

Meeting of the Faculty Senate

April 15, 2026

5:00–7:00 p.m. (CDT)

Simpson-Querrey Auditorium and [Zoom](#)

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| I. | Call to Order | Ian Hurd (5:00 p.m.) |
| II. | Visit from the Chair of the Board of Trustees | Peter Barris (5:05 p.m.) |
| III. | Report of the Faculty Senate President | Ian Hurd (6:00 p.m.) |
| IV. | Proposal to Amend the Faculty Handbook Regarding Faculty Appeals (first reading) | Mark Alznauer (6:05 p.m.) |
| V. | Endorsement of CLI Letter | Axel Mueller (6:15 p.m.) |
| VI. | COLA Resolution | Cat Fabian (6:25 p.m.) |
| VII. | Shared Governance Letter | Ian Hurd & Seth Lichter (6:40 p.m.) |
| VIII. | New Business | (6:55 p.m.) |
| IX. | Adjournment | (7:00 p.m.) |

Proposals to Amend the Faculty Handbook

Prepared by Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee
& Approved by Handbook Committee
Original March 4th 2026 • Revised March 25th 2026

The Faculty Rights and Responsibility committee exists to address “policies regarding academic freedom, teaching, research, interpersonal conduct, terms of appointment, promotion and tenure, and related matters, particularly with regard to the [Faculty Handbook](#).”

The two proposals in this memo build upon a “[Teaching Reassignment Issues](#)” briefing (Jan 7, 2026) and address the need for *rights of appeal* when a faculty member has been removed from the classroom in a way that is an *exception* to departmental or school norms.

In its present form, there exists a *grey zone* in Faculty Handbook policies relating to cases in which a chair and/or dean can remove a faculty member from the classroom and claim their action is *administrative* rather than *disciplinary*.

Allowing this grey zone to persist deprives affected faculty members of their due process rights.

Principles of academic freedom are designed around the idea that professors should have reasonable autonomy in the classroom and that teaching itself is integral to professional reputations. “Barring a teacher from [their] classroom,” a 1963 article in the American Association of University Professors’ *Bulletin* reported, “inflicts ignominy upon the teacher and is destructive to the morale of the academic community.” A 1966 follow-up article insisted that “to inflict such injury without due process and, therefore, without demonstrated reason, destroys the academic character of the University.”

[A 2008 AAUP report](#) (updated in 2023), argues: “Suspension usually implies an extremely negative judgment, for which the basis remains untested in the absence of a hearing, even though an administration may claim that it is saving the faculty member embarrassment. That potential embarrassment must be risked (or at least the faculty member should be permitted to risk it) if the individual is to have a chance of clearing his or her name...[S]uspension may create a prejudicial atmosphere totally out of proportion to the alleged offense and undeserved in the light of the professor’s previous record.” In other words, faculty need to be able to clear their names.

Proposal #1 - Academic Freedom and Disciplinary Action (Faculty Handbook, p. 6):

Current Language: “Disciplinary action will not be used to restrain faculty members in their exercise of academic freedom. If a faculty member believes a disciplinary action, including denial or delay of tenure or promotion, or termination of contract, violates their right to academic freedom, the faculty member may appeal, as outlined in the Faculty Handbook.”

Proposed Edits in Red: “If a faculty member believes a disciplinary action **violates their right to academic freedom, the faculty member may appeal, as outlined in the Faculty Handbook.** “**Disciplinary action,**” as used here, shall include but not be limited to any denial or delay of tenure or promotion, or termination of contract, **or removal from teaching duties.**”

Rationale: This change does two things. First, it strengthens the firewall between professors and administrators in terms of classroom autonomy. Second, it codifies due process rights for faculty should an administrator remove them from the classroom in a way that is exceptional.

Proposal #2 – Teaching Activities of the Faculty (Faculty Handbook p. 10)

Current Language: “School deans, department chairs, and program directors assign teaching responsibilities and courses to each faculty member with consideration for a faculty member’s engagement in research, service and other professional activities.”

Proposed Addition in Red: “If a dean, department chair, and/or program director takes the exceptional step of suspending a faculty member’s teaching duties, the faculty member has the right to appeal.”

Rationale: This addition does three things. First, it allows administrators to retain the power to remove faculty from the classroom if they deem it necessary in terms of “fitness for duty.” Second, it allows an affected faculty member to appeal that decision once it is taken, helping them protect their professional reputation and have rights of due process. Third, it reinforces the language in the Handbook on “Temporary Suspension” (see below), which acknowledges that such a step is “exceptional” and should be “narrowly tailored...so that the faculty member’s rights and privileges are not summarily abrogated...” To refuse a faculty member the right of appeal effectively abrogates rights of due process. (Faculty Handbook, p. 44)

Faculty Handbook Sections (p. 38):

Initiation of Disciplinary Proceedings and Fact Finding for Suspension

Initiation of Disciplinary Proceedings

When a complaint from any source is made against a faculty member, the faculty member’s dean⁶ may conduct an initial inquiry to determine whether additional fact finding is warranted. Such inquiry will be completed as expeditiously as possible.

Regardless of whether an initial inquiry is undertaken, the dean will notify the faculty member in writing of any allegations brought, the factual evidence supporting the allegations or other grounds for discipline, and any applicable policies or other standards of professional conduct.

The dean will give the faculty member an opportunity to respond to the allegations or other grounds for discipline. The dean and the faculty member may seek to resolve the matter by mutual resolution, either at the initiation of, or at any other time during, the proceedings. If the issue is resolved, the process terminates.

If efforts at informal resolution are not successful and the dean determines, in the dean’s judgment, that termination or suspension is not warranted, the dean will provide the faculty member with a written summary of the findings, if applicable, and notice of sanctions, if any, with a copy to the Associate Provost for Faculty. Any sanctions imposed may be appealed using the procedures outlined in the “[Appeal of Sanctions Other than Termination or Suspension](#)” section below.

Fact Finding and Sanctioning for Potential Termination or Suspension

If efforts at informal resolution are not successful and the dean determines, in the dean's judgment, that the allegations or other grounds for discipline could lead to the faculty member's termination or suspension, then a three-member *ad hoc* faculty committee will be appointed to conduct fact finding and prepare a report with recommendations, as described below. The Associate Provost for Faculty⁷ will appoint the *ad hoc* committee members from the Faculty Appeals Panel pool, in consultation with the dean and the Chair of the Faculty Appeals Panel Executive Committee. The faculty member will have a reasonable opportunity to disqualify potential committee members for reasons of possible bias or prior involvement in the case. When the faculty member is non-tenure-eligible, a majority of the *ad hoc* committee should be non-tenure-eligible faculty. Once the *ad hoc* committee has been appointed, generally within 15 calendar days, the Associate Provost for Faculty will notify the faculty member.

Faculty Handbook Sections (p. 44): Fitness for Duty and Temporary Suspension

Fitness for Duty

The [Faculty Fitness Panel Policy](#) addresses issues of significant impairment, disruptive behavior, or inability to perform essential functions of a faculty member's professional role. If concerns arise about a faculty member's ability to fulfill his/her/their professional obligations, this policy is intended to be used as a last resort once all other means of resolution have been exhausted. The faculty member's dean, school administrators, and the Associate Provost for Faculty should first seek to resolve potential issues informally before recommending or referring cases to the Faculty Fitness Panel.

Determinations of whether to mandate a fitness evaluation, the review process, the fitness evaluation, and the follow up to the fitness evaluation will be conducted pursuant to the [Faculty Fitness Panel Policy](#).

Other issues of faculty performance or discipline should be addressed through the disciplinary processes as outlined in this Faculty Handbook. Threats of violence to self or others should be referred first to the Behavioral Consultation Team (see "[Temporary Suspension](#)" section below) and then to the Faculty Fitness Panel.

Temporary Suspension

If, in the judgment of the provost⁸ and the faculty member's dean,⁹ after consulting with the chair (or chair's designee) of the University's [Behavioral Consultation Team](#), a faculty member poses an immediate threat of harm to his or her own safety, to the safety of others, and/or to Northwestern, the faculty member may be temporarily suspended from service pending ultimate determination of the faculty member's case (a "temporary suspension").

Situations calling for temporary suspension are exceptional, and the scope and duration of any temporary suspension must be narrowly tailored to the nature of the potential harm posed so that the faculty member's rights and privileges are not summarily abrogated more broadly than reasonably necessary. The faculty member's dean will consult with the provost and the Chair of the Committee on Cause concerning the length and other conditions of any temporary suspension. Salary and faculty privileges unrelated to the alleged behavior will continue through the period of the temporary suspension.

Endorsement of the Council on Language Instruction's letter (Appendix A) to NU Administration and WCAS Dean Randolph

We senators strongly endorse the concerns and requests expressed in the attached letter regarding faculty compensation. The sustained gap between salary increases and inflation, combined with the absence of cost-of-living adjustments, has created a growing and unsustainable financial strain, especially for lower-paid non-tenure eligible faculty in the arts and humanities across schools. Addressing this issue through a meaningful cost-of-living adjustment, alongside merit-based increases, is both a necessary and equitable step. Taking action now will help restore financial stability, reinforce institutional trust, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to valuing faculty contributions.

Appendix A

March 1, 2026

Dear President Bienen, dear Provost Hagerty, dear Provost Eric Luijten, dear Vice President Distel, dear Dean Randolph:

We are writing as members of the language teaching-track faculty at Northwestern to express serious concern regarding the ongoing lack of inflation adjustment to faculty compensation and the withdrawal of merit-based increases. While we understand that the political and institutional climate has created momentary budgetary constraints, the combined effect of these developments has resulted in a real loss of income and financial stability especially for language teaching-track faculty members.

In recent years, annual increases have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, faculty salaries have declined in purchasing power, and the impact has accumulated. To illustrate this, we attach a chart that summarizes the salary development for NTE faculty between 2017 and 2025 in which the salaries are expressed in 2025 Dollar amounts (i.e. inflation-adjusted) to provide easy comparisons. Because increases in compensation at Northwestern operate through a merit-raise structure rather than automatic cost-of-living adjustments, when annual increases fall below inflation, faculty effectively absorb the difference. A standard increase within the usual range this year would not nearly restore what has been lost.

At WCAS, the CLI NTE salaries are most frequently in the lower quartile. The absolute amounts at which average CLI NTE salaries for some of us have by now arrived (~\$68k-\$70k) barely match the Chicago area median income limits for 4-person households in the low-income 60% bracket (cf. https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/doh/provdrs/renters/svcs/ami_chart.html). According to US Dept of Housing and Urban Development, 80% of Area Median Income is low income and 50% is very low income. Earners at or below 60% of AMI qualify for rent assistance in Chicago (cf. <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/affordable-requirements-ordinance/home/for-prospective-renters/income-qualifications.html>). This effectively means that, as many of us are experiencing increased day-to-day financial pressures, it has become significantly more difficult to make ends meet. While the situation is especially pressing for us as among the lowest-earning faculty, our situation is not an isolated phenomenon. We are aware that the Provost's Office has identified from the 2025 Non-Tenure Eligible Faculty Survey that the level of compensation is a major stressor across NTE faculty at large. Our present letter is only to confirm and reinforce this finding for the especially exposed CLI faculty.

This issue is particularly urgent for language teaching-track faculty members, whose contractual compensation is already lower than that of other academic categories. For colleagues in this position, the combined effects of below-inflation increase and rising benefit costs have been, as we illustrated above, especially damaging. When compensation is already compressed in some instances, these pressures are felt most acutely, disproportionately affecting those with the least financial flexibility. In this situation it is additionally ironic that the lower salaries (and consequently: increases) are often those fixed from times of higher purchasing-power at a lower nominal Dollar-base rate; that is, from some of the most loyal and long-time members of CLI. It

feels to these colleagues as if the current system effectively penalizes loyalty to Northwestern as an employer.

For these reasons, we believe that this year's increase should, at least for the lower quartiles on the faculty payroll that are at or below the 60% threshold of Area Median Income, combine an at-large cost-of-living adjustment for everyone in this group regardless of merit with the usual merit-based percentages in individual salaries in order to address both current conditions and the cumulative shortfall, as well as to recognize the differential merits of individual faculty. Without such a prior correction, the Moreover, as was reported at the University Budget Update to the Faculty Senate on January 21, 2026, Northwestern has the capacity to act with its substantial increasing or additional revenue streams. The university's materials also emphasize the scale of recent philanthropic momentum placing Northwestern among the leading institutions nationally and reflecting significant financial stability entering FY2026 and beyond.

Taken together, these official data suggest that Northwestern is operating from a position of substantial strength. In that context, we respectfully request and expect that the university will take meaningful steps this year to address the accumulated shortfall in faculty compensation. We respectfully request and expect to be provided, prior to the usual merit-based increase, a cost-of-living adjustment for those among the NTE faculty whose salaries have reached the tipping point of barely covering basic cost-of-living for faculty. Only in this way do we see a chance to catch up, by a raise which meaningfully responds to current economic realities.

Such action is not only financially important; it is also essential for maintaining trust between faculty and the institution. Northwestern's success depends on the continued commitment of its faculty members, including those in language instruction who serve a vital role in the university's educational mission. Demonstrating responsiveness now would reaffirm that the institution values equity, sustainability, and good-faith partnership with its faculty. Only in this way can we secure the best education for our students, which is ultimately our highest, mutual goal. In light of President Bienen's, Provost Hagerty's and CFO Distel's announcements that adjustments for the faculty's 'resilience' in the face of budgetary bottlenecks in the recent past were a priority in this year's budgetary considerations, as expressed in the 2026 Annual Financial Update shared with the community (<https://www.northwestern.edu/leadership-notes/2026/2026-financial-update.html>), we trust that our request and expectations will find open ears.

Thank you for giving these concerns careful consideration and addressing them. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Majority of the Members of the Council on Language Instruction

Resolution presented for consideration at the April 15, 2026, Faculty Senate meeting by the Faculty Senate’s Non-Tenure Eligible Committee

WHEREAS, in recent years, annual salary increases have not kept pace with inflation. Furthermore, no raise pool was provided in FY2025-26, while health benefits cost-sharing has increased; and¹

WHEREAS, the impact has accumulated for Northwestern employees, with the lowest paid bearing the highest burden and experiencing difficulty covering basic necessities. Northwestern is also losing its competitive advantage as a preferred employer in the region. For example, entry-level compensation at local high schools has surpassed that of some full-time Northwestern faculty, and²

WHEREAS, compensation at Northwestern typically operates through an annual merit-raise (AMR) structure rather than automatic cost-of-living adjustment. In its current form, this AMR structure provides insufficient opportunities for Northwestern employees to adequately address a growing cost-of-living crisis; and

WHEREAS, Northwestern leadership has stated that addressing salaries is a priority for the coming fiscal year.

THEREFORE, the faculty believes that the merit pool structure is insufficient to achieve the institutional priority of addressing salaries in FY2026-27.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate calls on University leadership to take the following special measures in FY2026-27:

- Prioritize bringing the lowest salaries up to an acceptable level.
- Allocate funds for a cost-of-living adjustment

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Faculty Senate wishes to collaborate with University leadership in reviewing and improving compensation policies and procedures to better address cost-of-living concerns in the future.

¹ Per the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, recent “inflation in Chicago has been higher than overall U.S. inflation and among the highest of the urban places for which the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports CPI data... primarily due to higher price increases for housing and transportation.”

“Why Has Inflation Been Higher in Chicago Than in the U.S. Overall Recently?,” *Chicago Fed Letter*, No. 508, July 2025, <http://chicagofed.org/publications/chicago-fed-letter/2025/508>.

² <https://www.teach.cps.edu/salary-calculator>

To the Board of Trustees.

Northwestern University frequently touts its commitment to a thriving faculty and shared governance. If ever there was an issue that called for a collaborative attitude from the University it is health care, which affects each of us and our families personally and intimately. Yet, the healthcare change was made, not in partnership, but in secret, and reflects a pattern by which faculty are excluded from important decisions.

Failing to include faculty in important decisions of the University betrays our trust. The health care decision reveals the costs. Collaborating with faculty and staff earlier, and communicating more meaningfully, would have been much more efficient.

To make shared governance real, we ask the Board to support our call for the University to improve its performance in including faculty in relevant decisions. A minimum step is for the administration to include the Senate as partners from the beginning of decisions that affect our capacities to do our jobs.

This letter and other communications from the Senate should make clear that meaningful action is necessary to rectify missteps, restore trust, and reestablish a healthy working relationship.

Respectfully,
The Faculty Senate