

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

August 6, 2025 Minutes

Members Present: Bradshaw, Button, Clarke, Combs, Cressler, Davis, Eklund, Gay, Hanrahan, Heng-Moss, Jemkur, Mueller, Nelson, Sharif, Tschetter, Van Den Wymelenberg, Wilkins

Staff Senate Representatives: Brophy, Harner

Members Absent: Thomas

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

Cressler called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

2.0 Welcome New APC Members

Cressler welcomed new APC member Professor Sharif, School of Computing and Dean Derek McLean, Agricultural Research Division. He also welcomed Staff Senate representatives Jessie Brophy, President, and Jerri Harner, Vice President of Internal Affairs, who will serve on the APC during the budget reduction procedures.

3.0 Approval of May 7, 2025 Minutes

Cressler asked if there were any revisions to the May 7th minutes. Hearing none he asked for unanimous approval of the minutes. The minutes were approved by the APC.

4.0 Overview of APC Responsibilities

Cressler gave a brief presentation about the role of the APC (see UNL Bylaws <https://chancellor.unl.edu/bylaws-university-nebraska-lincoln/1-structure-university-nebraska-lincoln/> number 7 for complete list of responsibilities). He noted that the APC is a shared governance committee with representatives from the faculty, students, Graduate Council, Faculty Senate, administrators, and during the budget reduction process, Staff Senate representatives.

5.0 Seeking Nominations for Vice Chair

Cressler stated that he will be asking for nominees from the faculty members on the committee to run for election to become Vice Chair. He noted that the person would have a full year on the committee before taking over as chair next August 1st. He stated that anyone interested and/or who has questions should contact him or Griffin.

6.0 APC Representatives Needed for Committees

Cressler stated that at the next meeting he will be seeking APC members to serve on the following committees: Long Range Planning Committee, Project Initiation Review Committee, University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and the Aesthetics Review Committee.

7.0 Budget Reduction – Planning for the Process

Cressler outlined the budget reduction process, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and open communication among committee members. He explained the timeline for reviewing the framework document, specific budget proposals, and gathering public feedback. He noted the committee's role involves evaluating proposals, suggesting alternatives, holding public hearings, and making recommendations to the Chancellor's office by October 24th. He noted that the APC can vote on each proposed reduction separately, or as a whole, depending on what the APC wishes to do.

Van Den Wymelenberg noted that *The Procedures to be Invoked for Significant Budget Reallocations and Reductions* document Item II.6 indicates opportunities for APC to propose alternatives to any reallocation and reduction strategies, and he urged that this opportunity be made available early in the process to reduce unnecessary public exposure to units that are ultimately not proposed for reduction. Tschetter noted that in the 2020 budget reductions the Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences met with the APC to talk about what alternative cuts could be made, rather than the elimination of the Textiles, Merchandising, and Fashion Design department. Mueller pointed out that the APC's role is reactive, and he stressed the need for creativity in proposing alternatives to address the structural deficit. Gay noted that while the APC's role has been largely reactive, in the past the APC's recommendations have been considered by the Chancellor(s) who usually agreed with the Committee's recommendations.

The meeting then focused on the university's ongoing budget challenges, with Davis explaining that despite significant budget reductions over the past five years totaling \$75 million, the institution still faces a structural deficit of approximately \$21 million annually. The current fiscal year's shortfall is projected to be \$27.5 million, with \$6.2 million attributed to the system's deficit.

Combs asked for clarification on what the structural deficit is. Davis stated that basically it is that our expenses are outpacing our revenue, noting that much of our expenses are in salary and benefits. He noted that we have been using our cash on hand to cover our deficits, but we are depleting our cash reserves, and we must address our recurring costs by other means. Cressler asked if the structural deficit has been steady for the last few years. Davis reported that we are often in the \$12-15 million range even after we have made budget reductions.

Van Den Wymelenberg asked for clarification on the total amount of \$27.5 million and asked if we anticipate that at least \$6.5 million is attributed to the university system budget deficit or whether we anticipate that there could be an additional \$10 million. Davis stated that \$21.3 million covers our structural deficit and \$6.2 million is a combination of an estimation of our portion of the system structural deficit and a loss of tuition revenue. The discussion then highlighted concerns about future cuts, with Button noting that if the system requires additional reductions, the university will need to restart the budget process. He pointed out that the complete budget is difficult to calculate, noting that when talking about the budget you must consider that we have flat state appropriations, yet we have increased costs in things such as utilities and health insurance, and the university system's appropriations have not changed. He noted that it is not easy to address all the components of the university's budget.

Button explained that the budget reduction plan, which will be reviewed by the APC first, is a multi-dimensional approach considering administrative positions, staffing, voluntary separation incentive program, and potential academic reductions. He emphasized that all options are on the table to achieve the necessary budget cuts. He also discussed enrollment trends, noting positive numbers but highlighting the need to wait for the six-day census data to fully understand the budget impact. The group discussed the timeline for reviewing the budget plan, with public release expected during the week of September 8th, allowing time for impacted programs to be notified before public meetings. Button clarified that the plan was developed by the Executive Leadership Team, and that some deans were consulted and shown metrics if there is a possibility of a program in their area being cut.

Mueller discussed the scope of the Academic Planning Committee's brief regarding budget reductions and reallocations, questioning whether it should focus solely on academic programs or include broader university considerations such as the athletic department. Button emphasized the importance of strategic, data-informed approaches to avoid across-the-board cuts, which have been previously implemented. He clarified that while the committee's primary focus should be on academic program reorganizations and reductions, the scope may extend to other areas that impact academic programs. He noted that the APC's actual purview is in academic programs.

Van Den Wymelenberg requested that the budget reduction proposal include the following three considerations: Substitution Effects, Secondary Effects and Contribution margin. Substitution Effects – the ELT budget reductions proposal should include a model or estimate for the degree pathway substitution effect associated with any estimates of program/unit/degree cost reductions and associated lost revenues, effectively estimating net savings. It is not reasonable to assume that all program/unit/degree cost reduction proposals will allow for full revenue retention or a single universal rate of revenue retention at the university. Losing some degree pathways may result in greater revenue loss than other degree pathways. Secondary Effects – the ELT budget reduction proposal should consider the secondary effects associated with program/unit/degree reductions, especially in programs where students will likely depart the university due to substitution effects noted above. There should be a detailed model of the SCH generated by students/majors in a proposed reduced program at other units across campus. Contribution Margin – the ELT budget reduction proposal should consider contribution margin related to each proposed program/unit/degree reductions/elimination. It is critical to understand whether each proposed programs/units/degree reduction has a positive contribution margin or not to avoid propagating additional financial losses and erosion of the base to support university fixed costs.

The APC discussed proposed framework considering the timeline and process that would allow for reviewing the proposed budget cuts and program eliminations. The Committee proposed adding the date when public cuts will be announced and listing anticipated hearing dates to provide more clarity. The group debated the compressed timeline for gathering feedback from departments and agreed to potentially extend the time for departmental responses while shortening the public hearing timeline. They also discussed the format of public feedback, considering a combination of structured written responses and targeted public hearings.

The Committee also discussed the challenges of specifying dates for the public release of a budget plan and the associated public hearings, emphasizing the need for flexibility due to uncertainties in the process. Past issues were highlighted with missed deadlines and the complexity of the plan, which still requires finalization. The group also considered scheduling challenges for future meetings and the importance of faculty input.

The group discussed the timing and format of a confidential document's release, agreeing to keep the specific release date general until feedback is received and emphasizing the importance of in-person attendance rather than by Zoom. They discussed the university's recurring structural deficit, with Davis explaining that new revenue sources and enrollment growth are needed to break the cycle of cuts. Combs inquired about campus priorities, i.e., have priorities been articulated by the Chancellor. Button stated that the intention is to articulate the way this budget reduction process has been approached. He pointed out that we still have the aspiration of rejoining the AAU, we are still committed to access and student success, and our priorities need to adhere to the university's strategic plan of Odyssey to the Extraordinary. Combs asked whether the priorities have been communicated to the campus at large. Button stated that they have been communicated through various means such as the May 7th APC meeting where the metrics were provided, and President Gold released the university's Odyssey to Excellence pillars, but they do need to be put together and distributed in a combined format.

8.0 Other Business

Cressler reported that after consulting with Interim Vice Chancellors Button, Heng-Moss, and Nelson, he has decided to discontinue requiring the Vice Chancellors to give a report. Rather, they will give an update when needed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:42 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, August 20, 2025. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.