

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

April 23, 2025 Minutes

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

Members Absent: Boehm, Thomas,

Guests: VC Zeleny, Staff Senate President Gonzales, AVC Hope

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

Clarke called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m.

2.0 Approval of April 9, 2025 Minutes

Clark asked if there were any revisions to the April 9th minutes. Hearing none she asked for unanimous approval of the minutes. The APC approved the minutes.

3.0 APC Representative Needed for Philosophy APR (March 8-11, 2026)

Clarke asked if anyone would be willing to serve as the APC representative on the Philosophy APR. Cressler volunteered to serve.

4.0 Pilot Program to Facilitate Graduate Program Approval

Clark noted that this revisits the proposal to facilitate the graduate program approval process. She pointed out that currently graduate programs have an extra step in the approval process because it must go to the Graduate Council for review. She stated that with the proposal, the Graduate Council representative on the APC would act as a liaison and would attend the Graduate Council meeting when a proposal is being reviewed. Unless the liaison feels that the APC must act separately on a proposal, it would be added to the next APC agenda with a recommendation for approval.

Bloom stated that he understands the motivation behind the pilot program but asked if the APC has assessed how often and how much the APC has asked additional questions after it has been reviewed by the Graduate Council. Clarke stated that this is why the liaison would still have to report to the APC about a proposal. Button noted that the Graduate Council does a thoughtful review of proposals which is why it would be a consent agenda item for the APC, unless the liaison felt that there were things that needed to be addressed in a proposal.

Clarke moved to approve the pilot program. Motion seconded by Russo and approved by the APC.

Hope pointed out that nominations are now being taken for members for the Graduate Council. She reported that faculty members from the Arts and Engineering disciplines are needed.

5.0 Budget Reduction - \$5 million (Zeleny and Button)

Zeleny noted that the Chancellor sent out a message recently about the current budget situation which indicated that the first phase of the budget reduction will be \$5,000,000. He stated that this will be an across-the-board reduction and pointed out that this reduction does not fall under the APC's purview as it does not directly impact academic programs. He reported that the primary divisions that will be affected by the \$5 million budget reductions will be the Vice Chancellors' office, Office of Research and Innovation, Academic Affairs, Office of Student Life, and the Chancellor's offices. He stated that college recommendations were made by the Deans to the administration and the Executive Leadership Team received this information.

Zeleny stated that \$5,000,000 is a 1% cut to our state-aided budget and the reductions are operational in nature. He said the reduction included a couple of filled lines and one staff person will be ruffed when their contract expires. He stated that some vacant lines will not be filled, and some operational costs were eliminated. He reported that slightly less than \$750,000 was shifted to non-state aided funds and when you total everything up the Chancellor's office took a greater share of the budget reductions. He noted that this budget reduction is effective this year.

Button stated that the Chancellor made clear in his message to the campus, that this was not a significant budget reduction. However, Button pointed out, in reviewing everything from the colleges whenever you cut \$5 million dollars you are hurting academic programs. He noted that a lot of vacant positions, both faculty and staff, will not be filled due to this round of reductions. Bloom stated that he disagreed with the comment that this was not a significant budget reduction and said that it is the worst thing to happen in the history of the university. He pointed out that everyone should be horrified by these continual reductions to the university's budget, particularly if we are trying to rejoin the AAU. He stated that we must have a communication strategy conveying how terrible these continual budget reductions are for the university.

Gay stated that when the APC is not involved in reviewing the budget reductions, it eliminates shared governance. Zeleny stated that no vertical reductions or program eliminations occurred with this \$5 million budget reduction so the Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reductions would not be enacted.

Gay pointed out that the staff have been cut to the bone and some faculty lines will not be filled. He questioned how many administrators will be cut due to the budget reductions. Zeleny reported that there were a number of administrative cuts, most of them are on the programmatic side. He noted that in his office a person is resigning and will not be replaced. He stated there was also administrative support production so there is a significant amount of what would be categorized as personnel and operations related to administration that will be eliminated. He pointed out that graduate students and student workers would not be impacted by the budget reductions. Gay noted that in the last major budget reduction process the administration increased by 60%, but the staff decreased by 40%. Zeleny stated that he would need to follow up with Gay about these numbers.

Jemkur asked about graduate student and student worker lines and whether they would be impacted by the budget reductions. Zeleny stated that in total the amount would be less than \$100,000 and only a handful of student worker positions, and one or possibly two graduate students would no longer be funded.

Clarke asked how this information will be broadly communicated to the campus. Zeleny stated that there will probably be a story in Nebraska Today and he understands Bloom's point about needing to convey that this is a terrible cut to the university. He noted that these types of reductions do not require going to the Board of Regents for approval. Bloom pointed out that the Board of Regents should be horrified by these cuts, especially if we're trying to get readmitted into the AAU. Mueller agreed and pointed out that a larger budget reduction is still coming. He stated that any cut whether it is not filling a faculty member's position and losing more staff members, results in passing more work onto the faculty. He agrees that we should raise serious concerns about every cut that we receive.

6.0 Strategic Pillar – Extraordinary Stewardship and Effectiveness (VC Zeleny)

Zeleny stated that this pillar is asking us to establish a University of Nebraska system that is extraordinarily effective, efficient and stable organization for planning and implementation of all mission driven goals. He noted that in the N2025 strategic plan there was an appendix regarding environmental stewardship and financial stewardship model which shows that we have been addressing this issue for some time. He stated that recently we received some drafts from the Office of the President about what some of these measures might be with most of them so far being related and pertaining to financial metrics. He reported that we are looking at salaries and what percentile we are in on the staff and faculty side and perhaps we'll look at student measures as well. He stated that we need to consider whether there are better ways of delivering services across the system than what we have currently structured. In addition, we are looking at the faculty/staff ratio, and other financial academic measures including student credit hours per faculty apportionment, tuition per credit hour, net tuition for student credit hour and headcount and possibly looking at foundation numbers, and endowment numbers for expenditures. He reported that we may possibly be looking at some operational metrics including timeliness and other key indicators for procurement and facilities. He pointed out that the measurements will start with the next fiscal year so we will likely have an opportunity to consider these things a little more. He stated that he would be happy to entertain any thoughts to identify how we can further improve our effectiveness and stewardship. Gay stated that we need to stop spending so much money on consultants pointing out that we have a bunch of smart students and faculty members who can do work that consultants get paid to do.

Bloom pointed out that the metrics are good for us to see because we need to use them to determine if we are making improvements, even if it is looking at salaries to see whether they should be higher or lower. Zeleny stated that if we are focusing on AAU membership, salaries and retention rates will be an important metric. Russo pointed out that many metrics vary greatly from unit to unit and questioned whether that matters and asked how the variance is accounted for. Zeleny stated that he thinks the methodology for the plan will be like the approach that UNMC uses which is flexible to allow units to roll up many of these are annual metrics.

Bloom asked what investments could be made that would have greater payoffs for us. Zeleny stated that investing our time in positive changes and eliminating duplication allows for better alignment of our processes across the system. He stated that ensuring consistency and good data quality is needed and he pointed out that we will probably need a new accounting system as SAP has been around for a long time. Gay asked if SAP is nearing its obsolescence. Zeleny reported that about five or seven years ago we started looking into a cloud-based system which could be more efficient from the staffing side. He stated that our reporting systems would benefit with a better accounting system and noted that SAP has never really focused on the research side of the university.

Clarke asked if we could get access to VisionSync. Davis reported that we just got access to VisionSync and the senior leadership team will be looking at it. He stated that he hopes to have more information about it sometime next week. Zeleny noted that VisionSync is a system-level data repository program. He reported that it's a data capturing system that is entered manually by units, but he pointed out that we shouldn't have expectations that we'll be able to speak to it with our current systems. Heng-Moss stated that there are metrics that are going to be informative on our progress towards extraordinary. She reported that for colleges and above they would enter their operational strategic initiatives, which are going to be the steps to efficiency and your planning process. She stated that these would be updated quarterly. Davis stated that we need some clarity about this and noted that at some point in the future, the information gathered will be down to the department level. He stated that initially, the administration wants to simplify it, so we keep it at the university level and maybe to the college level. He pointed out that we must sort out a lot of details about how the data works and how it would be collected. In addition, people will need to be trained on the program. He stated that the hope is that when it is presented to the campus, it will be more streamlined and more comprehensible. Bloom asked what the licensing fee will be for VisionSync. Davis stated that the system is negotiating a contract and noted that there is a cost per user fee. He believes that the system-wide licenses will be available July 1 or sometime shortly thereafter.

Clarke asked if there are any other things that the university will be looking at to achieve extraordinary stewardship and effectiveness. Bloom noted that a strategic plan is being developed, supposedly with faculty input yet the APC has not been brought into those discussions even though planning is in the committee's purview. Davis stated that the strategy that is being referenced included a broad-based input form that was sent out to the campus community. Gonzales pointed out that President Gold came to UNL in late March to meet with various groups on campus to get their feedback. He stated that the Staff Senate and Faculty Senate Executive Committees met with the President, but APC was not included. He pointed out that the committee needs to be strategic in how we communicate with the President's office.

Button stated that we need to define for our campus what the priorities and strategic initiatives will be. Bloom pointed out that since we have effectively no input into the pillars or metrics, how do we believe we will have input into what our priorities are for our campus. Van Den Wymelenberg stated that there is this perception that the pillars and metrics are set, and the middle doesn't matter, but he pointed out that we need to get out of that thinking. He noted that the order is odd because usually you set metrics after you set priorities and not before. Button

stated that we also want to say what the targets are of those metrics like graduation rates, and we will need to control how we define the initiatives.

Clarke pointed out that there is a perception that people are sitting around and not doing anything, but she literally does not have the capacity to do any more things, noting that she does more staff work than ever these days. She stated that there must be recognition that if you want faculty to do more you have to give them the support they need.

7.0 Strategic Pillar – Extraordinary Culture and Environment (Jordan Gonzales, President Staff Senate)

Gonzales stated that if there are key metrics under the culture and environment pillar, they have not been shared with him yet. He pointed out that the Staff Senate is a new body on campus, and they agreed that they needed a strategic direction before they could develop a strategic plan. He stated that the Staff Senate created a task force on workplace culture and engagement noting that the purpose of the task force is to provide a strategic direction for the Staff Senate over the next two years and to focus on 9 distinctive objectives to improve the workplace culture and engagement experience. He reported that these 9 objectives are: 1) advocate for the implementation of a modern family friendly parental leave policy; 2) support competitive salaries and equitable benefits for staff across all job classifications; 3) promote policies and initiatives to reduce workplace harassment and bullying; 4) support the increased utilization and expansion of staff mental health and well-being resources; 5) advocate for a standardized and transparent promotional process; 6) improve leadership opportunities for staff classified as office service within the staff Senate; 7) increase staff recognition and awards; 8) increase awareness of accessible professional development opportunities for staff; 9) and advocate for an improved talent management experience.

Clarke asked what the relationship of the Staff Senate is with the different university campuses. Gonzales stated that he thinks it's a very productive relationship. He noted that UNL and UNK have a Staff Senate, and he as staff Senate President, has a seat on the Chancellor's Council. He noted that UNK has broad power to work with their Faculty Senate, but he pointed out that UNMC and UNO have a Staff Advisory Council, and they can provide input, but our Staff Senate and UNK's Staff Senate have greater input. He reported that the Staff Senates and the Staff Advisory Councils meet monthly, and it has been a good relationship. He noted that after the Staff Senate met with President Gold, he sent a follow-up email to the President suggesting that it was very important for the President to meet with the UNK Staff Senate and UNMC and UNO Staff Advisory Council as well as with other important groups on those campuses. He reported that President Gold is going to meet with the Executive Committees of these Staff groups.

Bloom asked if investments could be made to promote the staff culture, what would they be. Gonzales stated that investing in professional development, and providing organizational training and development would be things to invest in. He pointed out that there are no staff ombuds person. He noted that most of the employees at UNL are not here for the salary they receive and are here more for the mission of supporting the students. Making sure staff could grow and develop professionally is important as it is keeping them safe. He pointed out that some universities provide gym membership for their employees but that is not done here.

Gay stated that he thinks the campus leader should recognize the staff at commencement ceremonies for the work they do to help students be successful to attain their degree. Zeleny noted that this is starting to occur now, and Gonzales stated that the Faculty Senate President also acknowledges all the work that the staff does. Zeleny noted that staff can now serve on the Marshals Corps.

Button stated that we need to make sure that we support staff leadership. He pointed out that we need to have regular check-ins on our campus climate to see how people are doing and noted that this could be an initiative for our campus. Gonzales stated that the Staff Senate task force helped to organize the Staff Senate and as a result, many people in administration have been open to the Senate. In addition, there have been great opportunities for collaboration, but he acknowledged that things at the system level are more challenging.

Clarke reported that UNL Police Chief Ramzah will be meeting with the APC on May 7th to discuss the safety and security portion of the Extraordinary Culture and Environment Pillar.

8.0 UNL-UNMC Joint Accreditation

Clarke noted that President Gold has been stating that the system is seeking joint accreditation for UNL and UNMC with the Higher Learning Commission. However, she noted that it's a bit confusing and the faculty would like to get some clarity on what the goal is for having joint accreditation. Bloom questioned what the implications for shared governance are and what the impacts would be for APC if this joint accreditation is accepted.

Davis reported that President Gold has been pursuing the joint accreditation and noted that an application for it has been submitted to the HLC. He stated that having joint accreditation would allow us to combine our research funding for reporting purposes. He stated that UNMC and UNL would be considered the University of Nebraska.

Button pointed out that there is now a [FAQ](#) page on the system website which includes a link to the application to the HLC. He stated that there are many elements of joint accreditation that have not been fully addressed such as where the main campus will be and what shared governance will look like. He stated that faculty need to be involved in the process as these things are determined. He noted that we do already have an existing shared structure, the Graduate College which is a university-wide college. He reported that the idea is that we will work these questions out as we move forward. He pointed out that joint accreditation will better align us with our peer institutions, and our combined research expenditures have already boosted us up to being ranked 55th in the country. He stated that the sooner we have these discussions, the better, but he noted that 9-month faculty members are usually not here during the summer.

Bloom suggested that it would be good to have some planning done before the HLC team comes to visit the campus on June 2nd and 3rd.

9.0 Reports from Interim EVC Button, VC Boehm, Interim VC Nelson Nelson

Nelson reported that the landscape for federal research funding is continuing to change with the latest news that the Department of Energy has now placed a cap on F&A costs, similar to the other federal agencies. She pointed out that lawsuits have been filed, and they are currently going through the court system. She noted that some strange things are happening with NIH grants and her office is working with General Counsel to try and understand what is occurring and how it is impacting our grants. She reported that three NSF grants have been suspended. Russo asked what the rationale is for the termination of the grants. Nelson stated that currently the federal agencies are saying that the research projects are not aligning with the new priorities. She stated that the Office of Research and Innovation will continue to watch the situation.

Nelson reported that the recent Faculty Connector was fun, and it allowed researchers to meet other researchers for possible collaboration. She stated that the next one will not be until September.

Button

Button pointed out that this is a critical time for enrollment. He noted that we are up 6% from last year at this time, which equates to 455 more students. He reported that we are seeing a 20% increase in non-resident students, but domestic graduate student enrollment is down, but international applications are up, but he noted that it is still early in the graduate recruiting process. He stated that retention rates remain high at 80% and the academic navigators are working hard to make sure students get registered for the fall.

Button reported that we are celebrating Luke McDermott, our first Harry S. Truman Scholarship recipient in many years. He noted that our Speech Team won second place at the nationals and pointed out that there are many students on campus doing outstanding work.

10.0 Other Business

No other business was discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, May 7, 2025. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.