

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Annenberg Hall and Videoconference
December 11, 2025

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a special meeting on December 11, 2025, in Annenberg Hall and over Zoom videoconference. Faculty Senate President Ian Hurd (Political Science) called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

Actions

1. No formal actions were taken during this meeting.

Meeting Summary

I. Benefits Changes and Faculty Input

The president introduced Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Lorraine Goffe and Director of Benefits Dawn Kalamaras. The president shared some of the central themes the Senate has collected from faculty since the decision to switch healthcare providers from BlueCross BlueShield Illinois (BCBSIL) to United Healthcare (UHC). Namely, how were faculty involved in the decision-making, if HR was surprised by the response from faculty, and what were the total savings after such a move.

Vice President Goffe said the decision to switch providers was made by the Northwestern University Welfare Plan Administrators (NUWPA), a three-person committee created by the Board of Trustees consisting of the Chief HR Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Director of Benefits; academic leadership (President and Provost) was involved in the decision as well, but no faculty. She said the upset amongst faculty was a valid reaction because input would have been important. Vice President Goffe said the switch saved the university approximately \$9.6 million overall, but the net savings were \$7.5 million.

The president said faculty, when they hear that figure, are astonished compared to the disruption such change has distributed across so many faculty and staff. He then asked how long the agreement with UHC is and what role faculty can play in reviewing how the plan is administered.

Director Kalamaras said the contract is for three years and they are currently negotiating performance guarantees. HR will meet with UHC quarterly to determine if they are adhering to the performance metrics Northwestern set. Vice President Goffe said UHC will provide information about when faculty, staff, and their dependents reach out to UHC, whether or not calls are responded to on time, and if issues are resolved.

The president asked how faculty can communicate their experiences directly with HR. Vice President Goffe said they will have regular meetings with the Senate's Salary and Benefits Committee and are willing to join Senate meetings to provide updates, and individual faculty can send comments to their benefits counselor or at the benefits@northwestern.edu email address.

The floor was then opened for questions.

Senators' questions focused on faculty involvement in the current processes and moving forward, strongly suggesting that healthcare providers Northwestern be included in discussions. Senators also pressed for a central mechanism for sharing feedback beyond sending an email so data, without violating HIPPA, can be shared broadly. Senators described personal concerns about what coverage will be provided, the efficiency of claims processing, and Delta Dental. They also shared challenges faculty are already facing with UHC and pressed for more communication from UHC directly. Senators wanted to know the total budget for healthcare at Northwestern and pressed for more information on how the decision was made. Senators also pointed out the provider side of contracting and the immediate need for the plan document.

Vice President Goffe reiterated that Northwestern determines coverage, but it does not review individual claims. Northwestern will monitor how UHC administers the plan based

on the quarterly reports UHC provides. She added that UHC's network is larger than BCBSIL, that disruptions to the healthcare plan changes were minimal and they are currently attempting to expand the number of in-network mental health providers, and that they have asked UHC to set up a separate network just for Northwestern benefit plans, where that provider would be reimbursed at a rate similar to what they were reimbursed under BlueCross. Vice President Goffe also said they would look into how they receive feedback on the plan beyond just the email address. She noted that she was upset to hear there have already been challenges with UHC and that they would investigate those problems, and they would also try to communicate more about the concierge services available with UHC and CVS Caremark.

Addressing the full healthcare budget, Director Kalamaras said the University's total spending is approximately \$159 million. She said that performance commitments would be shared, and that approximately 71% of employees signed up for NU health insurance plan in 2026 (compared to 78% last year).

Vice President Goffe also stressed the NUWPA committee's fiduciary responsibility and that they had to look at many components beyond cost, but she acknowledged again that they did not consult faculty before making the decision to switch.

Both Vice President Goffe and Director Kalamaras said they were willing to come back to the Senate to provide updates once the new plan is in place, and they urged faculty to continue to share feedback.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Aaron Shaw (Communication Studies), Ian Horswill (Computer Science), Nikki Spigner (Black Studies), Jacqueline Babb (Medill), Eric Sirota (NTE, Pritzker Law), Greg Miller (Psychology), Sarit Markovich (Strategy), Sara Solla (Neuroscience), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Cat Fabian (NTE, SoC)

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared Spitz

Secretary to the Faculty Senate