

MINUTES
April 3, 2024

University of Nebraska – Lincoln
Academic Planning Committee

Members Present: Ankerson, Bloom, Boehm, Button, Clarke, Cressler, Davis, Doll, Heng-Moss, Jones, Latta Konecky, Mowat, Ourada, Theiss-Morse, Tschetter, Vuran, Haake, Gonzales

Members Absent: Minter, Russo

Note: These are not verbatim minutes. This is a summary of the discussions at the Academic Planning Committee meeting as corrected by those participating.

1.0 Call

Vuran called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

2.0 Approval of March 20, 2024 Minutes

Vuran asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Doll moved and Latta Konecky seconded approval of the minutes. Vuran then asked if there were any revisions. Hearing none he declared the minutes approved.

3.0 Budget Reduction Procedures

Vuran reported that he met with Chancellor Bennett last week to discuss whether the budget reduction procedures could be improved, and he met with Davis and Faculty Senate President Kopocis on Monday to discuss certain ways we could move forward with revising the procedures. He noted that the process this past fall was somewhat different as compared to previous years in that the goal was to have the APC more involved in the budget reduction process. He pointed out that the APC did not receive the full budget reduction proposal until late November and was able to provide feedback to the Chancellor in December which was the fastest time the APC has reacted and responded to budget reductions. He believed that this was due to APC's early involvement with the process and now the committee needs to review what worked well and how we could improve the process.

Davis stated he would provide an overview of where we are currently. He noted that we do have a projected deficit for the next fiscal year, but the amount of the deficit is not a confirmed number and could vary depending on decisions that will be made by the new President. He stated that the Chancellor continues to advocate for UNL to minimize our share of the reductions, but in the meantime the APC can use the time to improve the process. He reported that the Chancellor plans to meet with each Dean and some of the faculty in each college to discuss what challenges they are facing and what opportunities they need to move forward. He reported that the Chancellor has now met with two of the colleges. He pointed out that on February 15th the Chancellor met with a group of academic leaders from across the campus where a lot of frustration was heard about the process. He stated that the Chancellor will meet with the APC at some point to discuss the idea of revising the procedures.

Davis noted that no one was happy with the budget reduction process this past fall, but one thing that we do have control over is with our rules and processes for dealing with reductions. He suggested that these could be revised to clarify the process, the procedures could be thrown out and new procedures developed, or they could remain as they are but there could be a more collaborative process. He pointed out that the UNL Bylaws describe the APC's responsibilities as being very proactive and collaborative, and he asked if there are things the committee can do to shift things more towards these directions.

Bloom stated that there are many issues here and noted that the more general purposes of the APC are probably not used as best as they can be. He noted that we don't generate our own work, the committee gets proposals from the units, and participates in academic program reviews but the APC has not fully embraced its planning capabilities. He questioned why the APC does not develop a campus strategy, noting that the APC is comprised of very good committee members who have serious discussions. He stated that he did not think the existing budget reduction procedures were used as well as they could have been.

Gonzales stated that the biggest issue he saw with the budget reduction process had to do with the committee's decision not to recommend two of the proposed reductions. He asked what feedback the APC should provide to suggest alternative reductions noting that if the APC has the power not to recommend a proposed reduction, then it should have the power to provide alternative options, but it would have to act quickly. Pechous pointed out that the APC needs to clearly define what it means by recommendations. Is it saying it is recommending approval or not.

Doll noted that Pechous' statement is astute and pointed out that the APC is empowered to make recommendations, but not empowered to make decisions. She stated that gathering information from the faculty/staff/students is an important role for the APC and she does not think we did that to the degree it has been done in the past, however, this was due in part to the APC getting information so late in the process. She stated that solid data are needed, although it should not be the only consideration when making budget reductions.

Haake pointed out that in the spring 2023 budget reductions the APC had more insight into some of the non-academic budget reduction conversations, which often impact staff. She asked if there could be more opportunities to engage with the staff when these kinds of reductions are being made. Mowat seconded that comment and pointed out that there are communication issues that need to be addressed. She noted that the campus does not do well with sharing the campus goals to all levels of the campus community. She questioned how the ASUN and GSA representatives of the APC could get the best feedback from their constituents. Doll pointed out that it is good to keep these concerns in mind noting that it was difficult to get feedback this past fall because the process unfolded so quickly. Ourada noted that there were no hearings on the budget reductions and people were unclear whether their online comments were ignored making people feel that the process was being circumvented. She stated that the APC needs to consider how it communicates the work that the Committee does to the wider community.

Pechous stated that the APC needs to find a way to be more proactive, noting that some things are under the control of the committee. He pointed out that the motion to create a Faculty Budget Committee (FBC) that was approved by the Faculty Senate yesterday, seeks to have a

more proactive approach to the budget. Cressler noted that he is on the Faculty Senate and while the intent of the motion was good, it did not say how the FBC would interact with the APC. He pointed out that while being proactive sounds like a great idea the question is what the APC could do to be more proactive. Tschetter suggested that redoing the Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reallocations and Reductions might address some of the concerns that were raised during the Senate meeting.

Bloom asked what the university's priorities will be and how can the APC be an influence on these priorities. He stated that the APC could provide some guidelines and develop a framework. He noted that at some point the APC may need to be pickier about proposals for new academic programs because of the budget constraints. Jones stated that it is a good idea to establish a framework that makes recommendations about approving programs and evaluates existing programs. She suggested the APC could establish a recurring process to evaluate programs and information from the academic program reviews could be used to assist in the evaluations. Mowat pointed out that the APC's responsibilities as stated in the UNL Bylaws empower the Committee to make recommendations for goals for the campus in the areas of education, research, and service.

Heng-Moss questioned what is meant by programs, degree programs, academic mission, and does it include Extension. She pointed out that making substantial budget reductions isn't about eliminating a program, it's about eliminating a unit. Bloom noted that the definition of a program is defined in [Executive Memorandum No. 24 – Definition of University of Nebraska Program](#). He stated that while the APC has a representative to observe that APRs are conducted correctly, there are many departments that don't go through an academic program review. He noted that most of the APR reports suggest that a recurring theme is that units need additional resources for their programs.

Vuran stated that if changes are to be made to the budget procedures it is important to make sure that everyone on the APC is willing to take on these responsibilities. He noted that if the APC becomes more proactive would it be encroaching on other people's responsibilities and to what level should the APC be more involved in the budget cutting process?

Button reported that he is hearing from faculty and staff that they want to be a part of the process earlier before the APC is given the itemized categories of proposed budget reductions. He asked how we can open the process to have more shared governance so we can give and receive feedback. He noted that the Procedures state that the Chancellor provides information on the budget to the stakeholders and as of now he believes the stakeholders are the Deans and the APC, but he pointed out that this could be a key time to have more meaningful conversations with the campus community before the proposed budget reductions are presented to the APC. He asked how much ongoing continual review needs to precede the conversations about budget reductions noting that people's financial literacy and familiarity with the programs would become more critical if these discussions occur.

Ankerson stated that while having more of these reciprocal kinds of conversations creates trust and transparency, consideration also needs to be given to risk and reward. Risk in terms of information sharing in open preliminary conversations with a potential risk of revealing

information which could pinpoint whose jobs would be in jeopardy. The reward is transparency in process. She stated that there are regular duties of an administrator in making decisions that affect budget for their unit, that are not part of APC considerations; and there are duties that affect academic programs directly that are part of the APC duties. She believes that defining what is considered an academic program and defining the APC's purview need to be part of the conversation.

Jones wondered if the APC could have a more routine review of academic programs and the budget situation, so it does not always come to the committee as a crisis reaction. She said that an example of this is from an institution where the President or Chancellor forwards on a regular basis a list of underperforming programs to review. She asked if the APC would be willing to do this and noted that while it caused anxiety for some people in a unit, others embraced the opportunity to educate people about their programs and where they are headed with it.

Bloom stated that in a perfect world there would be no surprises because we would all understand the financial status of the university, and we could see what was working well. He noted that we are starting to see some transparency about the CCPE guidelines for academic programs, but he pointed out that we should not be surprised by budget problems and if the incentive-based budget model had worked, we would be able to see where the revenues are coming in and where the expenses are, and we would have better transparency with the budget.

Vuran pointed out that we focus too much on dealing with the budget reductions and don't focus on getting out of the problem. He stated that for a university that is struggling with enrollment, it surprises him to see that we are not interested in changing things. He noted that we need to see what students need to have a successful college career and to be attracted to the university and we should look at other institutions whose enrollments are increasing. Doll pointed out that while increasing enrollment will help with the budget, it will not be enough to get us out of these budget problems. Bloom stated that consideration also needs to be given as to what is being done at the system level that is impacting the budget. Ankerson reported that at our peak enrollment in 2017-18 we had approximately 1200 international students, but this number decreased sharply due to the political climate of the country and then the pandemic. She noted that international enrollment is starting to improve but we also need tuition increases and investments to improve our budget especially in light of inflation.

Davis stated that he is hearing from the APC interested in discussing how we increase revenue, how to become more efficient, and how do we secure additional investment from the university system. He noted that we also must wrestle with how to become more transparent and provide better communications, and how we create a more routine role for the APC in priority planning with the budget. He stated that he will check with the Chancellor to see when he can meet with the APC to discuss these ideas.

Cressler pointed out that it is the UNL faculty body that has elected the faculty members of the APC, but most of the faculty do not know what the committee does. He stated that if we are going to institute a policy of looking at academic programs, we need to be clearer about this with the faculty otherwise they will lose confidence in the APC. He noted that people seem to think that the Academic Planning Committee serves at the pleasure of the Chancellor, but it does not.

He stated that the Faculty Senate's motion to create a Faculty Budget Committee is indicative of the faculty's frustration of feeling that there is no transparency and no shared governance. Mowat pointed out that the budget framework seemed to be a point of contention and if the Procedures are to be revised this is an area that needs to be cleaned up.

Theiss-Morse stated that she is in favor of the APC being proactive and currently when the APC has voted to eliminate an academic program it has come at the request of the department. She pointed out that eliminating a program to save money is a different thing and she would not be comfortable making that decision. She noted that the **APC did a good job this fall** of dealing with the budget reductions in a very short period of time. She stated that a considerable amount of the budget process has to do with the Chancellor's office and getting the necessary information to the APC in a timely manner. She noted that she is in favor of the APC being more proactive by knowing more about the overall budget situation.

Boehm stated that there are expectations and the role of academic leaders across the enterprise to do specific things such as working with the stakeholders to develop a strategic direction. He noted that this would be a shared vision and consideration needs to be given to the programs that are aligned with the defined strategic direction and then how adjustments to allocate resources are made to drive that strategy. He pointed out that shared governance is done at the local level and there are pockets of transparency when budgets are put on the table and hiring decisions are made. He stated that we need a system that is bigger than constantly being in crisis mode or we won't be making our way to excellence. He noted that decisions need to be respected at the local level and at the end of the day the local decisions and leaders need to be listened to. He stated that we need standards at UNL, and we are not clear what our strategies are. Bloom asked where standards are lacking at the university. Boehm said just in general, standards are lacking. He stated that we should have a standard of productivity level for an academic unit when it comes to teaching and learning and this information could then be shared with a body that looks to see how programs are performing. Tschetter stated that the academic program reviews would be a good place to start when considering whether an academic program is meeting a set of standards.

4.0 Reports from EVC Ankersen, VC Boehm, Interim VC Jones

Boehm

Boehm reported that he just came from hand delivering the remaining promotion and tenure letters to IANR faculty and he wanted to express a huge thanks to the faculty committees and the leadership for their efforts on working on the tenure and promotion files.

Boehm noted that there are some 7,000 Future Farmers of America students visiting both East and City Campus and pointed out that these students are interested in everything, not just agricultural courses.

Boehm stated that he is excited for UNL to host Dr. Gold, the priority candidate for the President of the University of Nebraska. He noted that the vetting schedule is being arranged by the President's office in Central Administration.

Jones

Jones pointed out that there are some very strategic professional development opportunities in ORED, and she is going to talk about the NSF Career Club which was established in 2017. She stated that this reflects what we need to be doing about strategic programming because as of today UNL is one of only 11 academic institutions to receive 6 or more NSF Career Awards and in 2023 we tied with Princeton and Rice Universities and outpaced MIT and John Hopkins, and we are second in the Big Ten and poised to be number one in 2024. She noted that the Research Enterprise Apprenticeship Program was recently launched, and this gives our undergraduate students internship opportunities. She stated that there is currently a group of 13 students who will begin their apprenticeship this summer and noted that these students will gain foundational knowledge, have hands-on experience, learn soft skills, and will cultivate job placement across the research enterprise.

Jones reported that we have three active COBRE projects and there are plans to submit two more applications, one in January 2025 and one in January 2026. She noted that Rural Drug Additional Research (RADR) Center was recently awarded their phase 2 funding of \$11.6 million and noted that the animated film The Bell Affair is now available on streaming. She pointed out that NUTech was involved with the film which was done with a distributor. She reported that the University Press received 68 awards for their publications this year and stated that Morrill Hall recently reopened after renovations and the Joel Sartore exhibit should be open by mid-April. She announced that a 6-figure donation was provided to refurbish the mammoth and other displays at the museum. She encouraged everyone to follow her on Twitter for more good news about UNL.

Jones reported that we had a good number of Fulbright applications make it to the next round and we have had two Fulbright and one Goldwater awards granted. She noted that there are still 11 applications outstanding.

Jones stated that there will be an undergraduate poster seminar at the Governor's mansion which highlights the work of the students and so far, 18 Senators plus their staff will be in attendance. She stated that great things are also happening with our graduate students, and she commended Mowat on the great job she is doing as GSA President.

Jones noted that Professor Sheridan, Educational Psychology, has recently been elected to the National Academy of Education, and she is the first person from UNL to be elected to this prestigious organization. Bloom asked if the AAU recognizes the National Academy of Education in its metrics.

Ankerson

Ankerson reported that 67 promotion and tenure letters were sent out today and noted that the celebration for these faculty members will be held on May 7th.

Ankerson stated that the Director of Undergraduate Education, Dr. Patty Sollars, has agreed to be the liaison between UNL and the Higher Learning Commission for our upcoming reaccreditation and she knows that Dr. Sollars will do an excellent job.

Ankerson stated that Student Affairs is already working on the homecoming events that will be held in October. She pointed out that the Counseling Center reports to Student Affairs and the Center will be experimenting with Teletherapy to provide more mental health services to our students. She stated that we will carefully see how this works and if successful, we will look at future options with it. She reported that during the CAO meeting Dr. Gold discussed the Surgeon General's visit to the University and the focus on mental health and how the amount of screen time for young people can negatively impact their mental health. She stated that there is consideration of having a study that looks at the effects of too much screen time for middle and high school students. She noted that the study could lead us to consider what wrap around services might be appropriate for us to have for students. Mowat suggested that consideration needs to be given to determine underlying causes in the university culture that can impact mental health negatively. She questioned what could be done to make the campus a better place for graduate students saying that addressing the additional work hours that some graduate students are expected to perform, the appeals process, and lack of understanding of an international student's culture are examples of issues that should be addressed. She asked what kind of support international students receive once they get here.

Vuran stated that he recently learned that there is an increased number of cases of graduate students having medical issues, yet research assistants do not get medical leave and the only option they have is to take an academic leave which strips them of their funding. He pointed out that this is an issue that needs to be dealt with. Ankerson noted that there are a number of issues that are being addressed and she has had conversations with Dean Hope, Graduate Studies, about stipends and asked her to work with GSA about the issue.

Ankerson reported that our numbers show that we are still up in first-time freshman enrollment deposits and graduate student enrollment numbers are up too, more so with masters' students than PhDs. She noted that a team of people have just returned from India, Vietnam, and Malaysia where there were admitted student events coupled with alumni events and workshops. She pointed out that this relationship building is one of our approaches to attracting more international students and she believes we will have positive outcomes from these efforts.

Ankerson reported that there continues to be issues with FASFA, but we are getting about 1,000 forms a day from the Department of Education and we will be ahead of many other universities who are experiencing significant stalls with FASFA. She pointed out that in terms of packaging our team is very ready to get the financial packages together and sent out. She noted that our housing deposits are also up.

5.0 Other Business

Mowat reported that GSA is working with the Office of Graduate Studies on Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week. The week starts with the NU Graduate and Professional Student Showcase and Social and there are already 145 people registered for the event.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:46 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.