

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Guild Lounge and Videoconference
May 10, 2023

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held its standing monthly meeting on May 10, 2023, in the Scott Hall's Guild Lounge and over Zoom videoconference. President Ceci Rodgers called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the April 12, 2023 meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

The president then began her report.

Each quarter, the president said, the Executive Committee participates in a Summit with senior leadership to discuss issues of importance to faculty. On April 24, the Spring Summit took place with President Mike Schill, Provost Kathleen Hagerty, Associate Provost Sumit Dhar and Vice Provost Jake Julia. Also in attendance were Deputy General Counsel Priya Harjani and Dean of Undergraduate Enrollment Chris Watson. The president said that Research Affairs Committee Chair Tom Hope briefed the group on the committee's quarterly meetings with Vice President for Research Milan Mrksich and Associate Vice President for Research Rex Chisholm. Senator Hope said the committee shared concerns around some changes in IT protocols that had caused problems, particularly at Feinberg. He said discussions with IT, Vice President Mrksich and Associate Vice President Chisholm has led to a positive response and that solid steps were taken towards better communication and transparency.

The president said the Executive Committee was then briefed on preparations for the Supreme Court's upcoming ruling on affirmative action, which is expected to curtail the ability of universities to consider race in admissions. Deputy Counsel Harjani and Dean of Undergraduate Enrollment Watson said that a group put together by the Provost's Office is working through various scenarios, depending on how the decision is worded, and how they would need react to each of them. The

president then listed a few examples: Will universities still be allowed to use some form of holistic review of applications, such as the essay versus check-the-box? and Will schools still be free to pursue race-neutral policies, such as targeting zip codes? During the Summit meeting, Dean Watson said that many of these approaches have not been successful in states such as California and Michigan, where race-based admissions have been banned for some years. The president said that if the Supreme Court decision results in significant changes to or the end of Affirmative Action, General Counsel and the Provost's Office will work over the summer to provide training to those in schools and units who are involved in admissions.

The president said she attended the April Senior Leadership meeting, convened by President Schill, that included senior leaders of the university and the deans of the schools. She said it was the fifth one she attended, but the first in-person for her since January. She noted how important it is that the Faculty Senate is represented there, and that aside from what's formally on the agenda, the meetings are a chance to solidify relationships and lines of communication and to make connections, in an organic way, that facilitate the work of the Senate's standing committees. The president said she met new Vice President for Student Affairs Susan Davis for the first time at the April leadership meeting. Vice President Davis asked how she could connect regularly with faculty around student issues, and the president put her in touch with the Faculty Senate's Student Affairs Committee and the committee's chair, Senator Ana Maria Acosta. Vice President Davis, she said, has already met with the committee and shared her priorities, which she expanded on later that evening.

The president said that she and Secretary to the Faculty Senate Jared Spitz met with a group of Chicago-based senators who want to explore ways to better integrate the two campuses within the Faculty Senate. She said the meeting was well-attended and they had a fruitful conversation with many thoughtful ideas shared, including creating an ad-hoc committee on Chicago-Evanston integration.

The president then shared two reminders: the Faculty Assembly meeting will be held on Monday, May 22, at noon. Also, many departmental elections still need to be completed, and she asked that senators in departments up for election assist in guiding their departments election processes.

The president then concluded her report.

Seeing no questions, the president introduced Vice President of Student Affairs Susan Davis.

Vice President Davis said she has been at Northwestern for about six weeks. She said that, before Northwestern, she came from other highly selective universities, and this background informed her approach to health, wellness, and inclusion, and prepared her for Northwestern's environment. Early in her tenure at NU, she said she's held several focus groups with students and asked them about health and wellness, a topic she's trying to broaden to culture and not simply spaces like Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), amongst a host of other topics. Vice President Davis then listed some of her early concerns for students (not unique to Northwestern per se): Imposter syndrome (undergraduate and graduate students), cancel culture (especially undergraduate world), Supreme Court's expected decision on affirmative action and its impact on diversity, and students have a hard time having fun. The latter, she said, may sound frivolous, but she sees it as a vital component to a holistic academic life. She said she's finding that students greatly enjoy their academic journey at Northwestern and they thrive in the intense environment. In fact, that ethos and drive, she said, was necessary for students to get into a school like Northwestern.

Although one challenge this attitude creates, she said, is a culture of competition, especially in places like student clubs. Vice President Davis said student clubs are a complex topic. Student clubs are often viewed as resume boosters. She said this framing grants students a lot of emotional safety when the clubs are organized that way because it can feel unsafe to stop being busy and start having fun. This is about being comfortable with unstructured time, she said. Students do the "work hard" really well and they struggle with the "play hard," and Vice President Davis viewed this as an opportunity for enhancement, around, for example, funding for student organizations and creating community in spaces without adult supervision.

Vice President Davis then shared why she came to Northwestern. She said NU is an incredible research institution with a strong interdisciplinary focus and a place that cares deeply for, and wants to further cultivate, student community. She said those three areas together are a rare thing. And a great benefit to being here, she said, is also being surrounded by faculty who can be thought partners in her vision for student success. She cited Professor Terry Horton, who studies wellness related to green and blue places, in nature essentially, and how to connect the students, even potentially through research, to activities that would benefit their whole person. She said the students are asking for that kind of help. She then shared an anecdote about her daughter's college visit to Brown, a

university that has a unique approach to grades (can take any class pass/fail), major requirements (not necessary), and one writing requirement. Despite that, the tour guide told parents that students have two or three majors and take every class for a grade. Vice President Davis said she shared that anecdote because it is not necessarily the structure of places, it's the mindset of students. She said she really wants Northwestern to move the lens to include mindset and culture along with the clinical side of health and wellness.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Kyle Henry said, in comparison to his previous institution, University of Texas, there is an immense amount of money in the co-curricular programs at Northwestern. He said he views the actual funding structure as a hidden curriculum at times because the funding for outside speakers for student groups can be higher than certain departments. He added that unfortunately students are overseeing students in these organizations and there is a certain level of cronyism and student resistance to reform. He then asked if Northwestern gives student organization leaders training before they are put into positions to oversee these co-curricular programs. Vice President Davis said there is a lot of room for professional scaffolding to take hold while students are taking over these programs. She said it would help to have consistency within the organization to educate students on how funding works at Northwestern and what the standards and practices are. She said she would also love to incentivize away from the competition and selectivity where possible.

Senator Rick Cohn asked if there is a survey done of graduating seniors during their final year at Northwestern. Vice President Davis said there are a ton of surveys and focus groups that capture student experience throughout their tenure, both undergraduates and graduate students. She said she is a big proponent of student-led discussion. She said surveys can sometimes be focused on utilization, but she's also focused on who isn't using services and why.

President-Elect Regan Thomson said that oftentimes student affairs can be centered around undergraduates, but many of the issues Vice President Davis mentioned are equally relevant for graduate students. Add on the challenge of being siloed in their individual departments, graduate students face a lot, he said. He then asked what role the Student Affairs Office plays in graduate student wellbeing. Vice President Davis said Northwestern students, undergrad and grad, have great identity through their academic programs. Worries about loneliness in these settings is warranted

because there is very little cross-pollination of graduate students. In the focus groups, they said their social life is pretty dependent on their lab or their program. She said some of the solutions could be similar to undergrad in that they could open up programs and events to cultivate connections across campus. She said graduate students are also closer to having a sense of their career goals and there is more room in graduate lanes to approach the conversation of connection as preparation for their career.

Senator Barbara Newman said it is clear that undergraduate students are concerned about mental health—more therapists, quicker access to therapists, more diverse counselors and so forth. But she said she believes they are less informed about ways to protect their mental health before they see a therapist. She asked if there are steps that could be taken to support students who might be struggling with screen addiction, which Senator Newman views as a serious problem among young people. Vice President Davis said she absolutely agreed. The technology component is a huge part of how young people engage with the world, she said, but she would also like to make room for more human experiences, for face-to-face social interactions, and to change some of the behaviors students grew up with.

Senator Karen Alter said she also worries about clubs and said she believes the undergraduates need stronger advice on how they run their clubs. She asked if there is a required structure for student leaders to come together and address some these organizational issues and also if the application processes can be changed given the immense pressure students face to get into these exclusive programs. Vice President Davis said the advisors for the programs don't have a lot of extra time for training and oversight. She also mentioned the discussion centered around Greek life in a focus group and how they compare to student clubs. She added that students are too busy to do anything socially with the clubs by week three in the quarter, and the club structure doesn't serve as a good alternative to those who don't want to join a fraternity or sorority to find some belonging. She said Northwestern should be looking at how changes in club funding and structure might better serve these students.

Senator Jacqueline Babb asked what's one thing senators can ask their colleagues to do that would help Vice President Davis most. Vice President Davis said senators can engage with their colleagues and see what research faculty are already doing that could support wellness and inclusion across the campus. Other things that came to mind would be discovering the most effective way to

communicate with students. Also, how to help students step away from media, or engage with it in a healthy way. Vice President Davis said some of the trends across the country show incredibly high social anxiety, and she believes it is important for faculty to be aware of that.

Senator David Uttal said he is really encouraged by how much Vice President Davis cares and her plan for the future, but he said he was a little surprised there was no mention of the residential college program and the work faculty have done to support students in that arena. Vice President Davis said she agreed and that she is still trying to educate herself. She said nothing she is sharing is novel or unique because she is so new.

Senator Mary Zimmerman recalled Vice President Davis's comment about secondary housing and asked if she could expand on that. Vice President Davis said Northwestern has a unique housing situation because it does have residential colleges. One of the positive data points she saw about the residential colleges showed that students rank them among the happiest and most successful outcomes during their tenure despite students not ranking them as highly for living spaces. She wondered if that should be done throughout the housing inventory, but she wants to keep looking at how students can live together in community. Students want to live in affinity groups, she said, the way Greek groups who have housing do.

Senator Carol Schmidt said her son just finished his first year at college and at his school they have something called Well Corp, which requires over their four years of college students do 80 hours of fun stuff outside of their major. She said her son went to a fencing match and engineering events and learned a lot. She was curious if other schools have something like this. Vice President Davis said she has seen schools with incentive-based programs to get students outside of their comfort zone, but she was unaware of a school having a fun activity requirement. She said it sounded like it worked and he had fun doing it, which Vice President Davis said was very exciting.

With no further questions, the president thanked Vice President Davis for joining the Faculty Senate.

The Senate then entered a closed session to consider honorary degree nominations for 2024.

The president ended the closed session and asked for nominations for the position of President-Elect. The Executive Committee nominated Senator Jill Wilson, Chair of the Educational Affairs

Committee. With no further nominations from the floor, the president said Senator Wilson will stand for election at the June meeting of the Faculty Senate.

Senate Mark Witte, chair of the Governance Committee, then presented for a first reading several [proposed amendments](#) to the Faculty Senate Bylaws. Senator Witte said the rationale for making the changes were threefold: making uniform the hyphen in President-Elect, allowing senators to nominate themselves for the position of standing committee chair for consideration by the President and President-Elect in order to find the best candidates, and allowing all votes to be cast within 48 hours of a meeting if a vote of no confidence was ever held for the Faculty Senate President.

The president thanked Senator Witte and the committee for their efforts and then opened the floor for discussion.

Senator Alter asked that as a norm, not a formal amendment, each standing committee chair ask committee members to self-nominate so that senators are aware of that option, and also that the Senate leadership seek members of the committee to fill a chair's vacancy.

Senator Henry said Senator Amaral's original intention was democratization of the Executive Committee. With that in mind, he encouraged the Senate leadership to consider placing senators with contrary opinions on the Executive Committee rather than seeking unanimity.

Senator Cohn asked a clarifying question about the number of senators needed to remove the president. The Bylaws state that two-thirds of all senators must vote to remove the Senate President.

Senator Thrasos Pappas said that balance on the Executive Committee (by school, rank, and diversity) can be achieved with more nominations from the committees. The president said they would take any number of nominees.

Senator Gina Petersen, chair of the Secure Faculty Survey Committee then gave an update on her committee's work. She said the committee plans to run an internal survey of current senators to ask senators about their experience in the Senate. The aim is to improve Senate operations and increase dialogue. She said the survey will be run starting on May 11th and be open for about ten days. She said questions about this process can be emailed to her or to Senate Secretary Spitz.

Senator Schmidt asked about the length of the survey. Senator Petersen said the survey is 29 mostly close-ended questions. She said it should take less than ten minutes to complete.

Senator Alter reminded senators this is one of two surveys the committee worked on this year. She said the survey of all faculty should remain a priority and will require more pressure from the Senate to get it done. Senator Petersen agreed and said she will state as much in her year-end report.

Senator Witte asked the last time a full faculty survey was run. Senator Petersen said it was 2015.

Senator Greg Beitel asked how the (internal) survey will be sent. Senator Petersen said an email will be sent to all senators with a link to the survey.

Senator Uttal asked who collates and analyzes the data from the survey. Senator Petersen said she and Senate Secretary Spitz will be the ones with access to the full data. She said she hopes to share aggregate data with everyone.

Senator Judy Rosenbaum asked if there is an opportunity for qualitative commentary. Senator Petersen said yes, but it is limited because they wanted to analyze and share the results by the June meeting. She said the survey was about starting a conversation.

The president thanked Senator Petersen and the committee for their efforts.

Senator Wilson, Chair of the Educational Affairs Committee then gave an [update](#) on a recent meeting her committee had with Registrar Jaci Cassazza about Course and Teacher Evaluation Council (colloquially known as CTECs). Senator Wilson gave some background on CTEC reform, including a Senate resolution in 2018 calling for changes to the instrument that would address concerns about bias and discrimination in the responses and about how CTECs were being used. The University formed the committee to Reimagine CTECs in 2019 which did a lot of work before being shut down due to Covid. Ultimately, the committee was reconstituted and developed a new instrument with special attention to the ways in which bias creeps into responses. The new instrument, she said, moves from evaluation towards student experience, includes a preamble alerting students to the risk of bias and the importance of constructive feedback and where to appropriately report serious matters, and five new questions, most of which are on the Likert-scale, have a positive framing, one open response, and no overarching questions about the course or

instructor. She said the working group will talk with all stakeholders this spring and pilot the new survey in fall 2023 alongside the existing instrument. Senator Wilson added that the working group is looking for volunteers in individual classes, departments, and schools. Results of the pilot will be used to refine and enhance the instrument over numerous iterations. She said that senators can help by sharing this information with their colleagues and telling them to send feedback to Secretary Spitz or the Educational Affairs Committee. They can also participate in focus groups and volunteer for the pilot.

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senator Newman said she has a lot of reservations about the pilot. She said it seems too short and there is less useful information than the current CTECs. She also said she is concerned that there is next to no room for qualitative comments. Over 40 years, she said she's found those most helpful in her own classroom and in evaluating colleagues.

Senator Alter asked if the CTECs and the pilot are run at the same time. Senator Wilson said yes. Senator Alter said she has concerns about doing that, as this is not a traditional experimental model.

Senator Getzler said that, in his field (Mathematics), it is difficult if not impossible to have a sense of what one has learned after only eight weeks. He wondered if there was a way to ask students a year later if the course was useful to them. Senator Wilson said the new pilot is not an assessment of learning. It's moving towards feedback of student experience in the classroom.

Senator Henry asked if there has been a suggestion to match peer institutions who require students complete CTECs to receive their grades. Lack of participation leads to unhelpful data, he said.

Senator Wilson said she doesn't know, but she would pass the suggestion along.

Senator Angela Lee said she was also concerned about administering the pilot survey alongside the current CTECs. She said there would be huge effects that would invalidate the pilot. She strongly encouraged random students get the new survey and others get the old CTECs. Senator Wilson said she would pass that information along to the CTEC committee.

Senator Pappas said his experience has been when the class is easier his scores are better. He said this was a concern of his, and likewise allowing students who showed up for a third of the class to complete the CTEC.

Senator Mark Johnson seconded what Senator Getzler said. He said students were initially frustrated with courses he took, but then expressed gratitude a year or two later after they've had time to appreciate what they've learned. He said they are under a lot of pressure at the end of their courses and it's the wrong time to ask them for an evaluation.

President-Elect Thomson said he is all for improving ways to get better feedback from the students. He said he's curious if Northwestern is ever assessing how effective faculty are as instructors. He said his CTECs are good because he has a cool accent, but that doesn't tell him if he is a good chemistry teacher.

Senator Beitel asked when the new survey questions will be available. Senator Wilson said she wasn't sure and that she hadn't seen the new instrument.

Senator Acosta asked what the goal of the new CTECs is compared to the old CTECs. She said she asked because she wasn't sure how you could even compare the two if they have such different goals. Senator Wilson said it's hard to say without seeing the questions.

The president then asked if there was any other new business. Seeing none, the meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Spitz
Secretary to the Faculty Senate

