

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Guild Lounge and Videoconference
January 21, 2026

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held its standing monthly meeting on January 21, 2026, in Scott Hall's Guild Lounge and over Zoom videoconference. Faculty Senate President Ian Hurd (Political Science) called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the November 12, 2025 meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

Actions

1. No formal actions were taken during this meeting.

Meeting Summary

I. University Budget

Faculty Senate President Hurd introduced Associate Dean and incoming Provost Erik Luijten. Incoming Provost Luijten said he was honored to be selected as the next Provost, and that he looked forward to working with the Senate as a partner in shared governance.

Senate President Hurd then welcomed Provost Kathleen Hagerty and Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Mandy Distel for their [annual university budget update](#) (slides 5-43). Their remarks are summarized below.

Provost Hagerty began with a brief strategic overview and context for the state of the University. She stated that 2025 was a tumultuous year filled with many tough decisions, but that the overall budget is now stable. Despite the challenges, Provost Hagerty said Northwestern continues to ascend thanks in large part to the stellar teaching and research of the faculty. She recognized several significant accomplishments over the past year, including

moving up to 7th in the U.S. News & World Report Rankings, numerous faculty awards, the launching of key initiatives, and the excellent state of fundraising, which received the highest number of major gift (\$100,000+) commitments in university history. She also highlighted investments in undergraduate and graduate students, raises for faculty and staff, and enhancing Northwestern's academic facilities.

Vice President Distel began with updates on federal funding. She first outlined the FY2025 funding freeze impacts, including the termination of approximately 60 grant awards with a total value of approximately \$60 million. Additionally, press reported a \$790 million freeze on all research funding, the exact figure of which, she said, Northwestern has not been able to determine because they never received an official list and dollar figure from the federal government. During that time, the Board of Trustees approved financial support for the frozen funds, the 8-month impact of which was approximately \$350 million. Vice President Distel said that, in alignment with the agreement, nearly all funding has been restored, and that debt and liquidity used to pay for research during the freeze can now be repaid. She then signaled several areas the university continues to monitor, including overall federal funding for research, indirect cost recovery, and international students. One positive note: changes to the Endowment Tax kept Northwestern in the 1.4% tax bracket.

Vice President Distel then reviewed Northwestern's finances overall. The annual operating budget totals over \$3.5 billion in expenses.

Vice President Distel said Northwestern has four different budget categories in its model:

- **Appropriated schools** (WCAS, SoC, SESP, McCormick, TGS, Medill, and Bienen), which are partially supported by a budget appropriation, along with other school-specific revenue sources
- **Non-appropriated schools** (Feinberg, Kellogg, Pritzker, SPS, NUQ), which keep their own revenues, but also support their expenses, including central overhead costs
- **Auxiliary units** (Residential Services, Athletics, Parking) use sales and services revenues to support their operations

- **Administrative units** are supported by a budget appropriation.

Vice President Distel said the primary sources of operating revenue are tuition, endowment payout, private gifts, grants and contracts, and sales and services. She stressed that many of those are limited in their growth potential, and some come with restrictions, from say a donor or a sponsor. She said that on an annual basis they look at unrestricted revenues to determine where to invest. The University's expense base is taken up largely by compensation and benefits. Vice President Distel added that Northwestern must compete against schools with much larger endowments. Lastly, she said faculty salary increases were a top priority for FY2027.

Vice President Distel then shared an update on the budget model reform project, launched in fall 2024. The project will result in a redesigned model that will better support the academic, research, and service mission. The project is governed by a steering committee composed of school and administrative unit representatives that is tasked with finding solution to challenges in the current model (slide 36). Implementation and timing for the switch to the new model has yet to be determined.

Finally, Vice President Distel went over [financial statements for FY2025](#).

The president then opened the floor for questions.

Senators' questions focused on several major themes, notably, the specifics of the financial impact of legal action against the university, if the expectation that the percentage of international students in future undergraduate classes will be lower and likewise for underrepresented minority students, will research allocations be cut by congress, how interdisciplinarity will be preserved in the new budget model, where in the budgeting process might be best for faculty involvement, and ways central can support multi-year planning for departments.

Provost Hagerty said several major settlements ended in 2025, including the deal to return research funding, which closed out all federal investigations at the university. As to international students, she said international graduate student enrollment remains strong and that international undergraduate students has never been a large portion of the admitted

class. She added there are some limitations on scholarships for international students and that the travel bans do make admitting international students more challenging. In terms of underrepresented students, Provost Hagerty said they have excellent and diverse students applying to Northwestern. Admissions expect future classes to remain that way.

Provost Hagerty said it was her understanding that NIH funding is at the very least flat, meaning it's not being cut, and as for the budget planning model and their focus on multidisciplinary education and research, everyone on the Board and in central agrees that is a priority. Overall, the goal for the new budget model is make it more precise and transparent. Vice President Distel added that the budget office doesn't want to break what works in this process. For faculty and departments planning beyond this year, Vice President Distel said they are moving towards multiyear models with the schools and the hope is deans and their staff provide departments with a framework for long-term budgeting within departments. In terms of faculty involvement in faculty decision making, Provost Hagerty said there are things like academics and research faculty have full say over, but there are administrative decisions like pest control that faculty don't really want or need a say over, but there is a middle ground on things like benefits that faculty input could be beneficial. She said the goal is to have regular meetings about what is going on because otherwise so much is happening items get lost in the shuffle.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Andrea Graham (Medical Social Sciences), Pablo Durango-Cohen (Civil and Environmental Engineering), Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), Mark Alznauer (Philosophy), Helen Tilley (History), Ian Hurd (Senate President, Political Science), Rebecca Zorach (Art History),

II. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president's report is below and in the accompanying [slide deck](#) (slide 46).

The president said Professor Ravi Jagannathan (Finance) had to step down as chair of the Budget and Planning Committee due to a medical issue. Senator Andrea Graham (Medical

Social Sciences) was nominated and approved as the new chair of the Budget and Planning Committee.

The president said it was time to start considering nominations for the next Faculty Senate President-Elect. He encouraged all interested senators to reach out to him and the Executive Committee. Nominations from the floor will take place at the Faculty Senate meeting on May 6, 2026.

The president reminded senators that the meeting on February 11 will be hosted from NU-Q and will take place at 8 a.m. CST.

III. Presidential Search Feedback

Senate President Ian Hurd shared the process for the Presidential Search Committee. He said he would like to carry into the committee faculty views, and communicate what faculty believe is important in the role. He then opened the floor for comments.

Senators shared multiple points of views. Some said the deal with the federal government had hamstrung the university in seemingly irreparable ways. Others said prioritizing research and its role at Northwestern was paramount. Likewise, senators said the arts are a crucial part of this university that should not be overlooked, and rather, should be a point of emphasis moving forward. Several senators said they wanted a president who understood and would defend the robust role universities can play in the role of free speech, research advancement, and are committed to faculty governance and its shared role in guiding the university.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Helen Tilley (History), Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences), Detra Payne (Theater), Eric Sirota (NTE, Law), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Michael Rakowitz (Art Theory and Practice), Axel Mueller (NTE, WCAS), SonBihn Nguyen (Chemistry), Kasey Evans (English)

IV. Faculty Governance and the Governmental Agreement

Senate President Ian Hurd encouraged senators to share how and where they would like their voices to be heard at the university.

Some senators said they would like more say over the leadership in the schools. Several expressed a desire to have more representation and discussion with the Board of Trustees. Furthermore, senators expressed the need for more transparency about how decisions are made. A senator suggested a community-wide re-understanding of what the university is and a renegotiation about the administration's role, which seems to stretch beyond their intended role. Another suggested looking at peer institutions for models of shared governance. To the last point, the president said that kind of research was already underway, and he could preliminarily report that there is a staggering level of difference at each school.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: David Kalainov, Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Ian Horswill (Computer Science), TJ Billard (Communication Studies), Wendy Murray (Biomedical Engineering)

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared Spitz

Secretary to the Faculty Senate