

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Simpson-Querrey Auditorium and Videoconference
April 15, 2026

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a standing meeting on April 15, 2026, in Simpson-Querrey Auditorium on the Chicago campus and over Zoom videoconference. Faculty Senate President Ian Hurd (Political Science) called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m. A quorum was present.

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

Actions

1. The Faculty Senate endorsed a letter Council of Language Instruction Faculty to Northwestern administrators.
2. The Faculty Senate approved a resolution that calls on the University to i) prioritize bringing the lowest salaries up to an acceptable level, and ii) allocate funds for a cost-of-living adjustment in faculty salaries.
3. The Faculty Senate approved sending a letter to the Board of Trustees asking for their support in encouraging the “the University to improve its performance in including faculty in relevant decisions.”

Meeting Summary

I. Visit from Board of Trustees Chair Peter Barris

The president introduced Board of Trustees Chair Peter Barris. Mr. Barris thanked the Faculty Senate for the invitation and shared a few remarks before taking questions.

Mr. Barris first thanked the faculty for sustaining the institution during an incredibly tumultuous year that culminated in a [deal with the federal government](#) to return research

funding. He said the Board's work this past year was devoted to navigating the federal funding freeze, and that he and President Bienen were in lock step during that time, evidenced by the funds the Board committed to continue to support critical research and the preservation of Northwestern's autonomy and academic freedom once the deal was signed. Ultimately, he said the agreement with the federal government, while an incredibly difficult choice, offered a path to restoring those funds and that, for the most part, research funding is back to normal.

Looking ahead, Mr. Barris said the University's budget, while not without pressures, is stable and healthy. Along those lines, he said the highest priority for fiscal year 2027 is faculty and staff salary growth. He then spoke about how to manage the various financial pressures the University faces while continuing to support critical infrastructure and programmatic needs.

Mr. Barris touched on the current presidential search. He said it's been informed by the many listening sessions the committee held across stakeholder groups. He said there is a shared desire for a bold, visionary leader who champions academic freedom and the role of higher education. He added that they are looking for an intellectually curious individual that understands finances, maintains trust across stakeholder groups, will build on past success, and can advocate for Northwestern's distinct interdisciplinary ethos.

Mr. Barris ended on a note of gratitude, stating that the faculty's commitment to students, scholarship, and the University has been extraordinary.

The floor was then opened for pre-submitted and live questions.

Many senators posed questions about how the Board thinks about shared governance at Northwestern. Mr. Barris said he views each stakeholder as having dominion over their respective charges, faculty overseeing academics, the administration sets priorities around the mission and vision for the university, and the Board's principal role being oversight. Mr. Barris added that the Board sees the Faculty Senate as an organization that can consolidate faculty views and bring them to the fore.

Senators also asked Mr. Barris about how he sees the relationship between the liberal arts and scientific and medical research. Mr. Barris said the Board is comprised of many individuals with many different backgrounds and he wants to double down on the interdisciplinary nature of Northwestern, adding that the humanities and social sciences, given the proliferation of AI, will be more important than ever going forward.

Senators also posed questions on funding sources for research, the budgetary model, and the likelihood the federal government will stick to the terms of agreement to return federal research funding. For the two former questions, Mr. Barris said those are primarily in the purview of the administration and faculty, and regarding the deal he said there is a contract in place and Northwestern will ensure it follows the contract and expects the same from the federal government.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Karen Springen (Medill), Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Debu Chakravarti (Ob-Gyn), Helen Tilley (History), Eric Sirota (Law)

II. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president said Faculty Senate meeting on May 6th will also be in downtown Chicago, in the same room as this meeting. He said the Senate will consider honorary degree nominees at that meeting as well as hear nominations for the position of Faculty Senate President-Elect.

III. Proposal to Amend the Faculty Handbook Regarding Faculty Appeals (first reading)

Senator Mark Alznauer (Philosophy), chair of the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee [presented](#), for first reading, a [proposal](#) to amend the Faculty Handbook regarding faculty rights of appeal. Senator Alznauer said the proposal aims to establish some kind of faculty review when faculty are removed from teaching duties for reasons outside of a formal sanction. Below are the two main amendments the committee is proposing:

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)

The floor was then opened for comment.

Senators questioned whether the removal of research activities should also be appealable. Senator Alznauer and other Faculty Rights and Responsibility Committee members in attendance acknowledged this gap. Senator Alznauer said he wasn’t sure such a phrase could be easily added, but he promised the committee would review the suggestion.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Nick Cianciotto (Microbiology-Immunology), Branden Ghena (NTE, McCormick), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Debu Chakravarti (Ob-Gyn), Helen Tilley (History), Ian Horswill (Computer Science)

IV. Endorsement of CLI Letter

Senator Axel Mueller (NTE, WCAS), member of the Non-Tenure Eligible Committee, presented the following endorsement, sent by the committee, for approval in the full Faculty Senate:

We senators strongly endorse the concerns and requests expressed in the Council for Language Instruction faculty’s [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.

Senator Mueller said the committee consulted on the letter and it was endorsed by 7 or 9 NTE school-wide Faculty Senate representatives.

The floor was opened for discussion.

Senators considered whether the argument could be made more effective with hiring and retention data.

The motion to approve the endorsement was then voted on and passed by the Faculty Senate.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Dean Karlan (Finance), Kasey Evans (English)

V. COLA Resolution

Senator Cat Fabian (NTE, SoC), chair of the Non-Tenure Eligible Committee, presented the following resolution for Faculty Senate approval:

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

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>.

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.

The floor was then opened for discussion.

A senator asked if the raises were for all faculty. Senator Fabian said yes, though the resolution calls on the administration to prioritize the lowest salaries.

The Senate then voted on and approved the cost-of-living adjustment resolution from the NTE Committee.

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

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Nick Cianciotto (Microbiology-Immunology), Julie Marie Myatt (Theatre)

VI. Shared Governance Letter

Senator Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering) and Faculty Senate President Ian Hurd (Political Science) presented the following letter for approval:

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

The floor was then opened for discussion.

A senator wondered, since Mr. Barris referenced it during his talk, if a specific reference to the Faculty Senate being consulted directly on the new budget model could be added. Senator Andrea Graham (Medical Social Sciences), chair of the Budget and Planning Committee, said they just met with CFO Mandy Distel and Senior Associate Vice President for Budget and Planning Daniel Durack on the topic of the new budget model. She said there are plans continue that conversation as the administration finalizes the model.

Some senators also bemoaned Mr. Barris' response to the shared governance question and hoped this letter would shift his and the Board's perspective.

Senators also reiterated the administration's mistake in not consulting faculty before changing healthcare providers.

With no further discussion, the Senate voted on and approved sending the above letter to the Board of Trustees.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Helen Tilley (History), Andrea Graham, Wendy Murray (Biomedical Engineering), Larry Christiano (Economics), Ian Horswill (Computer Science)

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Spitz
Secretary to the Faculty Senate