

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

February 12, 2025 Minutes

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

Members Absent: Herbin, Kopocis

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 3:01 p.m.

2.0 Approval of January 29, 2025 Minutes

Cressler asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Griffin noted that Nelson made some minor changes. Cressler then asked the APC to unanimously approved the minutes. Minutes were approved.

3.0 Report on Earth & Atmospheric Sciences APR (Clarke)

Clarke reported that the APR was conducted at the end of September 2024 and noted that the External Review Team (ERT) was fantastic and did an excellent job. She noted that the EVC's office did a great job of handling the meetings, including the one-on-one meetings with the ERT.

Clarke stated that the EAS department is in the College of Arts and Sciences and has two undergraduate and graduate programs, meteorology and atmospheric sciences and the other in geology. There are 17 faculty members, mostly located in Bessey Hall and the department has a library in the basement. She pointed out that the department is actively involved in research.

Clarke reported that the department had specific questions for the ERT, such as what did the Team feel were the strengths of the department and how could they leverage these strengths. The department also wanted to know how their achievements could be more noteworthy and visible.

Clarke reported that the EAS academic programs are relevant to issues today such as climate change and the impacts on ecological systems. She noted that these programs are popular with students, but the department asked how the programs can be more visible to the campus. Clarke stated that the ERT felt that the department had several historical strengths despite having different program focus. The department chair is a good advocate for the faculty and the department has a substantial endowment used for activities that support students. The ERT also noted that the department has made significant efforts to be inclusive.

Clarke reported that the ERT felt that challenges for the department included faculty departures, and trend in decreasing enrollment, and how the department can support its mission. The Team

recognized that the department had some hard choices that will need to be made as to how many courses they can offer and what are reasonable teaching loads. The department also needs to focus on recruiting more students and needs to establish a brand for themselves on the campus which could be challenging given the two different focuses in the department.

Clarke stated that the department was very responsive to the Team's recommendations and have already begun conversations, including sitting down with the college leadership to make improvements. She noted that the department is considering hiring someone to help with recruitment and communications. She reported that the department recognizes that it will need to make some changes although the faculty are a little exhausted due to the decrease in the number of faculty members, but they are trying to rally themselves to find a path forward that the faculty and students feel good about and that is also sustainable.

Clarke reported that overall, the APR was well done.

Bloom questioned the comment about the curriculum and research goals and asked in which direction the changes to teaching loads would go. Clarke stated that it would be in both directions because there are some faculty members that should take on more teaching because they do less research and there are faculty members that are extremely active researchers and should have a reduced teaching load. Button stated that these options are already an existing opportunity and the standard faculty workload for tenured faculty should be competitive with other university departments with similar disciplines. Clarke pointed out that the EAS department may need to talk about curriculum changes in order to be able to accommodate the differential teaching load.

4.0 Status of Review of Proposal to Create Graduate Certificate in P20 Improvement Science (Gay and Russo)

Russon reported that she and Gay met to discuss the proposal and some found concerns such as defining key terms, what the projected enrollment would be, and whether there are competing programs in the state or in neighboring states. She stated that the questions have been sent to the proposers, and they are waiting to hear back from them.

5.0 Strategic Planning Proposal from the Long-Range Planning Subcommittee

Cressler reported that the Long-Range Planning Subcommittee (LRPS) met last week to discuss how the Committee could work on helping to develop a strategic plan for UNL. He noted that due to the pandemic, it has been difficult to measure the achievements of the N2025 strategic plan and the LRPS felt that there was a need for a strategic plan that is slightly more measurable and streamlined and that does not require a lengthy process to develop. Bloom pointed out that the N2025 plan had many metrics, but we were unable to meet all of them.

Cressler stated that President Gold sent out an Odyssey to Extraordinary framework document which laid out five key pillars of a university-wide strategic plan: extraordinary teaching and learning; extraordinary research and creative activity; extraordinary partnerships and engagement; extraordinary culture and environment; extraordinary stewardship and effectiveness. He noted that within each pillar there was some explanation of what this means

but there is no plan on how to achieve these goals. This then provides the campuses with an opportunity to define their own strategic plans.

Cressler stated that the idea is to get input from faculty members from different disciplines across the campus and he pointed out that the faculty on the APC represent a broad spectrum of faculty and were elected by the faculty. He suggested that the Faculty Senate could also be engaged to provide input.

Gay asked why we go through the effort of creating a strategic plan when the benefits from it are limited. Cressler pointed out that developing a strategic plan helps us to identify priorities for the university, which given our precarious budget situation, would be useful. He stated that having identified priorities would allow us to advocate for these priorities during times of budget reductions.

Davis pointed out that the APC needs to be careful that it doesn't get ahead of the system level's framework that is being developed, but this is an opportunity for the campus to build out our strategic plan as it relates to the framework. He reported that President Gold wants feedback from the campuses and the APC's effort would help to jumpstart that feedback.

Bloom stated that developing a strategic plan can be more useful than the actual plan. He noted that the N2025 planning provided an opportunity for us to have a serious discussion about our sense of priorities, and we need to determine how we are going to measure whether we meet these priorities. He pointed out that he does not recall hearing previous Presidents stating that they wanted feedback for helping to develop the university's strategic plan and we should seize the opportunity to begin working on our strategic plan by using the system's framework.

Ourada stated that she is not a fan of a strategic plan if they do not speak to what we, as a campus, are about. She pointed out that when the dance program was in jeopardy of being eliminated due to budget reductions, the N2025 strategic plan helped the members of the program show how they exceeded the goals of the strategic plan which helped to save the program.

Button stated that he appreciates the discussion and understands the skepticism, but the Higher Learning Commission will expect that we have a strategic plan. He stated that from the N2025 process we can learn that we need to have identifiable accountability and that we need measurable metrics. He pointed out that we also need to build expectations on how we report our metrics, and we need to hold ourselves accountable. He stated that the planning process can be useful to us to identify where we are heading in the next three to five years.

Van Den Wymelenberg suggested that it might be useful to see how we did not make the mark with the N2025 plan. He stated that we need to define realistic goals that we can set a plan for and achieve, and we need to be able to articulate what goals are really important. He stated that not only would this information be communicated to the system President, but also to the Governor.

Davis stated that it appears that the APC wants the opportunity to contribute to the strategic plan, but the APC will not run the process of developing the plan.

Heng-Moss stated that we need to know what our vision is for the future, and we need to consider why we exist for the state of Nebraska and beyond because people are questioning the value of higher education and why it is important. She pointed out that the impact that we hope to achieve needs to be part of the process of developing the plan.

Boehm stated that we will need to upload our strategic plans for getting to extraordinary and we need some kind of a high-level framework to say where we are going. He pointed out that in June or July we better be prepared to upload our initiatives that fit under the five pillars defined by President Gold. Bloom asked what was meant by upload. Boehm stated that when President Gold was Chancellor of UNMC he used a platform, and a tool called Visions Seek which will take your strategic document and pick up some key initiatives that would fit nicely under the President's framework. He pointed out that there will be an active process that allows people to contribute to the online process. Gay asked if the webpage exists to provide this input. Boehm noted that UNMC has been using a version of it. He reported that every year the departments at UNMC discuss their goals and perhaps make adjustments to some of them. The tool allows for stacking or vertical integration of goals and initiatives. Davis pointed out that the contract with the Visions Seek company is being negotiated. He stated that the top level is the framework, the next will be campus specific, and then the third level will be more at the unit level, and this is why we are trying to sequence things in the right way. He stated that the President has worked on sharing the top level of his strategic plan which are the pillars, but he wants a lot more engagement from the campuses and other stakeholders as well to develop the steps to help us attain these goals.

Cressler reported that the Subcommittee discussed inviting relevant groups of faculty, staff, and administrators with expertise in various areas to come and speak with the APC. He stated that the Subcommittee would develop a set of questions for the APC to use when speaking to these relevant groups and from their responses ideas could be taken so a strategic plan could start to develop.

Nelson questioned how we would set research goals for the campus, pointing out that this would need involvement from faculty across the campus and expertise from the Office of Research and Innovation. Regarding President Gold's strategic plan, she shared that she believes a webform if forthcoming that will gather information which would allow the APC to provide feedback on the five pillars.

Cressler stated that the goal is not to circumvent or supersede current efforts but perhaps to create a parallel process. He stated that the effort of the Subcommittee is to jumpstart conversations to begin developing a strategic plan. Davis pointed out that we need to move quickly but not necessarily get too deep into the process as this work is not originating from the APC, but the committee can provide input. He noted that there are faculty, administrators, and students within the APC from various disciplines that could provide ideas and input. He reported that there are some strategic planning processes that are already running.

Combs stated that she is excited about thinking of how we can move forward now so we are not waiting until the last minute to think about what campus should be doing in the future. She asked who the groups would be so that the APC could talk about extraordinary teaching and learning. Thomas, who is a faculty member of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education, noted that there are faculty members in her department whose research and teaching focuses on teaching and learning and she could consult with them for input. Russo noted that the relative communities engaged in the work of the pillars should have the opportunity to provide input. Nelson pointed out that the forthcoming NU system webform for input would allow for more feedback.

Davis reported that there will be a process for the campus to provide broader input into the President's strategic plan and there may be some campus engagement. He stated that the Subcommittee's idea is to craft something to get the APC thinking about UNL's strategic plan that would align with the President's plan. He noted that other people have provided input and these inputs, along with the APC's input would be considered when a draft of the strategic plan is written. He stated that eventually broader input from the campus will need to occur.

Russo stated that the points under each of the pillars are vague and aspirational and some of them can span many different avenues. She asked if the APC could change the pillars or expand them, so they are not so vague. Davis pointed out that it is good that they are broad because it gives us more opportunity to identify all the work that is to come. Russo asked if the APC could really focus its efforts on specific areas. Davis stated that the APC could make specific recommendations under the identified categories.

The APC discussed working on each of the pillars separately at upcoming meetings. Bloom suggested that we might want to invite a couple of people with expertise in the areas identified in the pillars. Button stated that he would ask AVC Goodburn to meet to discuss Extraordinary Teaching and Learning.

6.0 Reports from Interim EVC Button, Interim VC Nelson, and VC Boehm

Button

Button stated that he hopes that everyone has the opportunity to read [The Economic Impact of the University of Nebraska System](#) report that was written by the nationally recognized consulting firm Tripp Umbach which specializes in economic development and impact studies. He stated that it was worthwhile to see how an outside organization sees our strengths and weaknesses and it is a well-timed report in many ways. He pointed out that UNL alone has a \$3.1 billion impact on the state's economy and the report shows the value for investing in the University.

Button reported that on March 5th from 3:30-5:00 in the Nebraska Union Regency Room there will be a community conversation about teaching. He stated that the goal is to bring faculty and others together and there will be a panel with faculty and student speakers. He stated that more information will be forthcoming.

Button noted that UNL's charter day is on February 15th and that we are in midst of the Glow Big Red campaign. He stated that the goal is to achieve 5,500 donors and noted that we are already at 3,000.

Nelson

Nelson stated that hopefully everyone is keeping track of what is happening at the federal level and pointed out that we need to help educate people about [F&A, Facilities and Administrative Costs](#), because there seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about it. She stated that she really appreciated having the opportunity to speak to the Faculty Senate last week at their meeting about what is occurring with the federal situation.

Nelson reported that changes at the federal level are occurring almost every hour and she recommended that people check the Office of Research and Innovation's [Federal Research Updates 2025](#) webpage for the latest information. Gay asked if Nelson perceives that NSF and DoE contracts are going to follow the NIH contracts with F&A rates. Nelson stated that she has been talking to people around the country about this possibility, but no one knows for sure what is next.

Van Den Wymelenberg noted that as a researcher, when he had questions about the F&A rates, especially if he was working with a business, professional association, non-profit organization, or whomever, he would simply ask them what their typical billing multiplier is for any professional service that they are providing, and the answer is universally two and three times their costs. He then points out that the university's billing multiplier is only 1.5 times which makes us very efficient. He stated that he would routinely just negotiate fixed price contracts if they weren't with a federal agency, and he would talk about cost and value which was always effective. He stated that what he finds peculiar is that some federal agencies, such as the Department of Education, always had a lower F&A rate by comparison to the quoted federally negotiated F&A rate. He questioned what would happen to the federally negotiated rate when another agency, like the Department of Education, proposes to lower their federal rate. He asked if it would reinstate a new federally negotiated process.

Nelson reported that changes to the federal rate structure, such as what has been proposed with the NIH F&A cap, has typically gone through Congress because there has already been an agreed upon negotiated rate and this is not able to be changed except for when rates are re-negotiated every two to four years. She stated that there are a few agencies that have lower rates they are willing to pay, and we have a policy that we can accept a lower rate but stated that this is a business decision which would also include an option of whether we wanted to even do the work.

Van Den Wymelenberg asked if the lower F&A rate is approved by Congress, would it then be re-engaged with the rest of the federally negotiated rates. He asked when things are re-negotiated, do you share your DoE grant making at the University and then does that influence the federally negotiated rate that you ultimately achieve. Nelson reported that the negotiation has to do with our actual expenses to conduct research, and then the actual expense is higher than 55.5%, we negotiate down to 55.5%. She stated we would continue to carefully detail all of our

costs to conduct research and then carefully negotiate a rate. She stated that the negotiation is based more on our actual cost to do research.

Boehm

Boehm reported that we are watching the USAID situation very closely. He noted that we used to have a couple of Feed the Future innovation labs on campus, but it's been a long time since we've had one. However, we worked really hard to get another one back here and there is one with small shareholders, farmers, producers, irrigation and mechanized agriculture. He reported that the original agreement was to get \$19 million with another \$21 million passed through to platforms all over the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. There was also the intention of a second five-year, \$40 million dollar investment, but these funds are now on hold. He stated that the work going on right now is trying to figure out what financial liability is for the people who are there. He stated that thankfully here at UNL we have some buffering capacity. He noted that the scary thing about USAID is that the furloughs, firings, the forced retirements, and the pulling of USAID and Foreign Agricultural Service Staff from around the globe back to the US, all of that has been disrupted and restarting these kinds of programs is difficult and takes time.

Boehm stated that the USDA National Center for Resilient and Regenerative Precision Agriculture being built on Innovation Campus is moving along, and we will soon see the building of the USDA Ag Research Service Greenhouses which will be attached to our greenhouses when completed.

Boehm reported that he now has the promotion and tenure files for faculty in IANR and he is about ready to submit those with his recommendations to the Chancellor. He stated that he is looking forward to the celebration of success later this spring when those who receive promotion and tenure are awarded.

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.