

Northwestern University  
Minutes of the Faculty Senate  
Videoconference  
April 15, 2020

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The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held its standing monthly meeting on April 15, 2020, on a videoconference platform. President Lois Hedman called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president welcomed the Senate and noted that the minutes from the March 18, 2020 meeting were approved and entered into the record.

The president then gave her report.

The president thanked all senators for their continued engagement during the campus shutdown, particularly during the emergency Senate meeting in late March. A broad range of faculty perspectives were shared at that meeting and she was certain the Senate's extensive input greatly assisted the Interim Provost's decision on spring quarter grading.

The president said the Senate leadership has been in frequent communication with the Provost Office. One issue they have discussed is [CTECs](#). The president said hopefully the deans have shared the news that CTECs will be used during the spring quarter, but responses will not be public. The deans and department chairs will also not use CTECs in high stakes personnel decisions. Instead, course evaluations this quarter will assess how the transition to remote learning is functioning. The president said the Provost Office made this decision based on recommendations from the CTEC Committee.

The president shared information about ownership of faculty materials. She called the Senate's attention to two websites, one about [recording classes](#), and the [Copyright Policy](#) at Northwestern.

The president said the University is facing significant financial hardship due to lost revenues. However, the Provost Office did say that all commitments made to graduate students for the spring quarter

would be honored, including pay and making up for any grants that were lost. The University could not, however, make any guarantees after the spring quarter.

The president addressed the NTE faculty concerns that were raised at the previous meeting such as the need to pay for childcare while developing online courses and concern that NTE faculty might not be renewed after developing a course. In response, the Provost Office stated that they had encouraged deans and department chairs to be empathetic and understanding during this difficult time. She added, however, that no concrete directives have been given.

The president said she hopes to have Interim Provost Kathleen Hagerty and Senior Vice President Craig Johnson as guests at an upcoming Senate meeting so faculty can learn a little more about the decisions the Administration is facing and the reasons for actions they have already taken. In that vein, the president said she hoped senators would continue to reach out to her with concerns they and their constituents have. She promised to continue to follow up on these issues.

The president ended her report by highlighting the work of Senator Nicholas Soulakis from the Department of Preventative Medicine. Senator Soulakis is taking a leave of absence to work as an epidemiologist at the Illinois Department of Public Health. His role will be to help determine the number of citizens infected with COVID-19 and also help predict how long the outbreak will last. She thanked him for his service.

The president then asked if there were questions.

Senator Venkat Chandrasekhar asked for clarification on the comments about graduate student support. The president said graduate student support will be honored through the spring quarter unless there were prior agreements to funding beyond that quarter. He then followed up by asking if there was any potential support for students if a grant is not renewed because of this crisis. The president said she did not have an answer at that time, but promised to seek more information.

Senator Claudia Swan said she had recently read reports that Harvard might not return to on-campus instruction in the fall. She then asked the president if there has been any discussion at Northwestern about contingency plans should the pandemic continue to disrupt normal life. The president said she

has not had any direct conversations with the administration on the prospect of online instruction during the fall quarter, but she does believe it is being considered.

Senator Jennifer Cole followed up on graduate student funding by asking if commitments made by the Graduate School and the department made prior to the spring quarter would be honored beyond that. The president said her understanding of the Provost Office's stance is that any commitment made prior to the spring quarter would be honored.

Senator Hermann Riecke asked if the funding allotment would include teaching assistantships. The president said she did not know, but promised to seek more information.

Senator Fred Turek asked for clarification on the comments the president made regarding faculty's intellectual property and online content. The president said when they broached the topic of online materials with the Provost Office, administrators pointed out the two websites (mentioned above), which on the one hand offer protection from students being able to download or record classes, and the Copyright Policy on the other hand offers even more protection. In the Copyright Policy, everything that faculty are doing now for online courses is their own content, even if they are an NTE faculty member and are not renewed for the following year.

Senator Susan McReynolds said she is the Director of Graduate Studies for Slavic Studies and in a recent meeting with Weinberg College (WCAS) there was no discussion of any committed funding being rescinded. However, there was a clear warning that additional funding will not be forthcoming. The bottom line being that students who are here now do not need to worry at this point about commitments being rescinded.

The president, adjusting the order of the agenda due to technical difficulties, moved on to standing committee reports.

Senator Robert Hariman shared a [proposal](#) and [slideshow](#) that the Budget and Planning Committee put together. The proposal outlines a process whereby the chair of the Budget and Planning Committee will participate in the Resource Planning Workgroup (RPW). The role of the RPW is to synthesize school/unit strategies, financial plans, and resource requests. The RPW recommends to the President

and Provost a set of operating and capital resource allocations for endorsement. He said meeting with this group will give the Faculty Senate representative an opportunity to communicate priority funding needs for faculty, which the RPW will use to inform funding recommendations in winter quarter. Members of the RPW will also meet quarterly during the academic year with the Senate standing committee on budget and planning. Senator Hariman said the Executive Committee voted to approve the policy, as did the administration, and it will be practice moving forward.

The president introduced Interim Vice President for Research Affairs Milan Mrksich.

Interim Vice President Mrksich thanked the president and the Senate for the invitation to speak about research space allocation on the Evanston campus. He acknowledged that space is extremely important to faculty and that it can be a difficult topic to discuss. He said the natural fluctuations in allotted space and personnel for an experiment makes allocating lab space especially challenging. He said a number of these cases were reaching the Provost, which meant they were difficult for the deans to address. Accordingly, Provost Holloway put together a committee to solicit ideas about how space can be better allocated. So far, the committee has come up with three models, not all equally endorsed. He then shared outlines of the three models and offered a few pros and cons for each:

1. Data driven model—Measures funding, number of Ph.D. students, postdoc fellows, number of staff and undergrads, some measure of productivity like papers and citations (controversial according to Interim Vice President Mrksich). The problem with this version is there is not a one-size-fits-all model that would map onto space allocation. He cited large, expensive equipment that can't be moved as one potential problem. He added that this model did not have wide support within the committee.
2. Population based assessment—inventory of all the research spaces where every room would be assigned a number of lab personnel that could work in that space safely. Gathering numbers on each room would allow the University to determine where there is excess space and where there is a need. Interim Vice President Mrksich said this option is logical and there is a fair amount of data already gathered by Research Safety.

3. Longitudinal trajectory, which means faculty will be assessed by their data from prior years. This gives Northwestern a sense of whether a lab is growing or shrinking from year to year. This could be useful for a department chair or dean to see the full picture and trajectory of a lab.

Interim Vice President Mrksich said he understands that there is a feeling among the faculty that lab space decisions are made on an ad hoc basis. He said that's why the space allocation committee is trying to determine some objective measures for how space is being utilized and he thinks this could level the playing field when faculty need more space. He added that the committee has not met since the campus closed, but he assumes they will reconvene the committee once things are more settled.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Chandrasekhar asked about model number two. He said the number of people in a room can also depend on what type of experiments are taking place in that particular room. For example, he said some physics experiments require large equipment in a room with lots of square footage, but only one or two people are performing the research. Senator Chadrasekhar then asked if types of experiments are taken into account in model two. Interim Vice President Mrksich said if there is a lab with eight students and post docs, but only one person is using the equipment any one day of the week, he said that lab would be classified as a shared or support space, which would not factor into the number of people for one lab. This designation would keep from penalizing a lab using a large piece of equipment.

Senator Turek asked for more clarity on how decisions about space are made, or rather who has the final decision. Interim Vice President Mrksich said decisions operate at all levels, starting with the department chair. The best solution, he said, is when individual faculty decisions are handled at that level. Deans then have to balance the overall departmental assignments. Finally, the Provost then would then balance lab space between schools.

Senator Bob Holmgren said that one of the concerns on the Evanston campus was that a model would be put in place similar to current practice at the medical school. That is, assigning space based on dollars per square foot. He said that in Evanston there are dramatically different types of research that have vastly different cost structures, and evaluating the worth of the research differs in these respective

disciplines. Interim Vice President Mrksich agreed with Senator Holmgren. He acknowledged that when they first considered how to evaluate space, the model at the medical school did come up. However, he said the space allocation committee quickly realized that is not a practical model on the Evanston campus for the reasons Senator Holmgren gave.

Past President Baron Reed said the three models each seem to indicate a way to assess decisions during the normal course of business, but he wondered how much retention or outside hiring effects assigning lab space. Interim Vice President Mrksich said many of these decisions are made at the point of recruitment and retention. He said the space committee discussed different scenarios where retention and recruitment could influence lab space. Ultimately, the space committee knows these models are not perfect, and whatever choice they make, the University will also have to rely on the sound judgements of its leaders.

Senator Steve Tarzia said one of his constituents brought up the point that during one of the past economic downturns there was a lot of cheap off-campus space available and he wondered if it was possible for faculty to secure their own space off-campus if it is available. Interim Vice President Mrksich said it is the first time he has heard a faculty member would be willing to spend more money to lease space. He said the space committee did not discuss this, but he said he would take it back to the group when they meet again.

The president asked when the space committee will meet again and when a possible recommendation might be sent to the Provost's office. Interim Vice President Mrksich said they plan to meet in about a month, and he thinks it will take one or two more discussions to find the best approach. Thus, his conservative prediction was by the end of the spring quarter.

President-Elect Therese McGuire asked if the space committee also considered research space for the social sciences. Interim Vice President Mrksich said they did. He said that is a good example of the vastly different metrics across fields.

Senator Chandrasekhar asked if the committee was leaning towards a particular model. Interim Vice President Mrksich said there is concern that a data drive model could have every conceivable parameter built into it. The population model, conversely, is straightforward. And the longitudinal model has

some flaws in that there isn't a lot of data going back multiple years and it doesn't take into account the changing focus of some laboratories. He added though, that he still does not know which model they will choose. Senator Chandrasekhar followed up by asking if limitations on graduate student enrollment will be factored into the space committee's decision-making. Interim Vice President Mrksich said that if you are using space it has to be anchored to how many people are working on an experiment at a given time. Enrollment questions are outside that committee's purview, he said.

Senator Emmy Murphy said she one area of concern with data driven models is over incentivizing research that is less risky and faculty seeking more immediate success than possible with a longer term project. Interim Vice President Mrksich said whatever the committee decides they will take the volatility of funding into account and hopefully this will remove any risk aversion. He stressed that they don't want to create systems that are fundamentally inconsistent with the aspirations of faculty.

Senator Turek said the space committee obviously deliberated pre-COVID 19 and he wondered if the committee taken these huge societal changes into account. Interim Vice President Mrksich said they are still processing everything that has happened. He believes there will be change in the supply and demand for space. He expects hiring will slow down, which means there will be fewer new labs. This will probably ease the urgency they were experiencing before.

The president thanked Interim Vice President Mrksich for his presentation and for answering the Senate's questions.

The president then introduced Vice President for Information Technology Sean Reynolds and General Counsel Stephanie Graham to discuss the transition to remote learning and the accompanying concerns about security.

Vice President Reynolds then gave a [presentation](#) in which he laid out a significant amount of data related to remote learning and teaching. He also discussed resources available to faculty in regards to remote teaching, what IT is doing to maintain security during this crisis, and he also spoke about the Zoom platform and what measures can be taken to keep Zoom meetings secure. All the relevant details from his presentation can be found at the link above.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Chandrasekhar asked if there is a possibility of getting malware on a personal computer while using Zoom. Vice President Reynolds said the main concern would be if files were shared, and the guidance would be the same, which is only open files or click on a link that you trust.

Senator Laura Beth Nielsen asked if there is a concern for grad students and faculty conducting research over Zoom. Specifically, does Zoom security meet the basic standards for IRB and HIPAA? She also suggested sending out reminders to faculty to update Zoom. General Counsel Graham said yes, Northwestern is comfortable with Zoom meeting the IRB privacy needs. For HIPAA, Northwestern is in the process of signing a rider in the Zoom contract. Despite there being very little HIPAA activity on Zoom, they are still putting measures in place to have coverage.

Senator Abraham Abusharif asked why Northwestern transitioned from BlueJeans to Zoom. Vice President Reynolds said there was an extensive review by the learning technologies committee. They looked at BlueJeans, Zoom, Webx, and others. That committee unanimously recommended Zoom because of its ease of use and its ability to integrate seamlessly into Canvas.

Past President Reed asked if protections are in place to prevent searches by third party contractors on non-Northwestern email accounts being used by students for school purposes. Vice President Reynolds said there are extensive protections in place.

Senator Holmgren asked about using the VPN and what type of capacity it has. Vice President Reynolds said that if you are using campus-based services, you should be using the VPN. Otherwise, it's okay to keep it off. And yes, they do have the capacity to handle many users.

Past President Reed said one of the issues being reported in the press is that students who returned to their home countries might have their online activity monitored by their home country. He then asked if the VPN would prevent that type of activity. Vice President Reynolds said right now Northwestern does not know of any issues related to blocks to their VPN servers. Having said that, he said he does know of peers who are experiencing that difficulty, and Northwestern has experienced that difficulty in the past.



The president thanked both Vice President Reynolds and General Counsel Graham for their report.

The president then introduced Senator Josh Hauser, Chair of the Social Responsibility Committee.

Senator Hauser reported from the medical school and gave a special thank you to nurses, nurses aids, and respiratory therapists. He said they are the ones most exposed to COVID-19 and he said they are doing incredible work right now. He then shared a [document](#) the committee put together with links to organizations that give faculty the opportunity to donate their time, their money, and/or their skills if they are able.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Past President Reed shared some information on [Northwestern's Prison Education Program](#) and their efforts to provide protective supplies for the individuals they work with.

The meeting then adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jared Spitz  
Secretary to the Faculty Senate