

**University of Nebraska – Lincoln  
Academic Planning Committee**

**April 9, 2025 Minutes**

**Members Present:** Bloom, Button, Clarke, Combs, Cressler, Davis, Gay, Herbin, Heng-Moss, Kopocis, Mueller, Nelson, Ourada, Russo, Tschetter, Van Den Wymelenberg

**Members Absent:** Boehm, Jemkur, Thomas

**Guests:** AVC Zavala, AVC Meier

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

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**1.0 Call**

Clarke called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m.

**2.0 Approval of March 26, 2025 Minutes**

Clarke asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Bloom stated that he had a minor revision to the minutes which he would send to Griffin to correct. Clarke then asked if there was unanimous approval to the minutes. The APC approved the minutes.

**3.0 Proposal to Rename the Bachelor Fine Arts to Entertainment Design and Production**

Clarke noted that the proposal was just to rename the Bachelor of Fine Arts to Entertainment Design and Production, so the proposal did not need to be reviewed by a subcommittee. Ourada pointed out that the change in name more accurately reflects the Theatre department's degree program. Tschetter moved for approval of the proposal. Ourada seconded the motion which was then approved by the APC.

**4.0 Strategic Planning – Extraordinary Research and Creative Activity: Establish the University of Nebraska System research and creative activity scope and prominence as widely recognized for extraordinary societal impact as a top tier institution. (Interim VC Nelson, AVC Zavala, AVC Meier)**

Nelson reported that the Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) is focusing on continuing our journey in promoting a culture and environment for excellence in research, scholarship, creative endeavors, and economic development. She noted that we first combined our research expenditures with UNMC in FY2023 which brought the combined campuses expenditures to \$617 million, and of that \$365 million was from UNL. She pointed out that a recent survey showed that UNL is now up to \$386 million which brings us to a combined total of \$657 million.

Nelson stated that the presentation today will focus on President Gold's strategic pillar for extraordinary research and creative activity. She pointed out that there are three areas that are highlighted. The first is building a common research identity and for UNL that is making sure that our portfolio of research and scholarship is well represented and well communicated. She

stated that there is the idea of identifying and growing impactful federally funded research themes and programs, and the societal impact of what our research is doing. She reported that invitations have been sent out to faculty inviting them to attend a discussion on May 7th to gather the variety of perspectives and information sources important to shaping UNL's research identity. She stated that the key points for discussion would include collaboration and co-creation, especially with community, government, and industry partners; listening to the research community about needs to facilitate research growth; and allowing for open discussion for further collaborations. She stated that hopefully there will be a guest speaker from the APLU who can help provide the most up-to-date information from the federal funding agencies.

Nelson stated that we also need to be thinking about opportunities and what are the priorities for the State, and here in Lincoln. She noted that we also need to consider where we have made investments in different infrastructures, such as human infrastructure and what areas we have been hiring in, also what buildings we have been investing in. She pointed out that we are all aware of the financial constrictions we are under so it is really important that we think deeply about who we are so we may build on what's special, what is unique about us and to identify what strengths we must build upon. She stated that one of the special things about the University of Nebraska is the way in which we collaborate with one another, not just within our own campus, but across the university system. She noted that we need to think about how we collaborate and can co-create with a variety of partners including industry partners, community partners, and government partners.

Meier reported that in order to help facilitate research, ORI has a number of existing faculty supports in place. He stated that UNL is one of the first universities in the country to implement cohort-based programs to help faculty be successful. He noted that the Research Leaders Program positions emerging research leaders to take their programs to a higher, more collaborative level and pursue major extramural funding. InterFACE (Faculty Academy for Competitive Excellence) interfaces with universities in five other EPSCoR states in the region to support faculty members applying to NIH for research funding. He stated that other programs include the NSF CAREER Club which is an award-winning program that has helped to increase the productivity of NSF career awards on campus pointing out that we now have 9 faculty members designated as career award winners, and we are a top 20 producer of NSF career awards. He reported that there are two new programs, Research Development Fellows Program, and NU 2 Foundations. He stated that the NU 2 Foundations program helps individuals who have not previously prepared or received Foundation funding to help them identify a target foundation to pitch their research projects to. Further information on support programs can be found at <https://research.unl.edu/research-development/>.

Meier reported that ORI wants to ensure that the campus community knows about the full range of funding opportunities both public and private, that exist. In order to get this information out ORI publishes each week funding announcements which are a customized digest of funding opportunities tailored to the eligibility and interest of our campus community. He noted that it is also the primary publication for publicizing limited submission competitions. He encouraged people to subscribe to the funding announcements if they are not receiving the information (contact [jhardin11@unl.edu](mailto:jhardin11@unl.edu) to subscribe). He stated that about 1700 people receive the publication each week.

Meier noted that we have long-standing internal funding opportunities. He stated that since 2013, there has been a revision award mechanism, which he thinks has been undersubscribed. He stated that if someone had a proposal that was highly rated but was not funded, the proposers are recommended to meet with him to see if improvements can be made to the proposal. He pointed out that there are funds that are available for revision and resubmission. He stated that this has helped people receive funding on their second or sometimes third try. He reported that for the first time a book, fellowship and manuscript workshop program was developed this past fall. He stated that funds can be provided that could be used to help someone complete a book or manuscript so it can be submitted to a publisher. He pointed out that 77 awards were provided for a total of about \$120,000. He stated that a review panel looked at the applications and made recommendations to Nelson on which ones should be awarded funding.

Meier noted that the Research Council, which works closely with ORI, offers funding opportunities as well. There is the Interdisciplinary Grant which is intended to bring collaborators together from different disciplines to conduct research. The Research Council Faculty Seed Grant is for projects that encourage and enhance research, creative, and scholarly activities and enhance the prospects of obtaining outside competitive support. The Research Council Grants-in-Aid are for projects that promote a faculty member's research, creative, and scholarly activities, which may or may not enhance the prospects for obtaining outside support. The Research Council Special Opportunity Funding and the Research Council Visiting School Distinguished Lecturer and Symposia support visiting scholars and distinguished lecturers. He pointed out that these funding opportunities are currently being reviewed to see if they remain current and if they are effective.

Meier reported that many of the federal funding agencies want to know what the potential impacts of a research project would be and how the research findings are going to go beyond academia to have community and societal impacts. He stated that Jocelyn Bosley, Research Impact Coordinator, helps faculty develop their research impact partnerships and plans and she conducts annual training sessions for faculty, graduate students and post docs to think about the broader impacts of their research.

Meier stated that ORI also has experts on campus to help with proposal development. He stated that this group will dig into the narrative of an application and will help to develop it, so the application is more successful. He stated that the Research Project Management Office works well with department units and provides elevated support for large-scale interdisciplinary grants. He reported that another service is the external recognitions and awards program. He stated that this service seeks to help boost the number of UNL faculty who receive honorific awards. He pointed out that since starting this program the number of faculty members who have received honorific awards has doubled.

Meier stated that in order to elevate and go to the next level with faculty conducting research, ORI held focus groups this past fall to see what is working well, what could be improved and what we should be thinking about for the future of research. He noted that one thing that became apparent is that faculty feel that there is no support after a research program ends. Also, the need for additional support staff was voiced by the participants. He stated that the data that was

collected from the focus groups was shared with the deans in February and initiatives were proposed such as PI development sessions and how we can work together to pursue large-scale collaborations. He noted that other cohorts are focusing on team-based proposals.

Nelson reported that ORI is thinking about a research communication team to see how we can communicate with all of the different research that is taking place on campus and how we can identify and communicate these research efforts to our stakeholders. She pointed out that ORI needs services that are easy to use and that are efficient, and she is thinking of the Sponsored Programs team which has experienced challenges in keeping a fully staffed team. She reported that the new director of technology transfers has established an express licensing process, and the office is looking to see if other processes can be streamlined.

Nelson stated that ORI is in the process of the first cohort of Nebraska Research Enterprise Apprenticeship Program (NREAP) which is a two-year process for students to learn about the different opportunities for a career in research administration. She reported that there were initially 14 students, but we are now down to 12.

Bloom asked what we could recommend investing in that would have the biggest impact on our research efforts. Nelson stated that first and foremost would be faculty hiring. She stated that if we could expand by hiring strategically it would help grow our research enterprise.

Cressler stated that for research metrics, research expenditures are a relatively easy one to quantify. He stated that for programs that have different research expenditures is there a better way to quantify what is happening. He pointed out that he is not sure how research in creative fields would fit into the metrics. Nelson noted that we have been paying a lot of attention to AAU metrics which include books, honors, and awards. She stated that there are a number of faculty in the arts and humanities that engage in interdisciplinary research teams and pointed out that there are different opportunities for the arts and humanities community.

Gay asked why the regional InterFACE collaborative was not with our peers in the BIG Ten. Meier reported that the need existed among us and the universities in the regional collaborative, and it happened at the same time. It also gave UNL the opportunity to take a leading role in the collaborative. He noted that there is always interest in expanding the collaborative.

Davis asked what it means for us to be connected with UNMC research and whether there is expertise we can benefit from with this connection. Nelson stated that when we merged our research expenditure with UNMC it elevated us nationally, which is a major benefit for us. She stated that we can still do all of the different research we are doing, but we should also watch to see if we can do more collaborative research with UNMC. She stated that we can leverage strengths across the campuses and pointed out that virology is one area that we should think more deeply about collaborating in. She stated that there are some collaborations already occurring and IRBs are working well.

Gay stated that agriculture and medicine are the obvious research identifiers. He asked how our metrics in agriculture research compare with other universities and where do we stand in terms of the number of faculty. He suggested that we may need to focus on things that are obviously

our strength. Nelson agreed but pointed out that we need to tell our story louder, and while ag research represents a significant portion of our research portfolio, it is not the entire thing, and we need to convey this information. Heng-Moss stated that we have an opportunity here as we work together to make some improvements, and she believes we can do more with interdisciplinary research. She questioned how we can position ourselves to be unique, and noted that there is a lot of synergy to figure out what we can have distinction in.

Button reported that when you look at the AAU indicators and look across the university in our areas of strength, the College of Arts and Sciences is leading many of the metrics, and if you extrapolate that out, it speaks to the importance of sustaining and focusing on the comprehensive portfolio. He noted that when we are assessing programs in each college it is being done with their peers at other universities, not with programs within UNL. As a result, things look different for each program when we think about activities and creative scholarships. He pointed out that we want our research identity to be broader noting that the presentation was about cohorts and transdisciplinary collaboration, and we need to think about having a strategic hiring plan that allows for cluster hires. Meier pointed out that our size allows us to have the flexibility to have more interdisciplinary collaboration.

Van Den Wymelenberg noted that looking at the President's Pillars, creative activity is mentioned only once. He stated that the push for AAU metrics is funding counts first, but he questioned how we can influence the system to look differently. He pointed out that creativity could make a big road into societal impact but when you think of metrics it is a little harder to define creative/scholarly metrics. He questioned how we can grow creative/scholarly research so it is not treated like a second-class citizen because it may not bring in the large research grant funding.

Cressler stated that a case could be made that we need more people to get research grants because we see the same people continually getting grants. He pointed out that there a number of faculty members who have remained at the associate professor level for some time and he asked if any thought has been given to how to help mid-career people who may feel jaded about research funding success. He suggested that these faculty members should be targeted for assistance which could make a difference for them to rediscover what they are interested in researching. Nelson acknowledged that this is something that we have struggled with noting that the focus has been mostly on junior faculty members. She asked what we would need to do to help re-energize these faculty members. Ourada stated that collaboration for mid-career people allows them to bring their expertise into a team which could really help them get re-energized with research.

Heng-Moss pointed out that we do ourselves a disservice by putting all of the AAU institutions into the matrix and suggested that we narrow it down to the land-grant institutions. She stated that it would compare us with more similar institutions. She noted that we need to do our own storytelling and determine our own destiny.

## **5.0 Reports from Interim EVC Button, Interim VC Nelson, VC Boehm**

### Button

Button reported that undergraduate and graduate enrollments for the fall semester were looking positive and were up 6.4% above where we were at this same time last year. He noted that we have a 20% increase in non-resident deposits and if that holds true for the fall semester, we will have the largest enrollment of out-of-state freshmen students ever. He stated that international enrollments are flat right now, although we have seen a substantial increase in applications, and we are seeing a healthy increase in out-of-state graduate applications as well. He stated that we will know more information about enrollment after April 15.

Button stated that he is excited about the undergraduate enrollment and is cautiously optimistic about the graduate enrollment. He pointed out that international students and scholars are extremely vexed right now with the news that visas are being revoked for some people. He reported that a lot of guidance has been sent out to students and scholars, and they have been made aware that legal services are available should they need it. He stated that there is also a FAQ page, and we are tracking and trying to provide resources to our international community.

Bloom asked what the increase in out-of-state enrollment can be attributed to. Button stated that Admissions have been targeting more aggressively specific areas of students and that it has been helpful to have people on the ground in these areas directly recruiting students. He noted that bundling our scholarship package together has been helpful as well.

Button noted that the Lincoln Journal Star reported on the impacts the federal government's cuts were having on the humanities scholarships and he wanted to thank Nelson for bringing that community together quickly to address the National Endowment for the Humanities notification that all humanities councils awarded grants were cancelled in their entirety. He pointed out that this shows how quickly we can rally and come together to address the issues that we are facing, and he wanted people to know they can lean on the campus community for support.

Button stated that he was excited to announce that 103 faculty members have been notified about promotion and/or tenure. He reported that May 6<sup>th</sup> will be the day of celebration honoring their achievement.

Button stated that upcoming events include the Alumni Masters Week where many alumni come back to campus for the event.

Button reported that the University Libraries is celebrating 80 years of Love South and 50 years of Love North.

### Nelson

Nelson reported that seven out of eight NEH grants have been terminated. She pointed out that the Office of Research and Innovation continues to partner with General Counsel concerning the

letters of termination and we need to see what will happen given that many lawsuits are being filed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:32 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, May 7, 2025. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.