

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Simpson-Querrey Auditorium and Videoconference
May 6, 2026

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a standing meeting on May 6, 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 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the April 15, 2026 meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

Actions

1. The Faculty Senate approved a [proposal to amend the Faculty Handbook](#) regarding faculty appeals.

Meeting Summary

I. Honorary Degree Nominees (closed session)

The Faculty Senate entered a closed session to consider nominees for an honorary degree from Northwestern.

II. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president said the Faculty Senate leadership (President, President-Elect, Past President) recently met with Chief Operating Officer Luke Figora to discuss faculty involvement in operations. He said there was a genuine eagerness on the part of COO Figora to seek faculty input and expertise that might improve administrative decision-making, in particular in areas such as community relations, IT, and facilities management.

The Senate received a response from Board of Trustees Chair Peter Barris to its letter on shared governance, which was approved last meeting. Mr. Barris said he would share the letter with the full Board and expressed openness to building shared governance between faculty, the Board, and the administration. Mr. Barris' response can be found [here](#).

The president added that Mr. Barris and the Board also acknowledged the resolution on [cost-of-living adjustments and NTE salaries](#) and expressed a willingness to have these concerns be put before the Board's Academic Affairs Committee.

III. Nominations for President-Elect

The president said the Executive Committee received three nominations:

- Ana Maria Acosta (Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences)
- Ian Horswill (Computer Science)
- Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering)

There were no further nominations from the floor.

Per Faculty Senate Bylaws, the aforementioned candidates will send statements to senators prior to the election at the meeting on June 3, 2026.

IV. Proposal to Amend the Faculty Handbook Regarding Faculty Appeals (second reading & vote)

Senator Mark Alznauer (Philosophy), chair of the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee, presented for a second reading and vote a proposal to amend the Faculty Handbook regarding faculty appeals. He noted that during the first reading a suggestion to add "or access to research" was posed as a friendly amendment. The committee accepted that amendment and presented the following for senators to consider:

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 or access to research.”**

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.”**

The floor was then opened for discussion.

Senators had questions about the addition of access to research. Senator Alznauer said the language was purposely vague and that some of the vagueness could be resolved through the appeals process, and that really the language was intended to address extraordinary circumstances. Say, when a faculty member is removed from their labs. Senators generally agreed this was a good addition.

The motion was then voted on and approved by the Faculty Senate.

The Senate leadership and the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities and Faculty Handbook committee chairs will now work with the Provost's Office on amending the Faculty Handbook.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Ian Horswill (Computer Science), Thrasos Pappas (Electrical & Computer Engineering), Debu Chakravarti (Ob-Gyn)

V. Standing Committee Report: Educational Affairs

Senator Jacqueline Babb (Medill, IMC), chair of the Educational Affairs Committee, presented on [GenAI and academic integrity and the University's Assessment and Accreditation processes](#).

Senator Babb said the Committee recently met with leaders from the Associated Student Government (ASG) about GenAI and academic integrity. Specifically, students were confused and concerned about GenAI policies in classes and the somewhat vagueness they have encountered, which has led to significant consequences for some students. Students met with stakeholders across the university to share these concerns and faculty have been asked to outline their AI policies clearly and specifically in their syllabi.

Senator Babb also shared an update on the University's assessment and accreditation framework. On the heels of the University's recent reaccreditation, she shared the timeline for the next ten years, including planning of the reaccreditation and all programs completing at least one full assessment cycle. Senator Babb emphasized the assessment gallery as a space for programs to define their learning objectives and share their methods for assessment. For further examples, the Searle Center's assessment gallery can be found [here](#).

The floor was opened for questions.

Senators debated the use of AI in the classroom. One senator said they found the [Canvas module for enhancing student AI literacy](#) helpful. Others made the call for guardrails around AI that protect qualitative teaching and research and made additional calls for tools around how to teach without AI now that it is so ubiquitous. Senators also pointed out the challenges of policy-setting at a decentralized institution that has varying priorities in each of the schools.

It was generally agreed upon that faculty should be leading these discussions, and that the Senate should play a role in how AI policies are adopted.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Wendy Murray (Biomedical Engineering), Helen Tilley (History), Ian Horswill (Computer Science), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Ana Maria Acosta (Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences), Angelique Duenas (Medical Education), Rukhsana Mirza (NTE, Feinberg), TJ Billard (Communication Studies)

VI. New Business

Senator Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering) presented the following letter for the Faculty Senate to consider:

To the Board of Trustees and President Bienen

We thank Peter Barris for his response to the first letter.

As representatives of the faculty, the Senate has a duty to assess and communicate whether decisions affecting faculty welfare have been made in accordance with the University's obligations. With respect to the recent change in health care coverage, fulfilling this role requires that we be informed about how the decision was reached.

In particular, we ask that the Board of Trustees share with the Senate the considerations that demonstrate the University acted in the interest of plan

participants and their families, consistent with its fiduciary and stewardship responsibilities as employer and self-insurer. We expect that such considerations were carefully weighed. However, because the Senate was neither consulted nor informed during the decision process, we now request the information necessary to carry out our role.

Providing this information would also advance the transparency essential to shared governance, in keeping with the University's stated values and mission.

Respectfully,
The Faculty Senate

Senator Lichter argued that a second letter—with a specific request for the Board to share with the Senate "the considerations that demonstrate the University acted in the interest of plan participants and their families, consistent with its fiduciary and stewardship responsibilities as employer and self-insurer"—is a necessary act to show the Board the Faculty Senate should be taken seriously as a partner in shared governance. Senator Lichter then moved to send the letter to the Board of Trustees. The motion was seconded and the floor was opened for discussion.

Senators debated whether or not this letter was the right course of action in this particular moment. Some spoke in favor of the letter and others were hesitant after the Board's response to the Senate's letter from April 15.

A quorum was requested during debate. It was determined that there was no longer a quorum. Given that no further action could be taken, debate ended.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Ian Horswill (Computer Science), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Nick Cianciatto (Microbiology-Immunology), Ariel Stess (Radio/TV/Film), Jon Guryan (SESP) Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences), Helen Tilley (History), Ana Aparicio (Anthropology)

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

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Spitz
Secretary to the Faculty Senate