

October 21, 2002

## Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 10/21/2002

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*Northeastern University*

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### Recommended Citation

Vigeant, Mary D., "Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 10/21/2002" (2002). *Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes*. Paper 14.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d10005407>

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TO: FACULTY SENATE  
FROM: MARY D. VIGEANT, for the SENATE AGENDA COMMITTEE  
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2002-2003 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 21 OCTOBER 2002

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Present: (Professors) Alper, Alverson, Aroian, Baclawski, Bannister, Barnes, Bruns, Ellis, Gilmore, Hall, Herman, Hope, Kane, Khaw, Lowndes, Metghalchi, Morrison, Platt, Powers-Lee, Rotella, Serafim, Shafai, Sherman, Sherwood, Vaughn, Wallin, Wertheim, Wray  
(Administrators) Abdelal, Mantella, Meservey, Onan, Putnam, Soyster, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Brookins, Flym, Ondrechen  
(Administrators) Greene, Pantalone

Convened by Provost Abdelal at 11:57 a.m.

**President Richard M. Freeland.** President Freeland thanked the Senate for the opportunity to meet at the beginning of the year and noted that the Senate, as a formal, legitimate voice of the faculty, is utterly essential to the operations of the University, and, inevitably, the University needs to have that voice expressed in a way that everyone recognizes as legitimate. President Freeland expressed appreciation for the time and effort that members of the Senate contribute.

Top-100 Status. President Freeland reported that, in addition to Northeastern's #1 ranking in internships and co-ops in *U.S. News and World Report*, the numbers of academically superior student applicants attest to the attractiveness of the University. Faculty have good reason to feel pleased about the momentum that is carrying us forward toward top-100 status. That goal is desirable but also necessary for a secure future.

Semester Conversion. Two things going on this year that are absolutely essential and require the devoted attention of every member of the faculty and every department are getting the semester conversion right and continuing our work on student graduate rates and retention rates. We are in the third year of the three-year semester transition, and much difficult work remains to be done, and done well. Every institution that has made the transition from quarters to semesters has experienced difficulties of one kind or another. Because there are risks—in graduation rates, in losing students who are not happy, in the admissions process, and on the revenue side because of behavioral changes that cannot be predicted—we must do all we can to ensure the semester conversion is successful for the students and for the University as a whole.

Curriculum. One of the reasons we undertook the semester conversion was to raise the bar for ourselves with regard to the curriculum. One focus has been on the heightened integration of the classroom experience with the Co-op experience through the integrated learning model by which each college links with what goes on with Co-op. However, that work has yet to be translated into department level activity and individual activity. President Freeland termed that the single most important educational challenge in his period as president. What is going to allow Northeastern to position itself securely and comfortably among the top 100? The realization of a secure reputation as the best place to come for the particular form of education that we offer—education that links classroom work with real-world experience. The criticism of Co-op over the years has been its disconnection from the academic experience, the sense that the jobs aren't really that useful in terms of education. Guidance counselors and high school seniors have reported that some jobs are make-work and the curriculum experience is not effectively linked with the Co-op experience. This is an opportune time to remedy that by way of the integrated learning models, which will lay the foundation on which everything else is built in terms of our claims to quality. President Freeland urged Senators to make sure their colleagues understand the significance of this window of opportunity to bring the curriculum to the highest possible level of effectiveness.

Students. Our aspiration has to be for the semester transition to be almost invisible. We have assured the students that they would not have additional time to degree or additional cost to degree. Students' negative feeling about semesters two years ago has abated, but some apprehension remains. It is crucial that faculty work with students individually, advising them as they plan their lives in a semester environment. We owe it to our students to ensure that the strongest possible systems are in place so that the semester conversion does not disrupt their education and thus risk attrition.

Graduation Rates. President Freeland emphasized that the focus on making sure that our students have the best possible experience and the best possible chance of succeeding, from the moment of admission to graduation, fits within the framework of the semester conversion. Financial aid and housing are high on students' list of priorities, and much has been done to address those issues. However, as financial aid and housing are improved and therefore off the table, the quality of the classroom experience becomes more important in terms of the curriculum and interaction with faculty.

Retention. The Senate's Enrollment and Admissions Policy Committee is focusing on retention this year. There is also a university-wide task force, chaired by Vice President Mantella, which has put forward a set of initiatives that try to make more progress in helping students succeed through graduation. President Freeland urged that the Senate committee join with the retention task force toward that goal. This is a retail business, somewhat about policy but mostly about individual students. We can identify with increasing accuracy the individual students in the freshman class who are at risk of not making it through to sophomore year, and the number is manageable—200 in Arts and Sciences, 100 in Engineering, and 100 in Bouvé—and we will do all we can to make it possible for them to succeed here.

Classrooms. President Freeland concurred with the Senate's focus on issues of strategic importance and with the Agenda Committee's reporting of areas that need additional attention as we look to ratcheting up to the next level of success in positioning Northeastern. The charges to the Senate standing committees incorporate some of this thinking. We need to take a look at classrooms and to make sure that the classroom experience is as strong as it can be for both students and faculty. He noted that he would welcome additional analysis along those lines.

Salaries. President Freeland recalled that the administration had begun to address the issue of salaries in a serious way last year. Provost Abdelal is carrying out the mandate from the matchmate committee in getting the department-to-department comparisons right, and that will be a basis for further dialogue. All are in agreement that salaries have to be competitive at the top-100 level if we are going to be a top-100 university.

Size of the Professoriate. The size of the professoriate is a matter of concern to the Senate and also to the President and the Provost. It needs to be addressed in terms of full-time faculty and nontenure-track faculty if we are going to deliver the quality that we need to deliver, and that will involve discussions about workload, about what is the right mix of tenure-track and nontenure-track. It will also involve a range of issues to be worked through together. President Freeland assured the body that at the end of the day the administration and the Senate have absolutely common goals in this area—compensation and working conditions at a level appropriate for one of the top universities in the country.

Budget. President Freeland pointed out that we need to be mindful that we are not as wealthy as some of the institutions with which we are competing, and we therefore must look at the budget for the year ahead with caution because of the semester conversion. We need to approach the budget this year in the most conservative way that we have done in the last five or six years. The possibility exists that perturbations will arise from the conversion, so we will continue to worry about salaries and positions. To find a way that is compatible with protecting ourselves against some real financial exposure going into next year will mean the budget people will have to work hard to find the right balance. The agenda that the Senate has set for its standing committees with respect to top-100 is one the President welcomes, and he looks forward to working together on those issues.

Cultural Expectations. With regard to the top-100 goal, President Freeland indicated that he thinks it fair for faculty and the Senate to say to the President, "You want to have a top-100 university, you need to pay like a top-100 university. You need to have classrooms that look like a top-100 university. You need to have working conditions and work loads and infrastructure to support all those things." It is also fair for us to say to each other, "If we are going to achieve these aspirations, we need to have a cultural behavior that supports these aspirations. We need to demand of each other a standard of professionalism and a standard of achievement that is consistent with those aspirations." Competing at the top-100 level is not the same as being a Tier III university in terms of the way we conduct our business. It means we have to raise our expectations for ourselves in the classroom in terms of the quality of the service and the scholarship in terms of our productivity and our capability. This is something that only the faculty can do. In a recent discussion with the Board of Trustees about what various participants in the life of the University can do to help us get to our common goals, there was considerable discussion, as there should have been, about various material things that need to happen. But there was also talk about the culture of expectation. The Chairman of the Board, Neil Finnegan, said, "In the end, the University will only go as far as the faculty takes it." You could do a lot of things administratively and a lot of things materially, but it has

to be at the end of the day the quality of work of the faculty in education and scholarship that makes this happen. While many people at this university are performing at superb levels, President Freeland was not sure that he had seen the kind of cultural expectation that will ultimately sustain our aspirations. He would like to see more prizes and national competitions being won and more recognition for our programs. We need to put ourselves collectively under those kinds of expectations at the same time that we work on the material side.

Students. The students coming to us have higher and higher expectations. President Freeland frequently asks students how they are experiencing the education at Northeastern—is it rigorous enough, demanding enough, exciting enough? The answers are somewhat mixed. Not all students find the curriculum as challenging or rigorous as they might. He was concerned at the speed at which the student body is changing and whether the curriculum and classroom experience are changing rapidly enough to maintain the level of engagement.

The floor was opened to questions.

Professor Grabel asked what was being done by the University to generate Co-op jobs. President Freeland responded that maximizing the employment experience is one of the aspirations of the semester transition. Once the integrated learning models were in place at the college level, the Co-op coordinators, college by college, department by department, looked at the jobs we had, to categorize them in terms of their appropriateness for lower division work, second Co-op work, final Co-op work, or not applicable. The President's understanding was that this work is largely completed and that the existing set of Co-op positions has been winnowed in terms of the quality of the job experience in relation to the curriculum. That work will continue this year and, when we get to the final version of the integrated learning models in the spring, the process should be nailed down. The issue of job development is also critical, but it is difficult for Co-op coordinators, who mostly interact with companies at the middle level of the organization, to open up new territories. For this reason, the newly created vice president for corporate relations position is crucial to opening up territory for Co-op, sponsored research, executive education, vendor relationships, technical transfer relationships, and all the aspects of the corporate world with which we need to be involved.

Professor Wertheim expressed concern about the distribution of the professoriate, whose size has declined substantially since the 1990s, mostly at the assistant professor level. Vice Provost Meservey responded that it is the assistant professor group that has declined the most, which reflects the fact that the associate and full professor levels would be tenured and therefore less likely to leave the institution. As the numbers decreased during the mid-1990s and the numbers of incoming faculty slowed, it was clearly the assistant professors who were coming in. She did not have a complete sense of the trend at this point in time, but it does not seem to be unusual in relation to other schools. However, as we begin to rebuild the professoriate, the pathway would largely be through the assistant professor rank, and we will be able to have a larger pool brought in, to then evaluate their contributions as we move them into tenure ranks. President Freeland added that the numbers have stayed relatively flat, which is a major concern because student numbers have grown. Compression at the assistant professor level needs to be addressed so that we have a healthy mix across the age range.

Professor Hall noted that some faculty remain at the associate professor level for ten or more years because they are not comfortable enough or confident enough to seek promotion to the rank of full professor. President Freeland responded that one of the structural challenges we face as an academic community is that we have ratcheted up the level of our expectations across a range of circumstances. We have people who have been here more than thirty years and have seen very different versions of the University, so it is not inconceivable that faculty, who were hired under one set of expectations, now find themselves faced with a different set of expectations. He suggested that this might be an issue for the Faculty Development Committee to review. We have an obligation as a community to help everyone be as productive and fulfilled as possible, even in a climate of changing expectations, and if there is frustration at lack of advancement due to changing expectations, then we need to address that. We need every member of the faculty to be fully engaged and fully productive.

Professor Alper expressed concern that the culture of Northeastern, while aspiring to the top-100 goal, is still very much aimed at Co-op and experiential education and does not put emphasis on improving our record of getting students interested in going to graduate school. President Freeland responded that this is a profoundly important question because the top schools are mostly preparatory schools for graduate programs. Most of their students know upon matriculation that they will go on to graduate school within two or three years of graduation. However, Northeastern has a very different

configuration. At present, 85% of our students go directly into the job market and only about 15% go on to graduate school within three years, and this is a barrier to our aspirations. He has emphasized Co-op because it is central to our character. We must increase the academic stature of what we do with Co-op to convince the world that this is really a powerful learning experience, which ultimately will produce more fully developed students. Because the market does not perceive it as a powerful pedagogical vision, President Freeland has placed a great deal of emphasis on ratcheting up both what we do educationally and academically in this area and marketing it to the world. The notion of the vision of NU as the place to come if your thought is to go to graduate school, or a place to come if, along the way, you decide to go to graduate school, needs to be strengthened and celebrated. A recent discussion of university positioning strategy elicited the notion that Co-op is a powerful instrument in terms of providing a student with an informed choice in selecting a graduate school after experiencing professional fields. We need to develop a more integrated vision of Northeastern, in which graduate education is very much a part of its image, even as we continue to celebrate Co-op and linkage to the workplace.

Professor Khaw asked how graduate students would participate in our aspiration to reach top-100. President Freeland responded that we will not reach top-100 without first-class graduate programs. There are institutions that have such a strong reputation at the undergraduate level that they are able to position themselves among the top universities in the country without particularly strong graduate programs. Given our history and our persona, strong graduate programs are an essential component of the overall strategy. Over the last several years we have concentrated so much on getting the undergraduate program right, that strengthening the graduate programs has not been as much of a focus as it needs to be. We are now at a stage in our development where that and a couple of other issues can be brought forward. One of the issues at the graduate level that needs to be addressed is the doctoral programs that are at the bottom deciles of their disciplines, as judged in the 1993 NRC study. Also, some of our masters' programs are not as strong as they need to be, such as the MBA program, which should be one of our strengths. We have been bypassed recently by four institutions that were weaker than Northeastern a generation ago. The reality is that the halo effect of graduate programs is huge. The top-rated Arts and Sciences undergraduate programs are nearly all in institutions with very strong graduate programs. The list of the ranking for top graduate programs and the ranking for top undergraduate programs is highly synergistic. Without knowing exactly what the final shape will be, we need an initiative this year to really focus on the quality of graduate programs by college because in almost every college there are significant issues to be addressed.

Professor Kane pointed out that, as more and more students travel to various parts of the world for their Co-op experience, assurance of housing upon their return is important. President Freeland did not think students' priority in the lottery is affected by their travel, but he acknowledged that housing, while much improved, is still on the agenda for improvement in terms of renovation of existing housing and additional new residences.

Professor Wallin urged a strong initiative to advocate for national scholarships. He praised the work of Professor Portz, as part-time director of the honors program, in getting more students to attend graduate school and to obtain scholarships. He asked the status of making the honors program directorship a full-time position. President Freeland replied that the quality of our honors program is an appropriate focus and an important part of the equation as we look at our graduation rates and the success of our students. Most of the focus has been on students who do not do well because approximately 60% of the students who do poorly leave the University early, but there is also an issue at the upper end of the spectrum. We lose some top students as well, but in the absence of data that would contradict it, his view was that our academic standards are rising every year and there is still a fair spread across the freshman class in terms of ability. To provide enriched opportunities for some of the most academically ambitious students is a very important part of what we are doing at this stage in our development.

Provost Abdelal noted that his philosophical preference is for faculty who are involved in administrative matters to continue to be connected to their disciplines in terms of teaching and scholarship. He suggested a percentage of 25% or 50% administrative responsibility and at least 50% academic responsibility, but he added that he would be willing to discuss the matter further with appropriate committees or with the Senate.

Professor Herman, having been involved with the honors program from its inception, agreed with Provost Abdelal. He suggested that the honors program director position be categorized on the order of a department chair. Chairs are not classified as administrators, but the load, or division of the load within the department, varies on the basis of the complexity of the operation, the number of faculty, the budgetary issues, and a variety of other things. If we think of the honors

program as fully academic, the director's position would be a fully academic activity, regardless of what the teaching-administrative relationship is, and therefore might be coherent with the honors program.

Professor Herman asked about the nuts and bolts of the semester conversion in terms of Senate resolutions that have not been acted upon with regard to class scheduling and summer staffing. President Freeland acknowledged that he had not signed off on some of the resolutions because he was somewhat ambivalent about them pedagogically. Professor Herman indicated that he understood that funding was an issue with regard to allowing full-time faculty to teach during the summer. Vice Provost Meservey added that this year money was allocated to begin that process, and this past summer funds had begun to be released to the colleges so that they could increase the number of full-time faculty, and it will be in place for the coming year as a continuing source of funding.

Professor Herman asked the rate at which the full-time faculty would be recompensed. President Freeland recalled that the rate was 1/6.

Dean Soyster pointed out that there should be a University policy on the minimum amount of salary that faculty are paid to teach in the summer. Several Senators replied that the minimum is stated in the Faculty Handbook. The question is, how do we convert that as we go to the new calendar. Professor Morrison pointed out that some faculty may elect to teach in the summer and do another term as was done in the past, but it is not equivalent. Vice Provost Meservey noted that the first summer term in May of 2004 will bring revenues and a solution will be found.

Professor Morrison asked whether a policy would be in place or it would be up to the departments to work something out. Vice Provost Meservey responded that she would like to talk with faculty when those situations occur. Teaching in the summer of 2003 might be nearly equivalent to teaching the first term in 2004, and perhaps we could wrestle it through.

Professor Ellis asked the status of Northeastern's endowment. President Freeland replied that this is not a happy topic. Over the last five or six years our endowment has done well comparatively and has been in the top percentiles, the top third consistently and often in the top decile, which was not the case last year when we lost about 9%, which is below the median for private institutions. The problem has been with some underperformance in the value fund managers, but the funds and investments committee has made some changes. We have lost \$100M on our endowment; we have gone from \$530M to about \$430M over the course of this bear market, which is significant for many reasons, not the least of which is our capacity to build facilities because our borrowing capability is very much linked to that. Northeastern is in the "normal" range for the loss over the whole bear market, but many other funds have lost 20% or more.

Professor Platt asked about the capital campaign and efforts to develop funds. President Freeland replied that the capital campaign is \$200M. We have raised \$114M toward that. The remaining \$86M will be more difficult because the first dollars came from the immediate "family"—trustees, overseers, and corporators. Historically, Northeastern has counted contributions of software as gifts and put a dollar value on them, but there is some controversy in the development field as to whether it is appropriate to count them as gifts. In this campaign, it has been decided to change that practice because some of the gifts were actually discounted purchases, which amounted to about \$30M in the original planning toward the \$200M goal. People who would like to give are delaying in the hope the economy will turn around. The real issue is not so much the \$200M but rather to raise the number of contributors. We need to better cultivate our 160,000 alumni. We have an \$8M annual Co-op bill that other institutions do not, so we know we need to triple annual giving in order to be competitive with the thirteen top-100 institutions against which we track ourselves. It is helpful in fundraising to be able to say that 80% of faculty and staff support our goals and are willing to participate in the capital campaign. The dollar amount is less important than the fact of participation.

President Freeland reported that Parcels G and H, which are part of a project on the corner of Parker and Huntington Streets, are scheduled for construction of the new home for the College of Computer Science and more residential facilities. Parcel F, on which the O'Bryant African-American Institute is located, is the last site approved for development by the BRA, so any new building, with the exception of a parking garage, would require a vote by the BRA and public hearings. At present, four or five possible plans for the site are being considered. Housing is the most obvious, as it is the easiest to justify because it would have a revenue stream. Academic uses are also a possibility. Discussions with the Board of Trustees are ongoing. When we borrowed about \$90M for Parcels G and H, the trustees were a bit concerned because our debt/equity ratio has

now fallen below 1:1 with the market decline. President Freeland indicated that he would encourage continuation of the building program because it is essential to our future.

Professor Sherman asked the status of the O'Bryant Institute. President Freeland reported that the past difficulty had resulted in a commitment to a facility of equal size, 15,000 gross square feet, to be located near the existing O'Bryant site. Most of the community leaders and academic leaders are ready to focus on the quality of the facility to be constructed and the model developed by the committee, which was comprised mostly of people from the Institute and was co-chaired by Joe Warren, Special Assistant to the Director of Government Relations and Community Affairs, and Lula Petty, Director of the African-American Institute.

Professor Hall cautioned that the resolution of the crisis in 2001 had not been clearly communicated to the areas of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. President Freeland thanked him for the reminder about the importance of communicating with the surrounding communities and responded that the University had indeed printed the final resolution in the *Bay State Banner* and in the *South End News*.

In response to a question he had received in advance concerning a letter that was circulated to college presidents with regard to discrimination and harassment on campuses, President Freeland replied that he had not signed the letter because it had focused only on discrimination or harassment of Jewish or Israeli students and no other groups. He feels strongly that Northeastern needs to express dismay at any form of harassment or discrimination and to be a place where all feel safe.

As time had run out, a motion was made to adjourn.

Adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary D. Vigeant  
For the Senate Agenda Committee