

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

March 26, 2025 Minutes

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

Members Absent: Boehm, Herbin, Ourada, Van Den Wymelenberg

Guests: Associate Dean Kathleen Lodl

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 3:07 p.m.

2.0 Review of Proposal for Multidisciplinary Studies Undergraduate Major (Mueller and Kopocis)

Mueller reported that he and Kopocis reviewed the proposal which has been in the process of being developed for some time now. He stated that there is great enthusiasm for this program as it would enable students to return to the university to complete their degrees. He noted that the proposal comes from the College of Arts and Sciences leaders and the proposal identifies a current gap in our curriculum. He pointed out that many of our peers offer such a program which would enable students to improve their economic wellbeing for themselves and the state. He reported that the proposal indicates that we do not have a flexible pathway like our sister campuses do.

Mueller stated that the proposed undergraduate major does not require any new courses and needs only minimal staff support. He noted that the expenses are modest, and the potential enrollment is projected to generate ten times the cost of the program. Kopocis stated that she has used UNO's flexible pathway multiple times and pointed out that the program allows students to finish their bachelor's degree and, in construction management, a master's degree in less time than it would take them to get a BS in construction management through the traditional pathway. She stated that she is really excited that UNL is moving to create this program and pointed out that this is a great opportunity for non-traditional students and students who were unsure of what they want to do. Gay asked what the degree would be for these students. Kopocis stated that it would be either a BA or a BS.

Bloom stated that he certainly understands the goal and the target audience, but he questioned whether it is opening the door for a student to get a degree without having a traditional major. He noted that traditional programs have a set of courses from lower-level courses on up to higher level courses that students need to take for their major. He questioned whether we are comfortable with the flexible program or asked if this is just a trend.

Button reported that the target audience would be students who left the university, and have had 60 credit hours or more, and want to come back to finish up a degree. He pointed out that this program really relates to student athletes who have moved around a lot in their college career and who suddenly need to complete a degree. He stated that academic advisors are key in enabling these students to have a coherent plan and the interest is not to have an open-ended degree program.

Russo asked if these students would still need to fulfill the ACE requirements. Mueller said yes. Kopocis stated that it is important to note that the students need a C or better in their major courses. Russo pointed out that the program appears to be available for students that have a unique insight into what they want to do. Button stated that three different modes are defined. He reported that for highly motivated students who know exactly what they want to do, they could design their own major. He reported that there is a more structured path, and he believes the Community Colleges are really excited about this because more students could continue their education to pursue an undergraduate degree.

Mueller stated that with a modest amount of advertising, this program could be very successful. He pointed out that there are many people in the community who may be short of just a few courses. Button reported that there are over 300,000 former students in the state who have not completed their degree, and the plan for the future is to offer the program online. Mueller suggested that the program could draw in people in the community who are just shy of the courses that they need to graduate.

Clarke asked about the 481-capstone course and whether it is consistent with the other capstone courses for majors. She questioned whether a faculty member would be advising the student about the capstone course. Button noted that all the capstone courses are meant to be integrative, and they are meant to be reflective of the student's program of study so he believes that the same standard learning expectations would be there for the 481-course. He stated, as Kopocis noted, that programs like this already exist at other campuses and the question is how it would be handled once it leaves our campus. He stated that we would point to all the things that differentiate us from the list of those institutions. He pointed out that our collaboration with community colleges that we've had over the last year discussing this pathway program is another differentiator, as well as the quality of our faculty, so he believes our program will be stronger.

Kopocis stated that the students that have used the UNO pathway program wanted their bachelor's degree from UNL, but they were transferred to UNO in order for them to get their degree completed, but once we have the program here at UNL she suspects that many of the students will want to go through UNL.

Clarke asked if there was a motion to approve the proposal. Mueller moved and Heng-Moss seconded the motion. The program was approved by the APC.

3.0 Approval of February 26, 2025 Minutes

Clarke asked if there were any revisions to the minutes. Hearing none, she asked for unanimous approval. The APC approved the motion.

4.0 Review of Robotics Undergraduate Program (Cressler and Boehm)

Cressler stated that he and Boehm reviewed the proposal noting that the program is an interdisciplinary program from the Engineering college and coursework would come from the School of Computing, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Mechanical and Material Engineering. He reported there is already a minor in robotics so there are eight existing courses although while there is initial enthusiasm in the minor, few students complete the minor. He reported that across the three engineering programs, there are 227 students enrolled so there would be an audience for the program and there is funding already behind the development of this program.

Cressler reported that there is a Robotics Cluster which is a collaboration between the College of Engineering, Metro Community College, and the Northeast Community College. He stated that Invest Nebraska is providing funding to develop lab spaces for robotics. He pointed out that the Brookings Institute report identified Lincoln as a metro area for AI and robotics technologies and noted that there has already been investment in six different robotics companies in the Lincoln and Omaha area. He pointed out that Nebraska has the 4th highest participation of middle and high school students in robotics competitions, so it appears that there is a robust pipeline for students in this proposed degree program.

Cressler stated that the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration has already provided funding for the hiring of two Professors of Practice to develop the courses that will be needed for the robotics program. He noted the two people have already been hired on 3-year contracts. He pointed out that it is expected that there will be 20-25 students enrolled in the first year and noted that the closest other robotics program is in Colorado. He stated that the two community colleges in the Robotics Cluster have already partnered with the College of Engineering to create a pipeline for students from the community colleges to enter the BS program at UNL.

Cressler stated that he and Boehm felt that the proposal was very strong and that the program would be well supported. He noted that the program is on track to meet the accreditation requirements given the coursework that would be required.

Gay pointed out that the expenses are in the order of \$1.6 million and the expected income is in the order of \$6 million which is good, except he is assuming that most of the students in the program are more than likely switching majors so this would not be new tuition. Cressler stated that the students from the community colleges would come here for their last two years and get a BS in robotics engineering. He pointed out that previously those students may not have come at all if the program didn't exist. He stated that there are only about 38 of these programs around the country and it is a very popular program with younger kids.

Clarke asked if the reason the minor is not doing as well is because it is not integrated in the current major. Cressler stated that this is correct; for some majors taking the minor does require additional courses which is difficult given the demands of the undergraduate degrees in Engineering. He stated that the proposed degree is also very demanding, with more than 120

credits, and they would need to ask for an exemption to the Board of Regents policy for the proposed degree program.

Cressler moved to approve the proposal. Motion seconded by Tschetter and approved by the APC.

5.0 Proposal to Merge the German BA/BS and the French BA/BS Degrees into a New Major Called Modern Languages

Clarke pointed out that the proposal does not need to go to a subcommittee review because it is just a merger of two existing programs. Bloom asked if we are anticipating seeing more proposals like this so the programs can meet the CCPE's degree completion threshold. Button stated that he does think that there will be future mergers. He stated that it is possible in the future that there could be a general modern language degree featuring specializations of the different languages.

Bloom moved to approve the proposal. Motion seconded by Tschetter and approved by the APC.

6.0 Strategic Planning – Extraordinary Partnerships and Engagement Pillar - Establish the University of Nebraska System and our engagement partners as having the highest-quality and impact that are recognized for extraordinary rural and urban outcomes. (Associate Dean Lodl)

Clarke stated that the APC wanted to learn where UNL is with partnerships and engagement, what is working well and how the Committee can think about what would be beneficial for the campus.

Lodl reported that UNL fits well into President Gold's strategic goals pointing out that we are a land grant university where most faculty and citizens of the state believe in engagement. She pointed out that our definition of engagement echoes the Carnegie Foundation of community engagement which is "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." She noted that we received Carnegie Designation last year and we will be reviewed in five years to see if that designation will continue.

Lodl stated that we have a challenge with putting together all the different kinds of engagement that UNL is involved in because we have numerous colleges with different engagement activities. However, she pointed out that the departments and colleges were very interested in becoming more involved with engagement.

Lodl reported that we already have a statewide structure for UNL engagement. She stated that an [interactive engagement map](#) has been developed which shows areas throughout the state where UNL engagement projects are occurring. She noted that this can be very helpful for state legislators to see what UNL engagement projects are occurring in their counties. She stated that some examples are when engineering students went out to help with the flooding that occurred in March 2019, and when faculty members from the Law College went to Skylar, Nebraska, to help

students take courses to get their citizenship. She reported that projects are continually being added to the map.

Lodl noted that as part of the N2025 plan an engagement collaborative was formed and all colleges, as well as some other units, have been involved. She stated that the collaborative meets quarterly, and members act as a liaison to the faculty and colleges. She stated that currently we don't have a system to collect information about engagement, but the collaborative has been stellar in making connections. She stated that the collaborative's strategic plan for 2024-2027 includes: 1) data and reporting to track community engagement and its impact; 2) give awards for exceptional community engagement; 3) appointment, retention, promotion and tenure updates to reward community engagement scholarship; 4) capacity building for administration, faculty, staff and students; student opportunities for community engagement in the curriculum.

Lodl stated that we want our university to be very engaged and connecting with the public and we are consistently looking at the impact of our engagement with people and the communities. She noted that not only do faculty have participation in engagement, but there are student opportunities as well. She reported that UNL Community Engagement seed funding is available with awards of up to \$5000. She noted that the deadline for applications is November 15th, and applicants need to have a deliverable for the community.

Lodl stated that we have partnerships across the state, and we do this probably better than most of our peers. She pointed out that we have partnerships beyond Nebraska and noted that we have room for growth in this area. She stated that growing our partnerships will increase our metrics, which will help us when we go up for renewal of the Carnegie Designation and it will also help the individual colleges for accreditation.

Bloom noted that engagement is part of our land grant mission and given the current political environment, engagement is critical. He asked if there are things thematically that we should emphasize that would help us stand out more. Lodl pointed out that this is part of the reason for granting seed money. She stated that telling the story of the impacts of our engagement projects through a 30 second video that can be accessed through the interactive engagement map would not only communicate what we are doing, but it could be a more systemic way of collecting data of our engagement and partnerships.

Davis pointed out that while engagement is part of the land grant mission, our structure does not reflect this. He stated that creating the collaboration is a great start but asked if we are ready for the next step in expanding our engagement and partnership mission. Lodl stated that timing will be everything and asked how we can set us up in the long run to be in the best position to have the faculty more involved in engagement and partnerships. Bloom noted that engagement was discussed in the N2025 committee pointing out that engagement can be taken into all parts of the university. Davis reported that this position was folded into budget reductions. Lodl noted that our engagement framework can also help make relationships happen to get projects and partnerships occur out of our state.

Gay stated that he liked the vision with the red buttons on the integrative engagement map and noted that he cannot imagine a more political tool to send to every state legislator. Lodl stated

that this has been done and pointed out that we do have an advocacy group, but what is key is having our clients speak about the impacts the engagement with the university has had on them. She stated that we need to get these stories out to those people who do not know what the university is doing to help people in the State. Heng-Moss stated that if we get external stakeholders to convey to the State Legislators how the university has been significantly engaged with the people and communities across the state and the impacts the university has had, that is even a more powerful message. She stated that the university has created impact reports and impact statements that have been written by those we have engaged with, along with the creation of the integrative map, but she pointed out that we need to be coordinated to leverage our engagement efforts across the university. Gay noted that engagement occurs throughout the university, not just with Nebraska Extension. He stated that a few years ago Physics had a program called CROP where a lot of high school students and their teachers visited campus and then came to UNL during the summer where they were able to set up experiments. He pointed out that this was an incredible recruitment tool and great outreach. He stated that the teachers, who were from across the state, felt like they were getting attention from the university. He noted that we need to get these kinds of stories out to the public.

Heng-Moss pointed out that if faculty members submit online information for their annual evaluation, then we should be able to have AI go through and pull out the information related to engagement and partnerships which could go into a database. She stated that it would provide us with information from the various colleges on the engagement and partnerships that faculty are involved with. Davis noted that the problem is that colleges use different platforms right now for gathering information for the evals.

Button stated, that in thinking with strategic planning, if any thought has been given about ways in which the campuses can identify specific measures for engagement and partnerships. He asked whether we should target increasing our engagement sites to reach 2,000 in three to five years. He asked if there is thought to considering ways in which the campus might identify specific metrics to continue to show growth and performance in this space. Lodl reported that data was collected and reported in November, but it is not known whether everybody across UNL provided information. She said that they found that we have about 1,400 engagement sites and 413 research projects, and we have about 112 off-campus facilities. She pointed out that we need to make sure we have the capacity to collect data for a metric that we know is accurate. She stated that we have looked at engagement broadly but as time progresses, we will be increasing the rigor for it.

Davis stated that he was glad to see that the museums were included in the engagement metrics. He stated that museums exist throughout the institution and people come from across the state to go to them and to the Lied Center and we need to think about making a case to support them because some people think these are easy things to defund when finances are tight.

Russo noted that some of the engagement sites on the integrative map are very large and she asked what is the minimum that would count for an engagement metric. Lodl stated that currently we have a broad definition about what would be considered as an engagement site because we want people to be thinking about engagement. She stated that we are hoping to do more education on it and to see how we can take it to the next level where we are creating co-

solutions with those that we engage with. Russo pointed out that some of the small connections can be incredibly important for a community.

Cressler stated that he likes the idea of creating a training pipeline and asked what is the infrastructure that would be needed to enable it. Lodl stated that capacity and more people are needed. She reported that every other Friday there are groups of people interested in engagement that informally meet. She stated that there are community connectors, and people are invited from communities who want some help from the university to come to these connectors so they can meet and talk to faculty.

Clarke noted that President Gold's strategic document talked about partnerships beyond the state and asked what that means. Lodl pointed out that we are already doing engagement and partnership work across multiple states. She stated that she sees this as a catalyst for the future and makes us well poised to be extraordinary in this area. Davis noted that there used to be a global engagement and partnership map where the university was engaged in projects around the world, but it became difficult to maintain, and it was removed. He noted that we need to show our global impact as well in this strategic pillar. Clarke asked how global work would be promoted. Lodl stated that we would identify what things we are offering international groups that leads to policy changes and impacts.

Lodl stated that another piece of the N2025 strategic plan was alumni engagement. She stated that the Alumni Association is working on this aspect of engagement.

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

Button

Button reported that this weekend is New Admitted Student Day and we are expecting approximately 4,300 people on campus. He noted that most of these students have been admitted but there are some who may commit to UNL on that day. He stated that this day allows new students to familiarize themselves with the campus, so they see themselves as students of UNL. He pointed out that this is a large event that takes a significant amount of coordinated effort.

Button stated that Monique Snowden, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for ASEM, has been leading thoughtful campus sessions on strategic enrollment. He noted that there has been very thoughtful engagement from the faculty and staff for building an enrollment strategic plan and such a plan would touch on everything we do. He stated that the sessions are going well.

Button reported that our current students are continuing to do well and currently our 4-year graduation rate is on track to be the highest we have ever had. He noted that this contingent of students includes those from 2020. He pointed out that as we continue to get further out of the pandemic, our numbers are really improving.

Button stated that he will be meeting with the faculty of the College of Business and the College of Journalism and Mass Communications next week. He reported that he has had good engagement with the colleges and has noted that there are many similar themes being discussed in the meetings.

Nelson

Nelson reported that the next Faculty Connector meeting is tomorrow night where there will be discussion about tips for external funding.

8.0 Other Business

Jemkur reported that the Graduate Student Assembly is having a graduate social mix on Friday, which is a collaboration of graduate schools from our sister campuses.

Heng-Moss wanted to thank those involved with the IANR APR reviews noting that she appreciates the work that those involved are doing, particularly given how busy this time of year is for faculty.

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m. The next meeting of the APC will be on Wednesday, April 9, 2025. The minutes are respectfully submitted by Karen Griffin, Coordinator.