

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Guild Lounge and Videoconference
November 13, 2024

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held a standing monthly meeting on November 13, 2024, in Scott Hall's Guild Lounge and over Zoom videoconference. President Jill Wilson (Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences) called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the October 16, 2024, meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record.

Actions

1. The Faculty Senate approved a motion to send a resolution from the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee back to the committee.

Meeting Summary

I. Conversation with President Schill

President Michael Schill began by speaking about the implications of the recent presidential election in general at universities and specifically at Northwestern. He noted the decline in overall support for higher education amongst Republicans and Democrats in the past few years. Coupled with recent campus divisions, the lack of support has created an incredibly volatile landscape for higher education. Some potential challenges the University is preparing to face are a diminishment in research funding, a tax on endowments for private universities, similar scrutiny from the House Education and Workforce Committee, a shift in leadership on Senate committees, the elimination of the Department of Education, and increased research security. He stressed that Northwestern cannot approach these challenges passively, and that the community must work together to protect Northwestern and its values. For his part, he said he would be working with leaders from American Association of Universities

and the Ivy-plus group to devise and implement strategies to limit the damage and change the narrative when it comes to higher education, stressing Northwestern's role in educating the leaders and citizens of the next generation.

President Schill also shared updates on his [priorities](#). He highlighted research partnerships between McCormick School of Engineering and Feinberg School of Medicine in the biosciences, the Trienens Institute of Sustainability, investments in AI, construction starting on the new social sciences hub at the Jacobs Center, and the recent creation of the Center for Enlightened Disagreement. He also noted that, despite affirmative action being struck down, Northwestern increased its share of students who identify as black, Latino or Latina, Pell eligible, and first generation. He ended by championing Northwestern's jump to number six in the U.S. News and World Report rankings.

President Schill then answered pre-submitted questions and questions from the floor. He addressed the need for international students and the support Northwestern is providing for them. He also commented on outside pressures to erode academic freedom and doubled down on his commitment to it as a bedrock value at Northwestern. He cited the Center for Enlightened Disagreement as a place to start fostering conversations that reach across difference.

President Schill also addressed the University budget, the challenges in generating revenue as costs like graduate student stipends and salaries and benefits rise, and his plan to fundraise to help mitigate those costs. He also clarified that the President's Committee on Free Expression and Institutional Speech's statement on institutional neutrality was not policy, nor were they saying that the University should be neutral, but rather that University leaders should not speak for the University because to do that was to coerce.

Senators who asked President Schill a question during the meeting: Nasrin Qader (French and Italian), Caryn Ward (Medill), Sarit Markovich (Strategy), Kent Grayson (Marketing)

II. Report of the Faculty Senate President

The president's report can be found [here](#). Below are brief updates the president provided.

- CTA 201 benefits were cancelled at the beginning of this year due to high costs and a strategic decision to redirect funds for electric and hybrid vehicles on campus. The HR Benefits office acknowledged communication regarding the cancellation could have been better.
- Associate Provost Sumit Dhar answered questions on faculty disciplinary processes from senators (see slides 7 and 8 in the link above)
- The Faculty Assembly is on December 3, from 12:30-2 p.m. in Guild Lounge and on Zoom.

III. Update on Research Processes

Vice President Eric Perreault joined the Senate to give an update on the Office of Research. His presentation slides are available in the link above (slides 10-29).

In addition to providing information on research progress, updates on the University priorities related to research, faculty accolades, and the growth of sponsored research over the past twenty years, Vice President Perreault also shared some practical changes within the Office of Research. Namely, the budget for the Office of Research has grown, which has allowed Vice President Perreault and his team to invest in strategic areas.

In response to an external review, the Office of Research increased staffing. This includes the addition of a new Chief Operating Officer, who will oversee sponsored research, compliance, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, etc. Other changes included a new research panel in IRB, and better internal and external communication. The Office of Research, based on faculty concerns, is also considering separating grant due dates i.e. all business portions (budget, subcontracts, etc.) of the grant still must be submitted five days in advance of the due date, but the science portion of the grant would have a two or three-day deadline.

Vice President Perreault also spoke about new research security measures at Northwestern and across the country. He said that starting in January there will be mandatory research security training. The University will also have an international travel registry and additional mandatory training when faculty travel to certain restricted countries.

Vice President Perreault then answered pre-submitted questions and questions from the floor. He noted faculty feedback can be routed through departmental research administrators (first point of contact) and associate deans of research in each of the schools. He also shared information about data security, stating that the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and anything related to the Chips Act are the three big areas of concern when it comes to research security.

Senators who asked Vice President Perreault a question: Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences)

IV. Resolution from Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee

Senator Mark Alznauer, chair of the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee submitted a resolution for approval (see Appendix).

The floor was opened for discussion. During discussion, Senator Rebecca Zorach (Art History), offered an amendment, which was seconded (see Appendix).

The floor was once again opened for discussion and the motion passed with 31 senators in favor and 28 against.

A subsequent motion to amend by Senator Jacqueline Babb (Medill) was made and seconded (see Appendix).

The floor was opened for discussion and the motion failed with 24 senators in favor and 24 against. The president abstained from voting.

A motion was then made to send the resolution back to the committee for further consideration. The motion was seconded and the vote passed with 40 senators in favor and 8 against.

Debate on the original resolution and the subsequent amendments focused on the lack of clarity and purpose of the resolution, which led to it being sent back to committee.

Senators who spoke during this portion of the meeting: Susan Pearson (History), Rebecca Zorach (Art History), Jacqueline Babb (Medill), Mark Johnson (Biomedical Engineering), Caryn Ward (Medill), Ceci Rodgers (Medill), Ian Hurd (Political Science), Kent Grayson (Marketing), Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering), TJ Billard (Communication Studies), Ian Horswill (Computer Science), Simone Ispa-Landa (Sociology), Eriz Zaslow (Mathematics)

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared Spitz

Secretary to the Faculty Senate

Appendix

Original Faculty Rights and Responsibilities resolution:

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook recognizes that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have the prerogative to assign teaching responsibilities and courses to each faculty member; and

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook prohibits the suspension (or assignment of other duties in lieu of suspension) of any faculty member except as the outcome of disciplinary procedures identified in the handbook, and allows for temporary suspension only in cases where the faculty member is judged to pose an immediate threat to themselves or to someone in the community; and

WHEREAS Professor Steven Thrasher's classes have been cancelled and he has been prohibited from teaching prior to any disciplinary investigation but without any determination that he is an immediate threat to himself or to anyone in the community;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate requests that the University leadership, in a timely manner:

1. Provide a clear statement as to how suspension (or assignment of duties, or temporary suspension) is interpreted by the University leadership such that removing Professor Steven Thrasher from the classroom is not a violation of his rights as a faculty member of Northwestern University.
2. Identify the limits, if any, of the prerogative that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have to involuntarily remove faculty from teaching in the classroom.

Senator Rebecca Zorach's proposed amendment:

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook recognizes that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have the prerogative to assign teaching responsibilities and courses to each faculty member; and

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook prohibits the suspension (or assignment of other duties in lieu of suspension) of any faculty member except as the outcome of disciplinary procedures identified in the handbook, and allows for temporary suspension only in cases where the faculty member is judged to pose an immediate threat to themselves or to someone in the community; and

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook guarantees faculty the right to appeal any sanction imposed by the administration; and

WHEREAS Professor Steven Thrasher's classes have been cancelled and he has been prohibited from teaching prior to any disciplinary investigation but without any determination that he is an immediate threat to himself or to anyone in the community; and without any possibility of appeal;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate requests that the University leadership, in a timely manner:

1. Provide a clear statement as to how prohibiting Professor Steven Thrasher from teaching the courses he was assigned does not constitute a suspension (or, an assignment of other duties, or a temporary suspension) is interpreted by the University leadership such that removing Professor Steven Thrasher from the classroom is not a violation of his rights as a faculty member of Northwestern University, or a sanction.
2. Identify the limits, if any, of the prerogative that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have to involuntarily remove faculty from teaching in the classroom.

Senator Jacqueline Babb's proposed amendment:

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook recognizes that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have the prerogative to assign teaching responsibilities and courses to each faculty member; and

WHEREAS the Northwestern University Faculty Handbook prohibits the suspension (or assignment of other duties in lieu of suspension) of any faculty member except as the outcome of disciplinary procedures identified in the handbook, and allows for temporary suspension only in cases where the faculty member is judged to pose an immediate threat to themselves or to someone in the community; and

WHEREAS it's unclear in the NU Faculty Handbook how the determination of "immediate threat to themselves or someone in the community" is decided and what kinds of behaviors constitute an "immediate threat"; ~~Professor Steven Thrasher's classes have been cancelled and he has been prohibited from teaching prior to any disciplinary investigation but without any determination that he is an immediate threat to himself or to anyone in the community;~~

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate requests that the University leadership, in collaboration with the Faculty Senate Handbook Committee~~a timely manner~~:

1. Identify or characterize, using examples, behaviors that could be deemed “an immediate threat” in the context of determining whether a faculty member should be temporarily suspended, with a goal of incorporating them into the Faculty Handbook. Provide a clear statement as to how suspension (or assignment of duties, or temporary suspension) is interpreted by the University leadership such that removing Professor Steven Thrasher from the classroom is not a violation of his rights as a faculty member of Northwestern University.
2. Provide guidelines for faculty to petition when classes are canceled for reasons that involve faculty behavior." ~~Identify the limits, if any, of the prerogative that school deans, department chairs, and program directors have to involuntarily remove faculty from teaching in the classroom.~~