

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Guild Lounge and Videoconference
March 11, 2026

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a standing meeting on March 11, 2026, in Scott Hall's Guild Lounge and over Zoom videoconference. Faculty Senate President Ian Hurd (Political Science) called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the February 11, 2026 meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

Actions

1. The Faculty Senate unanimously agreed to the drafting of a letter—to be considered at the next meeting—to the Board of Trustees and the University President on the erosion of shared governance as it relates to, among other items, changes to the healthcare plan.
2. The Faculty Senate unanimously agreed to work with the language instruction faculty on the matter of NTE salaries and the university's policy on merit raises.

Meeting Summary

I. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president's report is below and in the accompanying [slide deck](#) (slide 5).

The president announced that next Faculty Senate meeting was moved to April 15th on the Chicago campus (Simpson-Querrey Auditorium). Board of Trustees Chair Peter Barris will be in attendance.

He noted that the AI-Assisted Grading Policy and Guidelines discussion was on Thursday, March 19th, from 11-Noon.

The president said the Governance and Executive Committees are considering what the university's obligations are in the agreement with the federal government, and how that impacts faculty.

The Budget and Planning Committee plans to meet with CFO Mandy Distel to keep the Senate informed on the university's operations and budget.

The Faculty Rights and Responsibility Committee, along with the Faculty Handbook Committee, are reviewing language that relates to how and when deans and central administration can suspend faculty from teaching.

The president said the Executive Committee has two upcoming meetings with university leaders, one with the President and Provost on April 6th, and the other with Board Chair Peter Barris on April 15th.

Lastly, he reminded the Senate about the Faculty Assembly next quarter (date and location TBD).

II. Standing Committee Report: Salary and Benefits

Senator Ian Horswill (Computer Science) provided an update on the recent healthcare changes (slides 6-16 in the link above).

Senator Horswill first gave a big picture view of the healthcare situation thus far, synthesizing facts about the new healthcare plan and what the Seante learned from HR leadership in December 2025. He said that Northwestern's PPO plans are self-insured, and that employee premiums are more or less determined by claims paid (~\$150 million last year). Northwestern determines what is and is not covered and the plan administrator (United Healthcare) matches the claim to the benefit document. He said that while Northwestern determines what kinds of procedures are covered, UHC sets network contracts with providers, so choice of administrator determines who's in network, payouts for specific procedures in and out of network, and procedures for claims, appeals, etc. He

then outlined some of the details regarding UHC: they have the largest network, they pay less to providers and accordingly many providers don't want to work with them, and the special arrangements Northwestern has with UHC, specifically, for behavioral health. That is, an agreement to pay BCBS providers at the BCBS rate for the first year of coverage. Senator Horswill then shared information about the prescription plans, and which entity (NU or UHC) is responsible for parts of the healthcare plan (slides 11 & 12).

Feedback for the Benefits Office can be sent to benefits@northwestern.edu. Questions, appeals, or something that requires immediate attention can be sent to askHR@northwestern.edu. If senators are comfortable doing so, Senator Horswill said they may copy him (ian@northwestern.edu) on their correspondences with HR. He continues to keep a log of issues he's heard about.

Senator Horswill shared details about healthcare plan oversight, noting that the Salary and Benefits Committee holds quarterly meetings with the Director of Benefits. During the most recent meeting, they received information on what they monitor, like patient satisfaction, claims processing, and network development, and are currently working on securing non-identifying information on the number of and types of complaints being made regarding the healthcare plan.

The floor was then opened for comment.

A senator described the clear failures in shared governance the choice in healthcare provider exposed and then proposed writing a letter to the Board of Trustees and the President, informing them of the trust that was betrayed and work they could do to restore that. The motion was seconded and the Senate discussed the matter.

The Senate then unanimously agreed to the drafting of a letter to the Board of Trustees and the University President on the erosion of shared governance as it relates to, among other items, changes to the healthcare plan, for consideration at the April meeting.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), Ariel Stess (Radio/TV/Film), Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences), Jon Guryan (SESP), Rebecca Zorach (Art History) Debu Chakravarti (Ob-Gyn), Nick Cianciatto (Microbiology-Immunology), Branden Ghena (NTE-McCormick), SonBinh Ngyuen (Chemistry)

III. Office of the Ombudsperson

The president introduced University Ombudsperson Sarah Klaper. Ombudsperson Klaper thanked the Senate for the invitation, and for their advocacy for the creation of her office a few years ago. She then provided an update on the work her office has done the past few years.

Most notably, Ombudsperson Klaper shared top concerns and trends for faculty, which included various evaluative relationships, peer and colleague relationships, compensation and benefits, jobs and career, organizational leadership and management, values and ethics, legal and compliances processes, and safety and well-being.

There was a suggestion to share specifics about the breakdown of problems faculty seek guidance on. Ombudsperson Klaper said the vast majority fall under the category of evaluative relationships and communication within those relationships.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), Debu Chakravarti (Ob-Gyn),

IV. Office of Community Enrichment

The president introduced Associate Provost for Community Enrichment Michelle Manno. They thanked the Senate for the invitation and shared an update on [their office](#) and its redesign.

Associate Provost Manno said their mission remains the same: to support Northwestern faculty, students, and staff so they can flourish through deep engagement with one another and with ideas that inspire ongoing learning and growth. Their vision: A Northwestern community rooted in belonging, invigorated by difference and steadfast in its commitment to collective thriving.

Associate Provost Manno said that thriving lives in the joint experience of vitality and learning. They focus on education, conflict + connection, and advocacy. An enriched community is curious, works empathetically and productively together, and one in which individuals feel empowered in their everyday lives.

Associate Provost Manno detailed the many offerings their office provides to underpin these values, including participatory learning, asynchronous resources, cohort-based training and development, staff and faculty affinity groups, CatalystNU: Conversations that Transform, and area-and-thought expertise from the Center for Civic Engagement, Native American and Indigenous Affairs, and the Women's Center.

Senator Ana Maria Acosta (Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences) asked how the university's response to the Dear Colleague letter—i.e. the erasure of phrases related to diversity, equity, and inclusion—impacted Associate Provost Manno's office.

Associate Provost Manno said it's been an incredibly challenging year for those who have marginalized identities, and there still is a tremendous amount of grief being felt. They said they are still navigating through this as a team. However, all changes aside, they have had full support from the Provost's Office as they face these challenges. Associate Provost Manno added that, while the erasure part is real and should not be downplayed, the values underpinning their work remain the same, and in some interesting ways, the shift has allowed them to expand their scope.

V. New Business

The constituency for language instruction faculty sent a draft letter to their NTE representative in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. Their letter asks for a policy adjustment to merit raises and to instead use whatever pools there are for a cost-of-living increase to a sustainable level. The issue is not merely a financial and existential one, they argued, but an issue of trust.

The Senate discussed the matter and unanimously agreed to work closely with the language instruction faculty on a strategy going forward, and to simultaneously send the matter to the Non-Tenure Eligible Committee for further evaluation, which may result in a resolution coming to the floor at an upcoming Faculty Senate meeting.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Axel Mueller (NTE-WCAS), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), Branden Ghena (NTE-McCormick), Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences), Helen Tilley (History), Nasrin Qader (French and Italian),

VI. Closed Session

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Spitz
Secretary to the Faculty Senate