

December 10, 2003

## Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 12/10/2003

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*Northeastern University*

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TO: FACULTY SENATE  
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr., SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE  
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2003-2004 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 10 DECEMBER 2003

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Present: (Professors) Alper, Alverson, Aroian, Blank, Brookins, Burse, Ellis, Hansberry, Howlett, Hunt, Khaw, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Margotta, Morrison, Ondrechen, Peterfreund, Serafim, Sherman, Sherwood, Vaughn, Wray  
(Administrators) Abdelal, Finkelstein, Greene, Hill, Meservey, Onan, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Bannister, Bansil, Barnes, Bruns, Flym, Futrelle, Metghalchi, Shafai  
(Administrators) Soyster, Weiss

Provost Abdelal convened the meeting at 11:58 a.m.

- I. **Carol Schneider, President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).** Professor Lowndes welcomed and introduced Dr. Schneider. He noted that the Academic Policy Committee had been charged to explore the feasibility of a new innovative template on general education at Northeastern. The Committee had invited Dr. Schneider to share some of her experience and wisdom with its membership and with the Senate.

Dr. Schneider has been a faculty member at several institutions, and President of the AAC&U since 1998. One of her major accomplishments has been an initiative that focused on liberal learning as a framework for the educational experience and on connections between high school and college learning. The resulting AAC&U report, *Greater Expectations: A new Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, was issued in the fall of 2002.

Dr. Schneider explained that the AAC&U is a national association that includes 900 colleges and universities, including NU, in its membership. One of the goals of the *Greater Expectations* project was to make sense of islands of innovations that are emerging across the country and to remap what we mean by liberal and general education for our time. The 19<sup>th</sup> century adhered to a common curriculum. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we invented a principle of breadth for general education and depth for the major. What is happening nationally now is a rethinking of those organizing principles toward a more vertical design that incorporates work in the final year as well as in the first year. Movement across the curriculum includes quantitative reasoning, diversity, writing, and even ethical reasoning, and these innovations seem to be leading to a remapping of what we mean by liberal and general education.

Dr. Schneider pointed out that organizing educational principles have changed over the years, from a focus on teaching in a curriculum that conveyed well-established knowledge, individual rather than collaborative work, and critical thinking and objective analysis based on Western culture. Strong emphasis was placed on the liberal arts for their own sake with the goal of serving and producing a relatively homogeneous group of students. Higher education was routinely considered in isolation from its feeder systems in primary and secondary schools. Although Dr. Schneider did not see a willingness to surrender past principles, she did see a process of adding principles. Teachers today also focus on what students are learning, where to find information, how to assess what is useful, and how to use their knowledge. Strong value is placed on collaborative projects and pedagogies and on linking critical thinking to real life issues that often involve contested questions and values. There is more focus on creativity in thinking and analysis that is geared toward engaging cultural complexity and global issues.

Dr. Schneider noted that the biggest general education program in the country is the Advanced Placement program in high schools that is overseen by the College Board. Students are coming to campus with larger numbers of AP credits. That is going to force us to think harder about general education and how to build on it as students with diverse entry points move through the curriculum. While acknowledging that faculties are overloaded, the *Greater Expectations* initiative tried to envision a more elegant approach to take the old themes in new directions. What should education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century be about? How do we want to remap our undergraduate experiences and the curriculum, pedagogy, faculty reward systems, and assessment

systems to fulfill the goals we are setting for ourselves? After reviewing 75 institutions in detail, 22 were selected as advisory to the *Greater Expectations* initiative. Those selected had made huge investments in forms of liberal and general education that were less isolated and more adapted to being one element of a commitment to serve all students across the curriculum.

A set of goals to guide undergraduate learning was developed by the national panel of individuals from the business and academic communities that was convened to guide the initiative. The goals included intellectual and practical skills, knowledge of human culture and the natural world, and individual and social responsibility. Since in today's knowledge-intensive society, analytical skills and practical skills are one and the same, we have to help students break out of the notion that there is opposition between the liberal arts and tools of the professions; they are both driven by analysis and problem-solving. Our students need to see liberal and professional education as the same kind of education. Knowledge of human culture and the natural world is often thought to be the province of general education, but the panel found at the leadership schools a strong emphasis on helping all students know where this knowledge comes from. How do we as a community gain insights into the nature of human society, and how are these insights contested or modified over time? The integrity of a democratic society requires a sense of social responsibility, and the emphasis on many campuses is on educating students for global interdependence and the ability to work with people from different cultures, even when deeply contested value differences are present.

In mapping out liberal education across the curriculum, Dr. Schneider pointed out that areas of knowledge and core skills focus on analysis, inquiry, and research, but also on collaborative and applied studies, examined values, and integrated learning. As a set of organizing principles of undergraduate learning, how does our first year experience introduce some provisional work in these areas? What are the collective responsibilities of the schools and disciplines as they build on that foundation and take it to another level? The *Greater Expectations* recommendations are intended to help students develop the ability to acquire, access, and use knowledge in responsible ways—as professionals, but also as citizens and human beings.

The floor was opened to questions.

Professor Vaughn pointed out that Advanced Placement creates a broad spectrum of academic disparity among freshmen. He reported that he has had students who were bored because they were familiar with the curriculum, while others were struggling to learn the material. He asked whether it might be sensible to separate these students into tracks. Dr. Schneider responded that one of the common themes in renewal of the curriculum, particularly at research universities, is to have some kind of first year seminar that gets students working at an advanced level on open questions in the disciplines. You can create a distinctive signature feature—first year seminars, research seminars, or learning communities—for your curriculum that is not dependent for success on whether the students have Advanced Placement. You can create courses that will be new to all your students, with different levels of placement for those who are ready to go on and for those who are not. Another model that many institutions are using is curricula organized around big themes so that students and faculty get to meet together across disciplinary lines.

Professor Sherman asked Dr. Schneider to elaborate on her earlier remarks on curricular and pedagogical innovations. Dr. Schneider obliged by pointing out that one of the most popular innovations is the development of linked courses or thematically organized learning communities. That movement was invented (at the State University of New York at Stonybrook) by people who were attentive to the research imperative and the difficulties of faculty surrendering some of what they really want to do in the cause of a good undergraduate curriculum. The idea behind learning communities is that existing courses in the curriculum can be drawn together around certain common themes. Ideally, faculty will talk to each other and a cohort of students taking two or three courses will become a linked learning community, making connections across areas that initially may not have seemed connected. One of the points of higher education is to look for insights or connections that are not obvious. She recommended *The National Study of Student Engagement* as a source of relevant data. The learning community model is a means to a more integrative learning model.

Professor Ondrechen asked what the size of a learning community should be. Dr. Schneider responded that a common strategy in large universities is to link writing instruction to a topic because writing is always taught

in small classes. Many institutions link a topic to mathematics to get students working together. Some classes are being restructured so that students work together in small groups at computer terminals.

Professor Khaw asked whether Dr. Schneider had done any investigation below the college level. Dr. Schneider replied that the report is not talking only about things that would begin in the first year of college, but also about a new partnership between schools and higher education in the service of certain advanced capacities and ways of learning that are important in our world. Typically, the AP tests are given at the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade level, and the gap between the competency levels of school testing and faculty expectations for college freshman courses is not being addressed, or even noticed. *Greater Expectations* is a family of projects. One part of it is to examine what background should be expected in high school graduates so that the freshman year of college is not remedial, but takes them to a higher level. Entering college students often have had little more than a survey course in world history (often at age 14), so we see colleges struggling to impart some knowledge of history, of culture, of complexity in order to address global and diversity issues at the college level.

Dr. Schneider noted that a great deal of innovation is under way, some of which has already been reported in *U.S. News and World Report*. She cited a study called *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: Three Years After the Boyer Report* ([www.sunysb.edu/reinventioncenter/boyerfollowup.pdf](http://www.sunysb.edu/reinventioncenter/boyerfollowup.pdf)), which is fairly critical of the failure of research universities to involve their students in research. The following recommendations came out of the study as to what should happen in a first year seminar: a focus on inquiry-based learning from the outset; involvement of all students in undergraduate research; creation of a senior capstone to give students the opportunity to show what they can do with research; more forms of collaborative learning (because most research is done in some sort of community); and strong emphasis on writing and communication across the curriculum.

Three years after the Boyer Report was issued, that group did a follow-up survey of some 91 responding research universities. The main finding was that most of the reform efforts had been aimed only at the best students. The average student at a typical research university is not yet benefiting from most of this. Respondents were confused as to what inquiry-based learning meant (learning organized around questions and problems as opposed to simple delivery of known facts). Nevertheless, they found a number of first year programs trying to introduce it. They found poor faculty participation in training opportunities related to new pedagogies and saw no significant incentives for participation by faculty. They also found only 20-25% of undergraduates doing research. Thus research universities are doing no better or worse than other institutions in engaging students in research. As to senior capstones, only 5% of universities require students to do culminating work that transcends disciplinary boundaries, though 60% of students overall are doing some kind of capstone work.

Dr. Schneider concluded her remarks by encouraging NU to mine its own “islands of innovation” to create a signature program that speaks to its relationship to society and brings together issues of professional and technical education with liberal arts education in innovative ways unique to this institution.

Professor Lowndes and Provost Abdelal each thanked Dr. Schneider for her presentation and discussion.

- II. **Minutes.** The minutes of 12 November were approved.
- III. **SAC Report.** Professor Lowndes reported the following.
  - A. **Meetings.** The Agenda Committee met three times since the last Senate meeting.
  - B. **CBA Dean Search.** Staffing is complete with the exception of one graduate student still to be appointed. The committee has met and the search is under way. Members are

Elected:

Professor Gloria J. Barczak Co-chair (CBA-Marketing)  
 Professor Ravi Ramamurti Co-chair (CBA-General Management)

Professor Thomas M. Begley (CBA-HRM)  
 Professor Bruce H. Clark (CBA-Marketing)  
 Professor Mario Maletta (CBA-Accounting)  
 Professor Don R. Rich (CBA-Finance & Insurance)  
 Professor Marius M. Solomon (CBA-Management)

Appointed:

Professor Shelia M. Puffer (CBA-General Management)  
 Dr. Neal Finnegan (Chair, Board of Trustees)  
 Professor John E. Kwoka, Jr. (Economics)  
 Dean Stephen R. Zoloth (Bouvé)  
 Mr. Peter Antonellis, SGA Representative

C. **Search Procedures.** By mutual agreement, the CBA Dean search committee has been established using refinements to the current search procedures that SAC and the President and Provost are continuing to discuss. As the Handbook is not specific about certain aspects of the search process, SAC and the President and Provost have been working to improve the current search procedures without going outside the existing framework. Election of the majority of the search committee membership will continue, but it is in the area of appointed members that one of the changes is being considered. In the past, SAC has appointed a number of faculty, according to the size of the committee, and the administration has selected one or more administrators. That will basically continue, except that the SAC now develops a slate of twice the number to be appointed from whom the Provost (in this case) selects the appointed faculty members. The Provost, correspondingly, provides a slate of twice the number of administrators needed from whom SAC selects the appointed administrator(s). The President may select a trustee, or a member of the Corporation, or an appropriate alumnus, who would bring visibility or experience to the search. Student representation would also work on the slate process. The procedures are still in draft stage but will be brought to the Senate in due course.

D. **New Searches.** SAC has been asked to initiate an internal search for chair of the Department of Physics. An election will be held on 11 December.

A search is being initiated for director of the Law, Policy, and Society program. That search will be internal.

The Visual Arts Chair Search Committee is being staffed. That search will be external. The department elected Professors Ann Galligan, Neal Rantoul, and Thomas Starr.

E. **Research Policy Oversight Committee.** The Ad Hoc Research Policy Oversight Committee has been staffed with the following faculty:

Professor Ahmed Busnaina (MIME)  
 Professor Matthias Felleisen (Computer and Information Science)  
 Professor Jeffrey A. Hopwood (ECE)  
 Professor Graham Jones (Chemistry)  
 Professor Barry L. Karger (Chemistry, Barnett Inst. Director)  
 Professor Albert Sacco (Chemical Engineering)  
 Professor Michael B. Silevitch (ECE, CenSSIS Director)  
 Professor Srinivas Sridhar (Physics)  
 Professor Vladimir P. Torchilin (Pharmaceutical Sciences)  
 Professor Carol M. Warner (Biology)

The charge to the committee is as follows:

1. Taking into account the existing and possible future research directions in the sciences and engineering, and the likely opportunities for significant external research funding, what strategic disciplinary and interdisciplinary directions should Northeastern pursue in order to achieve excellence as a research university and thereby support its top-100 goal?
2. In order to achieve this excellence, what major infrastructure changes are needed to advance the University's key research programs, both current and future?

The SAC intends to set up a separate, parallel committee, which will draw on the non-science and non-engineering areas that also deal with sponsored research.

- F. **Committee on Funding Priorities (CFP).** The CFP has now completed its work on its recommendations for the 2005 budget and its report has been sent on to the Budget Committee for its consideration. The CFP recently voted that the report not be confidential this year and President Freeland has agreed to its being released once the Budget Committee has completed its work. The CFP is now considering recommendations for the Supplementary, or Contingency, Budget and recommendations for a possible multi-year academic investment plan, consistent with earlier Senate resolutions.
- G. **11/19 Resolution.** A motion to reconsider the resolution on conference hours adopted in the last Senate meeting will be proposed at the next Senate meeting.
- H. **Next Meeting:** 14 January in Raytheon Amphitheater (240 Egan).

IV. **Provost's Report** Provost Abdelal reported the following.

- A. **Committee on Funding Priorities (CFP).** The second part of the charge to the CFP is to look at the academic initiative. The complex questions relate to the magnitude of this initiative, that is, what we can afford to do over the next five years, and what we can project in terms of the budget.
- B. **Searches.** On behalf of his office and the President, Provost Abdelal expressed appreciation to the Agenda Committee for its collaborative spirit in drafting revisions to the search procedures.
- C. **"Town Hall Meeting."** Provost Abdelal expressed his appreciation to faculty who had participated in the recent University-wide faculty meeting. The town-meeting format provided good dialogue and an opportunity to connect faculty across the University. He plans to hold at least one such meeting each semester.
- D. **Freshman Learning Communities.** The Provost's Office is working actively with the Offices of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs to develop learning communities with thematic, intellectually based learning, possibly in a residential arrangement, for next year's freshman class.

V. **Question and Discussion Time**

- A. Professor Peterfreund had been given to understand that an advisory committee was being formed from outside the University to assist the Visual Arts Chair Search Committee. He asked if this were true and, if so, what its relationship would be with respect to the search procedures in the Faculty Handbook. Provost Abdelal responded that the Provost's Office has agreed to invite a number of nationally recognized experts to consult as individuals with the department faculty with regard to where the department currently is and where they want it to go. Dean Stellar added that this chair search would be transformational, given that Visual Arts had split from Architecture two years ago and that this provides an opportunity for the department to launch itself in new directions.

Professor Lowndes added that, given their recent experiences and as the search will now be for a national leader, the department had requested that external consultants be available to offer guidance and

expertise, and the Provost has agreed to fund this endeavor. These consultants, though, would not in any way direct the search, but would serve in an advisory capacity to the Senate Search Committee.

- VI. **SGA Resolution on Syllabi.** Professor Lowndes moved the following resolution from the Student Government Association and the motion was seconded.

**WHEREAS: The course syllabus is an essential component to instruction and a crucial piece to a student's academic outlook, AND**

**WHEREAS: The availability, circulation and distribution of course syllabi vary greatly among respective colleges, AND**

**WHEREAS: Northeastern University is committed to providing equal access for all students regardless of disability status, AND**

**WHEREAS: Northeastern University currently provides education and instruction for faculty at the Education Technology Center in programs that notably expand students' access to information such as Blackboard, AND**

**WHEREAS: Students' web access to course syllabi would greatly improve the level of communication between faculty and students and enhance the availability of information on and off campus, AND**

**WHEREAS: Students are not always able to make contact with their professors or instructors, to request information that might otherwise be available in a syllabus, THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That every undergraduate course, lab, recitation, section adjunct, module, and seminar taught at Northeastern University provides an updated online version of the syllabus, AND THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That 50% of syllabi per college (as defined above) be available via the internet by the end of the first full academic semester after this legislation is approved and 100% by the first academic semester thereafter, AND THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That each Academic department will maintain a directory of courses offered with access directions to each individual course's syllabus. This directory will reside both in the department's office and on its website.**

The floor was yielded to Professor Herman, Chair of the Academic Policy Committee, who indicated the Committee's approval of the resolution and explained that the resolution was consistent with policies previously passed by the Senate and with the Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, which gives students the right to expect a syllabus for every course. This legislation deals with making sure the syllabus is available even if a student has misplaced the paper copy.

The floor was yielded to Peter Antonellis, SGA Vice President for Student Affairs, who explained that the resolution would ensure the availability of a syllabus online that students could access at any time. He noted that, while not all faculty are technologically savvy, the EdTech Center is willing to instruct any member of the faculty in the use of Blackboard.

Professor Herman added that there are online alternatives available for faculty who do not wish to use Blackboard.

Vice Provost Meservey noted that in the not-too-distant future students would be able to look at syllabi to select courses using more detailed information than appears in catalog course descriptions.

Professor Sherman suggested having syllabi at a central point such as the Registrar's database.

The floor was yielded to Leslie Hitch, Director of Academic Technology Services, who reported that technology is being developed to bring processes together for information access on the Registrar's database, the course catalogue, and other information sources that will help students.

Dean Finkelstein expressed concern that contractual disputes might occur in the case of changes made to an online syllabus. Professor Herman responded that the course description and the syllabus, in combination with other parts of the Handbook, provide a contract between students and faculty to educate the students, but it is not a contract in the sense that no changes or supplements are possible as the term progresses. If a textbook goes out of print or an exam schedule changes, it is a commonsense issue.

Professor Ondrechen, having heard no argument against the resolution, asked that the record show that many faculty would like to see all syllabi made public and centrally accessible.

Motion. Professor Peterfreund suggested changing "provides" to "provide" and replacing "updated" with "up-to-date." This was accepted as a friendly amendment.

Professor Sherwood supported the resolution but felt that faculty need some sort of flexibility with a syllabus.

Professor Blank reported that he had polled the faculty in his department and found that some objected on the basis that they do not know how to put materials online and do not want to learn. He suggested a mandate for each department to provide the means of putting syllabi online.

Professor Alper asked what would happen if faculty refuse to comply and where resources would come from for departments to maintain up-to-date syllabi on the web. Professor Ellis responded that the resolution does not say it is the responsibility of individual faculty to put the syllabus online. A department can work out its own system of getting syllabi online, whether by using Dreamweaver or by creating its own website. Dean Stellar added that his office would work with the departments in his college to accomplish the task of getting syllabi online.

Professor Herman pointed out that faculty have a range of teaching responsibilities enumerated in the Handbook and that there are almost no specific penalties attached to them individually. If these responsibilities are not carried out, the problem can be handled within the merit system. The students had asked very little of us: the legislation did not include remediation mechanisms, was as lenient as possible, and did not demand that faculty put syllabi online themselves.

Motion. Professor Sherwood called the question, and the motion was seconded.

Vote on cloture: PASSED, 27-2-0.

As amended, the resolution read as follows:

**WHEREAS: The course syllabus is an essential component to instruction and a crucial piece to a student's academic outlook, AND**

**WHEREAS: The availability, circulation and distribution of course syllabi vary greatly among respective colleges, AND**

**WHEREAS: Northeastern University is committed to providing equal access for all students regardless of disability status, AND**

**WHEREAS: Northeastern University currently provides education and instruction for faculty at the Education Technology Center in programs that notably expand students' access to information such as Blackboard, AND**

**WHEREAS: Students' web access to course syllabi would greatly improve the level of communication between faculty and students and enhance the availability of information on and off campus, AND**

**WHEREAS: Students are nor always able to make contact with their professors or instructors, to request information that might otherwise be available in a syllabus, THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That every undergraduate course, lab, recitation, section adjunct, module, and seminar taught at Northeastern University provide an up-to-date online version of the syllabus, AND THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That 50% of syllabi per college (as defined above) be available via the internet by the end of the first full academic semester after this legislation is approved and 100% by the first academic semester thereafter, AND THEREFORE**

**BE IT RESOLVED: That each Academic department will maintain a directory of courses offered with access directions to each individual course's syllabus. This directory will reside both in the department's office and on its website.**

Vote on the motion as amended: PASSED, 24-1-4.

Adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.  
Secretary