

October 22, 2003

Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 10/22/2003

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Recommended Citation

Ellis Jr., Charles H., "Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 10/22/2003" (2003). *Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes*. Paper 33.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d1000502x>

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr., SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2003-2004 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 22 OCTOBER 2003

Present: (Professors) Alper, Alverson, Aroian, Bansil, Blank, Brookins, Bursley, Ellis, Flym, Futrelle, Hansberry, Howlett, Hunt, Khaw, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Margotta, Metghalchi, Ondrechen, Peterfreund, Shafai, Sherman, Vaughn, Wray
(Administrators) Abdelal, Fin kelstein, Greene, Hill, Meservey, Onan, Soyster, Stellar, Weiss

Absent: (Professors) Bannister, Barnes, Bruns, Morrison, Serafim, Sherwood
(Administrators) Zoloth

Provost Abdelal convened the meeting at 12:02 p.m.

- I. **President Freeland.** President Freeland thanked the Senate for the opportunity to meet again this fall in the spirit of working together across the University for common goals. He credited Northeastern's institutional culture with being able to keep our common energies focused on where we need to go as an institution without being diverted by turf battles or conflict between faculty and administration.

President Freeland expressed appreciation for the Senate's help with the semester conversion. It was a collaborative process from the beginning; a thank-you dinner took place the previous evening, attended by approximately 350 members of the Northeastern community who devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to the process. He noted the Senate's key role, by initially advocating the semester system in the early 1990s and then sponsoring forums for discussion and the faculty referendum that resulted in its passage. He stated that all can be proud of the relatively seamless transition from quarters to semesters.

He thanked the Senate for the efforts of its Financial Affairs Committee in trying to achieve a common salary matchmate comparison methodology so that we are closer to agreement on aligning faculty salaries with reality.

The President wanted to focus on three issues: 1) the overall repositioning of the University around the top 100 goal; 2) what we have we done and how we have used our resources to get to that point; and 3) where our focus is going to be as we move forward.

He suggested that Mark Putnam, Director of Planning and Research, be invited to brief the Senate on what has happened with our key metrics over the last few years.

The four key categories of institutional activities that we track in order to trace our trajectory toward top 100 status are: 1) student selectivity—the academic quality of freshman admissions; 2) student success—our ability to retain and graduate the students we admit; 3) our overall academic reputation—how we are viewed not by the world in general but by presidents, provosts, and admissions deans of other institutions; and 4) our resources—how much money we raise and how much is available to spend per student to support our academic programs. We benchmark ourselves in those four categories against other institutions, and if we can match a top 100 institution in those four ways we will be in very good shape competitively.

This year with respect to student selectivity—the quality of our freshman class—we are competitive with the top 100 universities. We track ourselves against thirteen private institutions similar to NU in SAT scores, and our yield rates are actually better than those of many of our benchmarks. With a 47% admit rate, we are more selective than BU (58%). New goals will include raising the bar still higher, but how much higher? We reached our 2008 goal in 2003.

In the mid-1990s, when we really started to focus on retention, our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate was about 75%. It rose to 78% in 1996-1997. Our benchmark institutions have freshman-to-sophomore retention rates of about 88%. This year we reached 87%, which is a wonderful success story and puts us near the top of our benchmark institutions. Our big challenge is not so much freshman-to-sophomore retention rates but the overall graduation rate. Last June, our six-year graduation rate was 61% vs. the 70% to which we aspire. Nevertheless, our progress has been astonishing, since our 1996 graduation rate was only 40%.

Academic reputation is the hardest *U.S. News and World Report* metric to move because it is driven by the softest underlying indicators. It is analogous to a beauty contest with 249 contestants; the 747 judges are the presidents, provosts, and deans of admission at other universities in our comparative set in the survey. How much they know about NU is anybody's guess; their perceptions may be decades old. We are working hard to change those perceptions. In fact, we moved from 2.8 to 2.9 last year, which puts us in the range of top 100 institutions, but we need to get above 3.

Resources present a huge challenge. We are highly tuition-dependent, and our fundraising lags significantly behind comparable institutions. On a per student basis we would have to triple our total annual giving in order to be competitive with the top 100 institutions. Over the last two years our overall rank has moved from 150 to 127, the top of the third tier. The score that *U.S. News* uses to assign rankings would need to go up by only one point to take us from Tier III to Tier II. President Freeland expressed hope that this would occur next year, but he cautioned that *U.S. News* manipulates its formula year to year so results are unpredictable.

On his second focus, what Northeastern has done and how it has used its resources, President Freeland noted that, while financial investments are important and even critical, many people at the University have contributed, in ways that are not compensated, to initiatives like the semester conversion. That reorganization will strengthen the institution academically and help us do a better job in many other areas. The reorganization of Coop also represents a large investment of time and effort by many people, and he expressed his gratitude to all who have been part of those and other efforts.

Two categories of investments to strengthen NU's overall academic position are 1) those that directly enhance the academic program in some way, and 2) those in non-academic areas that contribute to the recruitment and retention of students. With respect to the academic program, President Freeland reported that the full-time faculty to full-time student ratio is about the same as it was prior to the crisis of the early 1990s. However, the tenure-track faculty to student ratio has changed radically due to a significant increase in the use of non-tenure-track faculty. This has serious implications for the quality of the academic program and needs to be addressed.

In response to recent Senate advocacy for improved faculty salaries to make up for losses in the early nineties when faculty received no raises or minimal salary increases, President Freeland emphasized the continuing investment of significant dollars to address these gaps.

Significant investments have targeted support for key senior faculty appointments, such as eleven named chairs in the last five or six years, with three more still to be announced. In addition, we have invested in interdisciplinary research centers, which will enhance our academic reputation.

Investments in auxiliary areas have been financed with significant amounts of money, much of it borrowed. While the increased indebtedness has had an impact on the operating budget, the improvements to the campus have had a very positive influence on admissions and retention. The enormous investment in our IT infrastructure has paid dividends in that we are now very competitive, and even ahead of the curve with our student services. Increasing the discount rate in financial aid has brought financial relief to students, but has made a large claim on the budget. For the admissions initiative, the University has invested in personnel, publications, travel, and marketing. Still, there are unmet student needs, and we must continue in our efforts to be more competitive with institutions like BU and BC.

As to the future, President Freeland emphasized that most of the areas mentioned above continue to require attention. The building program is not finished. More housing is planned. IT infrastructure issues are ongoing, and we need to continue a diversified program of investment in order to reach top 100. However, we are poised on the threshold, and all we need to do is convince the world that we have taken this university to another plane academically. The Provost and Deans have been asked to shape an academic investment plan for the next five years, to include the following: academic quality; faculty salaries; the right number of full-time tenure-track faculty; quality of classrooms; quality of the research infrastructure; support for graduate education; and continued support for centers of conspicuous excellence that will dramatize the overall excellence of the institution. The President has asked the Committee on Funding Priorities (CFP) to stay in session after submitting its budget report (around Thanksgiving) in order to work on longer term overall priorities for the University and for its academic initiative.

President Freeland reaffirmed his commitment to accomplishing, in the very near future, the truly historic feat of moving from the bottom of the third tier to top 100.

The floor was opened to questions.

Professor Futrelle expressed concern that when we discuss undergraduate affairs all kinds of statistics are cited, but little statistical information comes forth when the quality of the faculty is mentioned. He suggested faculty accomplishments should be tracked centrally, such as research publications, citations of published work, invited talks, doctorates awarded, and information on the quality of our graduate students. President Freeland responded that statistics on sponsored projects are always part of the mix, but that we could do better in other regards. The national rankings of our graduate programs have sometimes shown conspicuous weakness, the reporting of which would not serve us well. He pointed out that, like NU, other institutions do not do particularly well at systematic review of faculty achievements. Within the next year we expect to have an institutional protocol on how best to track fellowships and major prizes won by faculty.

Professor Shafai asked about bringing together strengths in biomedical engineering to create new majors that would further enhance our academic reputation. President Freeland responded that when he arrived here in 1996 his perception was that NU had invested heavily in the physical sciences and less so in the life sciences, yet the great scientific revolution of our era is in the life sciences. That is one reason we are now investing heavily in the biotechnology initiative. He hopes to see life sciences and engineering come closer together.

Professor Ondrechen expressed concern that little attention is being paid to the declining size of the professoriate and the resultant weak ratio of professors to full-time students. President Freeland replied that enormous attention is being paid, and that it is most important to get the size of the professoriate right. He agreed that what may have been good enough in 1989 is not good enough in 2003. The advice he has received in the past from the Committee on Funding Priorities and faculty in general is that it is more important to close the salary gap of present faculty than to hire full-time faculty. The *U.S. News* places us at a 16:1 ratio, with our thirteen benchmark institutions at 13:1. There may be issues with *U.S. News* using federally-reported data for student enrollments, but depending on institutions to report their own faculty size and ratio. Having said that, President Freeland emphasized that the goal of getting the full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty size right has been a central issue in the academic initiative for several months. It is not an easy task but he hopes to have agreement during this year on what the right number is.

Professor Aroian expressed surprise that faculty research and scholarship data are not centrally accumulated, given that each faculty member must report these in annual reports for merit review. President Freeland turned to Vice Provost Meservey who responded that the data is variable across colleges and acknowledged the challenge in aggregating it. The Delaware study group has begun to discuss ways better to synchronize such data and it is hoped that we will be able to do so this year.

Professor Peterfreund suggested that IS be charged to develop an on-line reporting system. He then expressed concern that while phasing out lecturer positions and replacing them with TA's may make sense, we are thus recruiting graduate students rather than considering them for admission. President Freeland replied that graduate recruitment is high on the list of priorities, but it is a difficult area, as graduate education is far more decentralized than the undergraduate sector. He noted that, although a significant amount of the progress made in undergraduate retention is lost at the graduate level, the aspiration is to right-size the full-time faculty and tenure-track component within that group, not to pretend that teaching assistants can be equivalent to full-time professorial faculty.

Professor Vaughn noted that there are two classes of graduate programs. Masters' programs generally produce revenue, while the doctoral programs do not. Nevertheless, the doctoral programs are critical in advancing the academic reputation of the University. He recommended providing the resources for active, competitive graduate recruitment. President Freeland responded that stipends are very much an issue to be addressed and agreed that more investment is needed.

Professor Khaw raised the difficulty in scheduling attractive and well-equipped classrooms for meetings and outside speakers, that the University cannot showcase its positive features to outsiders. President Freeland noted

that our success with undergraduate enrollments constrains these resources and agreed that we need a mechanism that can facilitate scheduling the best of our facilities when guest speakers and others visit the campus.

Professor Alper asked what the next goal might be once top 100 status is achieved. President Freeland responded that he foresees taking admissions to another level rather than merely maintaining what we have and “resting on our oars,” although it may be a major effort to maintain what we have now achieved. While we could aspire to Ivy League altitude in terms of selectivity, to be an Ivy look-alike is not our niche in American higher education. However, our kind of program is very powerful for very smart students who want the combination of classroom and workplace experience. It may appeal more to an individual with an SAT score of 1350 than to one with 1600. The question is how to market in a way that is both competitive and still appropriate in the other ways that make NU special.

Professor Sherman expressed reservation as to whether the University will be able to meet the challenge of today’s LAMP students, undeclared majors who, unlike those in the past, are among our strongest students. President Freeland responded that Vice President Mantella had anticipated this phenomenon and that other institutions see choices of major coming later for better students. The short answer has been to try to strengthen the LAMP program, but this trend is growing and fundamental restructuring may be required to provide freshmen with greater opportunities for educational exploration.

The following question was sent to the President in advance of the meeting: “Many of us are under the impression that Mail Services was long a place where the University, by employing numbers of persons with disabilities/challenges, has met a significant community need. How does the recent outsourcing of Mail Services to Pitney-Bowes affect our ability to continue to meet this need? Even if all our former employees were rehired by Pitney-Bowes, they would no longer be Northeastern employees.” President Freeland explained that a special program was instituted to provide employment opportunities for physically and developmentally challenged people in Mail Services at a time when the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission had resources to support the placement of challenged people in various institutions. This was a number of years ago, and Northeastern has had three such employees. Two of the three had left the University prior to the Pitney-Bowes decision and there is no relationship between the Pitney Bowes decision and any change in our commitment to providing opportunities for physically or developmentally challenged individuals. He took the question as a mandate to find out how we fare in comparison to other universities in employing people with physical or developmental challenges.

President Freeland closed his remarks with thanks to faculty for their engagement in the recent enterprise of repositioning the University.

- II. **Minutes.** The minutes of 8 October were approved.
- III. **SAC Report.** Professor Lowndes reported the following:
 - A. **MIME Chair Search Committee.** The committee is staffed. Members are
 - Elected Members:
 - Professor George G. Adams (MIME)
 - Professor Thomas P. Cullinane (MIME)
 - Professor Hamid N. Nayeb Hashemi (MIME)
 - Appointed Members:
 - Professor Ramaiya Balachandra (CBA, Management Science)
 - Professor Mishac K. Yegian (Civil & Environmental Engineering)
 - B. **Excellence in Teaching Awards Judging Committee.** Members are

New Members:

Professor Marilyn A. Cairns (Cardiopulmonary Sciences)
 Professor Uichiro Narusawa (MIME)
 Professor Peter S. Rosen (Geology)
 Professor Michael L. Woodnick (Communication Studies)

Continuing Members:

Professor Carol A. Glod (Nursing)
 Professor Jeffery A. Hopwood (ECE)
 Professor Don E. Lewis (Center for the Arts)

C. **Next Meeting:** 29 October in Raytheon Amphitheater (240 Egan).

IV. **Provost's Report.** Provost Abdelal reported that the Deans and the Provost's Office have been working collaboratively on the following key elements of the academic initiative:

- The ratio of faculty to students, which is the cornerstone of investing in tenure-track faculty and in graduate professional programs;
- More competitive stipends to enhance graduate research support;
- Operational support for colleges and departments;
- Professional staff for recruitment; and
- Library resources.

V. **Question Time**

A. Professor Peterfreund asked the date of the MIME Department name change. Professor Lowndes replied that trustee approval is needed before the change can be implemented.

B. Dean Stellar suggested that the Senate transmit its sense of gratitude to the President for the interactive dialogue and agreed to craft a motion to that effect.

Motion. Dean Stellar moved the following, and the motion was accepted.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate wishes to express its gratitude and appreciation to President Freeland for coming to the Senate on 10/22/03 and engaging in an understanding dialogue on the common issues we face as a faculty and administration.

Vote: PASSED by unanimous voice vote: 33-0-0.

As time for the meeting had run out, Professor Ellis moved to adjourn.

Adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.
 Secretary