculty members who signed the letter. She then shared some doubts about faculty consultation and cited the hiring of an outside investigator as a potential place where a report might be shared with the broader community.

Senator Enectalí Figueroa-Feliciano asked how he should handle a vote if he was just becoming aware of this issue. Senator Schoenbrun said that two faculty members—present at the Senate—who wrote the letter might be able to answer the question.

Senator Hariman said that one of the strengths of this motion is that it requests the administration report to the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate. Without presuming to know what the General Counsel would decide, he said it might be reasonable to have a confidential meeting with the

administration and then a report could emerge from the Executive Committee. To Senator Figueroa-Feliciano, Senator Hariman said that if anyone believed they were not prepared to vote, abstention was an option. He also noted that the abstention was an option and the Senate could also vote to hear from the faculty members present who wrote the letter .

Senator Henry said he was in support of the motion and he advocated for similar types of resolutions that signal the faculty's values.

Senator Christina Kiaer made a motion to recognize Professors Kate Masur and Jessica Winegar. The motion was seconded, and the floor was opened for discussion. With no discussion, the motion was then voted on and approved.

The president then returned to the original motion and recognized Senator Josh Hauser. He said he supported the motion. He also pointed out that the nature of the input from the Faculty Senate was ambiguous, and he acknowledged that might have been intentional, but he wondered if there were perspectives on the specificity of the motion. Senator Schoenbrun said it was left intentionally vague to represent the breadth of options available to the Senate and the administration. The president said she prefers the flexibility the current resolution gives the Senate.

Senator Harris Feinsod asked if the faculty visitors could share their perspectives on the resolution. Professor Masur said she first heard about this issue in the Chicago Tribune when they broke the news that an undergraduate at Northwestern was suing the University for its response to sexist practices on the cheer team. The Daily also interviewed African American cheerleaders who detailed racist practices the former coach engaged in. These two articles provoked herself and several others to write an open letter to the administration condemning the allegations while recognizing that not all the facts had been revealed. In response to the letter, the Provost said they were very concerned about the allegations and confirmed the cheerleading coach's contract had not been renewed. Professor Masur added that the Provost offered support but was vague about the next steps. She said the original authors responded with another letter asking for more transparency and the creation of an independent investigating committee. That day, the authors received a response that was encouraging in some regards with an independent investigator being hired, however, she said there was no recognition of faculty involvement.

Senator Henry said he thought it was vital the faculty weigh-in given the seriousness of the allegations and potential conflicts of interest between donors and the administration.

Professor Winegar said as faculty they must ensure that the set of procedural problems, which allowed the alleged incidents to occur, be thoroughly examined and fixed.

Senator Amaral said that recently there have been serious issues occurring in athletic programs. He said more oversight is vital in athletics.

With no further discussion, the president called the question and the Senate voted to approve the resolution.

The Senate then heard a standing committee report from chair of the Salary and Benefits Committee Bob Gordon. Senator Gordon presented a [letter](#) the Organization of Women Faculty sent to the administration in early February and then was brought to his committee for consideration. Upon receiving the letter, the committee decided to send the letter for endorsement to the full Senate. The letter, he said, points to the incredible burdens the pandemic has placed on faculty, particularly faculty with caregiving responsibilities. More generally, he said the faculty have had major new pedagogical shifts to online teaching, which have required extra time and effort to design and implement. The letter details these factors and then asks the administration to take into consideration when reviewing faculty for promotions and tenure as well as to conduct a comprehensive study of the effects the pandemic has had on faculty life. The motion to endorse the letter was seconded and then the floor was opened for discussion.

Senator Schoenbrun said one of the effects of the pandemic is the dissolution of research spatially on campus. He thought it would be interesting to measure the effects such dissolution has on research.

Senator Alter said Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences introduced a report recently about the expected long-term impact the pandemic has had on students. She says that report was indicative of the administration focusing more on students than the faculty impact. She added that, like the students, the faculty will be affected by the pandemic for multiple years.

Senator Franks asked a broader question about what happens to resolutions once they are passed by the Senate. Past President Hedman said that a Senate resolution serves as a marker, something the Senate leadership can cite continuously as a way to ascertain what progress is being made on a given issue.

With no further discussion, the Senate officially endorsed the letter from the Organization of Women Faculty (OWF).

The president then introduced the new Associate Provost for Faculty Sumit Dhar.

Associate Provost Dhar thanked the Senate for inviting him. He said he began the job on February 1, and it has been a whirlwind since he started. Right now, he said he is catching up on the backlog that built up in the absence of his position being filled. Having said that, he shared some of the things he has been working on since he started. Top of mind currently is the COVID response faculty committee that will be launching soon to collect information and then provide recommendations for the University on what steps to take. He said he discussed the idea of forming a committee with the OWF leadership, with the Faculty Senate leadership, and with a broader faculty group. As momentum began to build, he said he discovered several groups already focusing their attention on the effects of the pandemic. Notably, the Office of Organizational Strategy and Change is conducting a University-wide plan involving staff and how things might be structured differently when the pandemic ends. Similarly, the Office of Student Affairs is studying the student experience. He says these efforts are closely linked and will in some ways align with the recommendations for faculty. Soon, he will be combining these groups in a centralized way with representatives from each to make sure the recommendations from each group are attuned to the others. He said he suspects they will have a faculty committee formed by the beginning of the spring quarter. He also said the administration is already collecting data inside and outside Northwestern about the deleterious effects of the pandemic and will bring all of that data to the first meeting of this committee. Along the way, Associate Provost Dhar said he will keep the Senate and OWF leadership apprised. In addition to the committee work, he said they plan to organize a few listening sessions for individuals who have been significantly harmed by the pandemic. He said those sessions will allow them to hear from voices unable to serve on the committee. As this faculty group comes up with a long-term strategy, he said it is also important to keep in mind that crucial decisions like merit raises will have to be made. One of the items he talked about with the deans and associate



deans is mitigating big differences between the schools in how they will award tenure and merit-driven raises. Accordingly, Associate Provost Dhar said he is creating a matrix that will track how these decisions are managed in each of the schools. Another item that has captured his attention is the hiring and managing process, specifically whether it should go back to how it was before COVID or finding ways to be more insightful about the procedures in place. Lastly, he shared his role in the review of TGS. He said he will focus the small working group (mentioned earlier) on the academic review, while also sharing all of what they are doing, so they can decide what fits best where.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Schoenbrun suggested being in touch with the new Chief Diversity Officer Robin Means Coleman as the Provost Office consider new ways of hiring. Associate Provost Dhar said his default operational mode is to have everything run through the Chief Diversity Officer until she says otherwise.

Senator Mary Zimmerman raised one small objection with regards to the letters of recommendations, and that is the push towards uniformity. She said the practices in the schools are very different and that sort of diversity needs to be honored where it can. Associate Provost Dhar said he could not agree more. He said this is a good example of the broader view not doing justice to what is happening. The letters, he said, will be as different as they have ever been. However, schools were inserting sentences specific to the pandemic. Some of the schools entered one sentence and others had lengthy paragraphs. He said he advocated for some similarity in that portion of the letter.

President-Elect Holmgren said he was curious about the various staff-and-student-focused committees, mentioned earlier, looking at next fall. He wondered what discrepancies Associate Provost Dhar has encountered, if any, between these groups. Associate Provost Dhar said that the work in comparing these groups has not begun in true earnest. He said he expects to see some intractable data once they start collecting information on the students and staff that might make it difficult to align with faculty goals. However, he said his main priority will be faculty life, and that focus will be his guide.

Senator Feinsod asked about strategic hiring as well. He wanted to know more about the speculative thinking Associate Provost Dhar alluded to when he spoke about changes to the process. Associate Provost Dhar said in his role he is not a decisionmaker. He is a collector of information and an

influencer. He said the Provost and the deans are the ones he will talk to about hiring. Northwestern has not hired extensively in recent years, and he expects a fair number of faculty to accept the retirement plan they are offering. With that in mind, he said every department and school will have to think about hiring with a three-to-five-year outlook. Operationally, he said he has started working with institutional research to collate past data on hiring so the administration can be informed by it. He hopes a committee of faculty will be able to use the data to come up with a set of principles they would like to share with each of the schools for guidance on hiring.

Senator Carol Heimer said she thought it was a good time to use this terrible time as an opportunity to try and improve what was not working before. In that spirit, she said there were two things she hoped would be considered: Program review takes a tremendous amount of time and effort, she said, and often the faculty who create the plans for their department never get to see those plans come to fruition. The vita supplement process, too, is incredibly cumbersome. Furthermore, she said, it is unclear what the annual vita supplement means for faculty and/or how it is being used. Associate Provost Dhar said those are very good points.

Senator Fred Turek asked about early retirement and how many people are considering taking it. Associate Provost Dhar said there are approximately 160 faculty members eligible for the retirement plan, and close to 40% have said they are interested. There is a good chance, he said, all of them will be able to take the retirement option. Not all will be this year, and some will be next year, he added.

Senator Henry echoed his colleagues by mentioning the opaqueness of the merit review processes. Associate Provost Dhar said he is slowly learning how the schools and departments operate differently. Broadly speaking, in some schools the dean is the final decisionmaker. In others, the chair has all the power. Further, some schools split the funds distributed and decide how they are doled out.

Past President Hedman mentioned problems with communication, especially from the top down when the administration sends out important information to the deans and it does not trickle down to faculty. Associate Provost Dhar said there is widespread understanding that communicating information to deans does not necessarily mean it will get to faculty. He expressed a willingness to brainstorm better ways to communicate directly with faculty. Past President Hedman added that the Senate is looking for more opportunities for the Senate to be represented on University committees. Associate Provost Dhar

said one thing he has learned already is that having faculty on committees goes beyond optics. It is about efficiency—why go through the process and have it fail when faculty are unsatisfied?

Senator Turek added that transparency around salary distribution, and the folios faculty must fill out when they might not be in consideration for a raise, would be welcome. Associate Provost Dhar said we have to work on solutions together. He hopes for faculty support in his efforts.

The president thanked Associate Provost Dhar for his time and said she looked forward to continuing to work with him.

With no new business, the meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared Spitz

Secretary to the Faculty Senate

