

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Guild Lounge and Videoconference
February 12, 2025

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a standing monthly meeting on February 12, 2025, in Scott Hall's Guild Lounge and over Zoom videoconference. President Jill Wilson (Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences) called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the January 15, 2025, meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

Actions

1. No formal governing actions were taken during this meeting.

Meeting Summary

I. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president's report, along with other standing committee reports can be found here: [February 2025.pptx](#). Below are brief updates the president provided.

- A reception hosted by President Schill is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, June 5th.
- Senator Anne Zald (Libraries) shared a [collection of links](#) to alternate sources of government data and information
- The March agenda includes a discussion on admissions. The president encouraged senators to speak with their directors of graduate and undergraduate studies.

II. Faculty Forum Recap

The Faculty Senate hosted a Faculty Forum on Artificial Intelligence on February 7th. The president said approximately 50 faculty attended. The conversation centered on several broad themes, such as AI's impact on courses, learning objectives, and the ethical and research concerns AI poses. Some faculty expressed concern about whether faculty are giving clear guidance on acceptable uses of AI, and if given guidelines are realistically enforceable. Faculty also reported that students have questions about how faculty are detecting and reacting to the proper use of AI. Given the breadth of faculty views on AI, a concern was raised about how faculty might help students identify their own position on artificial intelligence, encouraging faculty to articulate reasons for their policies.

Attendees also discussed AI's impact on learning objectives and courses specific to discipline, eliciting a wide array of viewpoints. Some argued faculty should maintain a focus on teaching fundamentals and not be distracted by trends. Others shared some of the ways they effectively use AI in their classes to promote their learning objectives. Still, some expressed concern about how faculty develop critical thinking in their students through the use of AI or in the presence of AI.

Some ethical concerns raised included: the enormous impact large language models (LLMs) have on the environment (using huge amounts of energy and water), the integrity of the information used to train LLMs, the threat LLMs could pose to academic labor. Faculty also discussed the impact of overwork on students, and how that is leading them to rely on AI more despite faculty's policies.

There was little conversation about AI and its impact on research. The president will consult with the Faculty Senate's Research Affairs Committee to consider further conversations around AI and research.

Overall, the president said these questions were still unanswered, without broad agreement in the room. More open discussions are encouraged to continue interrogating the scale and scope of AI's impact on the university and society more broadly.

III. Standing Committee Reports

a. Non-Tenure Eligible

Senator Cat Fabian (NTE, School of Communication), chair of the Non-Tenure Eligible Committee, provided an overview of their work this year. She said they are researching and documenting the context of NTE at Northwestern and examining how that has changed over the years. She shared some figures (slide 11 in the deck linked above and below) on the makeup of the faculty in 2016 to last academic year (2023-24). She stressed the importance of monitoring that balance as it speaks to some of the critical components of academic freedom, that job security grants faculty the latitude to engage in groundbreaking and challenging research without fear of repercussion.

	2016		2023-2024***	
NU Faculty	~3100 members		~3300 members	
NTE Faculty	~1760 members	57%	~2400 members	73%
NTE Faculty (w/o Feinberg)		42%		37%

***AAUP reports at that same time, 68% were contingent faculty. Contrast that to 1987, when 47% of faculty were contingent.

Senator Fabian also said the long-planned NTE climate survey will be distributed very soon. The NTE Committee seeks transparency and accountability based on the results of the salary equity study and climate survey.

The NTE Committee has also been gathering data on appointment and promotion for clinical and teaching faculty practices, across the schools (slides 13 and 14). Senator Fabian reviewed the various data points and the committee's efforts to address outliers.

Moving forward, the NTE Committee will work with both the Salary and Benefits and Budgets and Planning Committees to review merit pool utilization in each of the schools.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences)

b. Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

Senator Mark Alznauer (Philosophy), chair of the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee, provided an update on the resolution presented at the November 13, 2024, Faculty Senate meeting, which the Senate voted to send back to committee for further review. The resolution centered around the issue of non-voluntary removal from teaching, sometimes in conjunction with a disciplinary question. The committee has been considering whether to modify the Faculty Handbook to make such removal appealable. He said the administration's position is clear: there is no legal right to teach, and teaching assignments are an administrative responsibility. Administration is unwilling to revisit this topic, which makes modifying the Handbook difficult.

Senator Alznauer then contrasted the administration's need to remove someone from teaching to address sexual harassment, age-related incapacity, and mental health concerns with the reasonable concerns faculty have that a dean or administrator could abuse such power. Given this impasse, the committee has been discussing a potential mechanism that gives limited faculty access to information that would allow them to judge whether the removal was *prima facie* appropriate. This committee discussion is still in its early stages. The committee continues to monitor the case that sparked this investigation into teaching duties. Senator Alznauer encouraged senators to send their thoughts and ideas to him and the committee.

A senator likened the situation at Northwestern to a case at LSU where a judge ordered the university to reinstate a professor after he was removed from teaching

for making political comments. Other senators encouraged the committee to continue to gather information from the administration so that the Senate can make the most informed decision regarding the Faculty Handbook.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Mark Johnson (Biomedical Engineering), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences)

c. Faculty Handbook

Senator Anne Zald (Libraries), chair of the Faculty Handbook Committee reported that they continue to work with the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee on the teaching-related sections of the Faculty Handbook. Her committee identified a number of broken links that have been shared with the Provost's Office. They are close to having a clean version of the Handbook to post online. She also noted that with the recent presidential election there will be no changes to Northwestern's Title IX policy. The Senate and the Faculty Handbook Committee pondered whether policy language should be included in the Handbook or available via a link to the policy, given the frequency of policy updates. It was pointed out that since the Handbook was the contract between the faculty and the University, it is important to have some legal language in the Handbook

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Regan Thomson (Senate Past President, Chemistry)

IV. Faculty Values and the Budget

The president acknowledged that the University will likely face significant budget pressures given the recent executive orders. With that in mind, she said she thought it was important the Senate articulate and convey to administration what faculty care about and how faculty would like them to think about these values as they make budget decisions.

Senator Michael Fishman (Finance), chair of the Budget and Planning Committee, then asked the Senate to discuss the following questions in breakout groups:

- What budget-related information would you like to have from the administration? What data do you need to understand and evaluate the budget decisions the university makes?
- What information would you like to provide to administration? What should they know then they make their decisions?

A few key themes emerged from breakout discussions:

Administration

- What are the parameters for existing spending and what is the degree of fungibility across those categories?
- How might the Senate be involved before major budget decisions are made? Relatedly, how might the Senate be involved in budget reform? Many comments centered around these questions.
- How does the administration prioritize academic disciplines and where do they get their data from?
- How does upper administration salary increases compare to the faculty's?

Board of Trustees

- How much say does the Board have over budget decisions?
- What is the threshold for an “emergency” when it comes to drawing additional endowment funds? What projections have been made and what are the projected outcomes for this current climate?

Schools

- How much discretion does a dean have when it comes to the current budget cuts?
- Request for transparent, school-specific budget figures.

Values

- Some senators said they value socially responsible investments, need-based scholarships rather than merit-based ones, and environmentally sustainable building on campus.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Ceci Rodgers (Medill), Jacqueline Babb (Medill), Ana Aparicio (Anthropology), Julia Oliver Rajan (Spanish and Portuguese), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Mark Johnson (Biomedical Engineering), Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences), Ian Hurd (Senate President-Elect, Political Science), Cat Fabian (NTE, School of Communication), Keith Tyo (Chemical and Biological Engineering), Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering)

V. Closed Session

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jared Spitz

Secretary to the Faculty Senate