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Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 09/22/2004

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr. SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2004-05 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 22 SEPTEMBER 2004

Present: (Professors) Bannister, Bansil, Blank, Bobcean, De Ritis, Ellis, Futrelle, Hansberry, Herman, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Marshall, McKnight, Melachrinoudis, Morrison, Powers-Lee, Reynolds, Robinson, Schaffer, Shafai, Sherwood, Vaughn, Wiseman, Wray
(Administrators) Abdelal, Finkelstein, Hill, Meservey, Onan, Spieler, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Glod, Margotta, Peterfreund
(Administrators) Moore, Soyster

Provost Abdelal convened the meeting at 11:54 a.m.

I. **Minutes.** The minutes of September 15 were in progress.

II. **SAC Report.** Professor Lowndes reported the following.

A. **Meetings.** The Agenda Committee met twice since the last meeting, once in regular session and once with Provost Abdelal. In the meeting with the Provost several issues were raised that had arisen over the summer, some of which need further discussion. SAC expects that some ultimately will be sent to Senate standing committees.

B. **Summer Compensation.** Some misunderstanding seems to have occurred among some deans about the extra compensation for faculty teaching summer courses. The fact of the matter is that what the Senate passed and the President approved was 1/6 of the base salary for a 4-credit course. Any variations for courses that are not 4-credit are to be resolved by the Provost and the deans.

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

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

A. **Summer Compensation.** Provost Abdelal confirmed Professor Lowndes' statement about the 1/6 of salary per 4-credit course, and said that he had also mentioned this in the latest Deans Council meeting.

B. **Positive News.** The Academic Investment Plan is performance-based, to be funded contingent on our success with retention, enrollments, and generation of overhead. Early indications are positive on all three fronts. Undergraduate credit hours this fall are up 2% over those of last fall. Freshman retention is up by 1%. Graduate enrollments also appear to be up by about 2%. Credit hours in the summer increased significantly relative to the previous summer. We must be mindful that the first half of the summer was in the last fiscal year and the second half in this one. However, the total enrollments increased by 2.4%. Indirect costs (overhead) lag by one year. Last year \$8.7M was projected and \$9.7M was actually generated.

C. **New Faculty.** Some of the twenty new faculty members in the sciences and engineering are bringing outside funding with them, such as a center for drug design (\$2M). The recently established center for nanoscale manufacturing has been granted NSF funding of \$12.4M over five years. These enhancements will help us significantly in the *U.S. News* peer evaluation and academic reputation category.

- D. **Vice Provost Position.** Provost Abdelal reported that a job description, with some redistribution of responsibilities, has been drafted for Vice Provost Meservey's position. It will be shared with Professor Lowndes and the deans for their feedback. Subsequently, an advisory search committee will be established.

IV. **Question and Discussion Time**

- A. Letter from Professor Peterfreund:

"If you saw the story in today's *Globe* ("NU, city try to quell off-campus parties," B1, 7) today, perhaps you winced, as I did, at Northeastern spokespersons being quoted as saying, "We take this matter very serious" (Fred McGrail, B1), and "The university will take swift action against any student whose behavior is deemed detrimental to themselves. . ." (Ed Klotzbier, B7). While I concur wholeheartedly in the need to curb irresponsible student behavior caused by illegal drinking or any other factor, I am distressed by the fact that two spokespersons designated by the University to express its position cannot do so in something approaching correct English. And the fact that I and not some university official is bringing this reaction before the Faculty Senate suggests the light regard in which correct and idiomatic expression is held by those in charge of the institution.

"All the Jumbotron time, PBS underwriting, articles in prestigious magazines, and branding that money can buy will go for naught if the university, by its words and deeds, does not project the message that it cares about how it expresses its collective will.

"As I must absent myself from the Faculty Senate meeting of September 22, I ask that this letter be made part of the record."

- B. Professor Futelle expressed concern that increasing enrollments also increases the burden on faculty. Provost Abdelal responded that the goal is not to increase the number of incoming undergraduates, but to have increased retention through the quality of the undergraduate program. While the total number of incoming freshmen and transfers is lower than that of last year, the number of credit hours taken is increasing because of better retention and graduation rates.
- C. Professor Herman asked for a progress report on the NU Press. Vice Provost Meservey reported that the University has been in negotiations with the University Press of New England (UPNE), a consortium that currently includes five institutions (the University of Vermont, University of New Hampshire, Brandeis University, Tufts University and Dartmouth College) that is headquartered at Dartmouth College. NU Press is now publishing its fall list of fifteen volumes — the transition is producing not as many as we would like — and if all goes well we will publish five or six more titles in the spring. Northeastern's participation will include continuing its own faculty editorial board to recommend to UPNE the works to publish under the NU imprint, and representation on the UPNE editorial and governance boards. This appears to be a positive conclusion to what was a difficult situation.
- C. Professor Lowndes announced that this would be Vice Provost Meservey's last Senate meeting before she becomes Suffolk University's provost. He thanked her for her extraordinarily productive service on behalf of the administration, the Senate and the faculty, wished her well, and called for a round of applause. President Freeland has appointed Vice Provost Falcon as her replacement on the Senate

- V. **Report of the 2003-04 Ad Hoc Senate Committee on Information Systems (IS) Policy.** Professor Bansil moved Resolution #7 and the motion was seconded. The resolution read as follows:

WHEREAS there is a critical need to develop and maintain a robust infrastructure for research computing and computational training in the university,

BE IT RESOLVED That a centralized facility for research computing and computational training be staffed and supported by IS. A Faculty Committee with representation from the various campus

research constituencies will set policy for this facility. Appropriate mechanisms for sustaining this effort on a long-term basis for serving diverse campus needs in research computing and computational training will be developed.

Professor Bansil reported on the progress already made in implementing the plans called for in this resolution. A \$350K donation from Hewlett Packard Company to the Advanced Scientific Computation Center (ASCC), with an additional \$150K from the Provost's Office, has made possible the purchase of a state-of-the-art, high-powered computational system which lists for over \$500K. It is now being managed on a day-to-day basis by IS. This computer system is expected to be available for use by the university community within a few weeks. On behalf of the research community, he thanked Provost Abdelal, former Vice Provost Hedlund, Vice President Weir, and ATS Director Hitch for their help in making this possible. The faculty advisory committee envisioned in the resolution has been formed and has met under the leadership of Co-chairs Professor Rappaport and Dr. Glenn Pierce. Research computing and the computational training of students in high-end platforms are well-suited to be coupled with competitive proposals for outside funding resources, and will herald a new and exciting era for NU to make its mark on the national scene in research computing.

Professor Bansil announced that several proponents of the resolution would like to make brief statements. He yielded the floor to Professor Ondrechen.

Professor Ondrechen reported that she had accompanied a delegation to the University of Kentucky last year to view its research computing facility. She said that this kind of dedicated facility is critical for creative research and scholarship for faculty and students and for competing for outside grants.

The floor was then yielded to Dr. Hitch who expressed IS's enthusiastic support for the resolution as providing the opportunity to have, like other research universities, a centralized operation on the campus that will move us forward and build momentum for the Academic Investment Plan.

Professor Futrelle declared himself a skeptic and doubted that this sort of centralization is the answer to everyone's problems. He pointed out that many institutions nationwide buy Linux clusters, which are inexpensive but provide a huge computing capacity.

The floor was yielded to Dr. Pierce who indicated that the issue is not whether to centralize or decentralize; we want the capability and this facility's staff will provide complementary expertise for many projects on campus.

Professor Bansil read statements from Professor Rappaport and Professor Jose of Physics.

The following is Professor Jose's statement:

"Northeastern University has started the needed effort to support a Central University Research Computing facility with the recent acquisition of the Hewlett Packard Itanium2 system that is presently operationally managed by IS. This Central facility should expand to cover as well computational educational training. It should also be a computing system that is updated on a regular basis, since computing technology becomes obsolete within a 2-4 year time period. The planning and how the Central University system should be run will be overseen by a university wide committee made out of the leading high performance computing researchers. The passing of this resolution will cover a gap needed for the university's efforts in becoming a top 100 university with the appropriate funding of a Central high performance computing facility."

The following is the statement from Professor Rappaport, Associate Director of CenSSIS and Chair of the Advanced Scientific Computation Center Advisory Committee (ASAC):

"Asking for more computing power is like asking for more money...everybody wants more." This comment addresses the specific need for a powerful computer system for technical research, and why this need is critical.

“The computers I am talking about here are big machines, used for runs that take hours to hundreds of hours, and necessary for advanced modeling, prediction, simulation, and reconstruction.

“As the Assoc. Director of CenSSIS, I can state that the need for big computers is clear for CenSSIS research, but also it is necessary for many other investigations across the colleges of Northeastern University. At CenSSIS, we endeavor to use waves to probe below the surface of complex environments: finding underground contaminants, cancerous tumors, sub-cellular structure, and buried plastic land mines. We must simulate the realistic background structure with irregular potholes and rocks, and organs and blood vessels, and nuclei and mitochondria, as this is often the chief reason why subsurface objects are hard to identify. This accurate modeling of the background is necessary both for studying how radar or sonar or light interacts with it, but also how to unravel the often scrambled signals that return. With help from our colleagues in Computer Science, Biology, and the health professions, we engineers have the scientific tools to do this modeling, the physics-based techniques and mathematical algorithms to precisely describe the particular field behavior. What we need is the computing power to run the simulations.

“Simple, idealized or two-dimensional calculations can be performed adequately on currently available (high-end) desktop computers. But to solve the full three-dimensional, fully realistic problem requires 100 to 1000 times more power, and 10 to 50 times more memory. Many of the subsurface sensing problems are not only slow, but often just not possible on any but the most powerful computers.

“Such powerful computers are clearly expensive. So much so that only with special major equipment grants or donations can they be acquired. They are simply out of budget range for even the largest research grants. However, having a big computer available to the full community of Northeastern researchers has the very positive effect of bringing certain grants and contracts within reach. Many advanced research projects often have a modeling component that requires tremendous computing power. This power being easily accessible on campus opens up previously prohibited options reserved for the elite research institutions.

“Furthermore, it makes sense to administer this computing infrastructure centrally and share its benefits, especially to those units with severely limited equipment budgets. A suitable computer system would have enough capacity to go around. [While I’d like to monopolize a giant machine with just my research group, it is fair and sufficiently productive to use just a piece of it, as predicated by others’ needs.] A central facility would also benefit a wide range of campus users, as the lessons learned from successful researchers would aid newcomers the research computer system.

“I urge the Faculty Senate to adopt this resolution, and bring Northeastern’s research computing environment up to par with the best.”

Professor Lowndes suggested adding “appointed by the Provost in consultation with the Senate Agenda Committee” after “A Faculty Committee”, and this was accepted as a friendly amendment.

Dean Finkelstein supported the resolution and recommended that the committee also be charged to educate the faculty about what other resources would be available, both locally and nationally.

Professor Blank asked whether the necessity really is high-powered hardware, as opposed to manpower. He definitely supports having the people to provide expertise.

Professor Futrelle noted that, as a member of IS Policy Committee, he did not recall any communication about this advisory committee being formed nor about the establishment and funding of the new facility. Professor Bansil responded that this had been mentioned in several meetings of the ISPC and was included in the final report, which had gone back and forth a number of times for revisions by the members before final approval by the committee.

Provost Abdelal noted that his office had responded to the request from Professor Bansil during the summer for the University to provide matching funds so that the equipment would be obtainable from the source. Professor Bansil’s request was reviewed and endorsed by the Department of Physics and by the Dean of Arts

and Sciences. While the request converged with the ISPC report, the Provost's Office response was really to a specific request of the kind that any faculty member can submit at any time, although it helps if the request is endorsed by the faculty member's department and college.

Professor Onan asked for a review of what this new advisory committee has been charged to do. Provost Abdelal replied that the committee was constituted in response to the report by the [provostial] committee chaired by Professor Jarroll on research computing.

Dean Stellar explained that he had constituted the committee because the Dean's Office is pushing for its research centers to have advisory boards. He indicated that he could understand, with all of the players in the mix, how some events may not have been brought fully to the attention of every group in exactly the right way.

Professor Shafai asked what the vision of the Provost's Office was for providing support and manpower for the operation. Provost Abdelal explained that our computing support for research and teaching is sometimes centralized and sometimes distributed, adding that this is true for most other universities. We need to ensure that the sum of the two approaches is adequate to our needs. Staff positions may be added as needed, but will be supported by the colleges' resources. Discussion of where we are and what is needed will be ongoing.

Professor Lowndes pointed out that, while the resolution reflects one possibility that we need, it does not preclude establishing other mechanisms. He wanted the record to show that this is a centralized university-wide facility, not in a department or a college. He proposed that the Provost, along with SAC, be responsible for establishing and charging the advisory committee, and this was accepted.

Dean Finkelstein noted that the ISPC report takes a broader view than just this resolution, and he assumed that some of the other issues will be addressed in due course.

Professor Powers-Lee suggested adding “, including consideration of centralized and/or distributed support” after “training”, and this was accepted as a friendly amendment.

As amended, Resolution #7 read as follows:

WHEREAS there is a critical need to develop and maintain a robust infrastructure for research computing and computational training in the university,

BE IT RESOLVED That a centralized facility for research computing and computational training be staffed and supported by IS. A Faculty Committee appointed by the Provost in consultation with the Senate Agenda Committee, with representation from the various campus research constituencies, will set policy for this facility. Appropriate mechanisms for sustaining this effort on a long-term basis for serving diverse campus needs in research computing and computational training, including consideration of centralized and/or distributed support will be developed.

There being no objection, the Senate turned to a vote.

Vote: PASSED, 29-0-1.

Professor Bansil moved Resolution #8, and the motion was seconded. The resolution read as follows:

WHEREAS faculty require a diverse array of up-to-date technology to meet their individual research computing needs,

BE IT RESOLVED That the ITPC will survey and develop appropriate mechanisms for supporting faculty needs with respect to research computing. A suitable upgrade cycle for faculty computers will be developed.

The floor was yielded to Professor Ayers who explained that, when we purchased a centralized mainframe some years ago, the original box had ¼ megabyte of memory and performance measured in megaflops. The typical desktop computer of today, has one gigabyte of memory and a gigahertz or multiple-gigahertz performance, so all faculty have something that far transcends the power of the item most consider to be a traditional mainframe to use for a variety of research purposes. This broad body of equipment does not fall under any particular support facility. The number and condition of our university computers is not known, nor are the various kinds of software they contain. We have no economies of scale for support, and we have enormous need for them. We must, therefore, take stock of what active resources we have and develop some effective connection among the Provost's Office, the Division of Research Management, and the IT effort of the University. We must come to grips with the need to support the equipment purchased on research grants, to inventory that equipment, and to obtain personnel to support desktop and laptop activities, such as scientific visualization, modeling, and simulation.

Professor Vaughn favored having a clear structure, with IT at the apex, that has some academic authority.

Professor Ayers noted that the other group, users of Linux clusters, Macs and Unix, is not represented here.

Professor Lowndes suggested adding "and teaching" after "research" in both sentences, and this was accepted as a friendly amendment.

Professor Lowndes emphasized the benefit of having base-budgeting for replacing computers on a regular cycle.

Professor Ellis favored the concept of having a regular upgrade cycle.

Professor Herman noted that the resolution did not recommend yet another committee; the resolution provides a piece of the charge to the main committee (ITPC) that had been renamed in Resolution #1. These resolutions together would set up an overarching structure to oversee and look comprehensively at the centralized computing organization and perhaps include a set of subcommittees with various responsibilities.

Professor Sherwood called the question.

There being no objection, the Senate turned to a vote.

Resolution #8, as amended, read as follows:

WHEREAS faculty require a diverse array of up-to-date technology to meet their individual research and teaching computing needs,

BE IT RESOLVED That the ITPC will survey and develop appropriate mechanisms for supporting faculty needs with respect to research and teaching computing. A suitable upgrade cycle for faculty computers will be developed.

Vote: PASSED, 32-0-0.

Professor Bansil moved Resolution #9, and the motion was seconded. The resolution read as follows:

WHEREAS new and emerging technologies are the key to maintaining a cutting-edge IT infrastructure for research and teaching in the university,

BE IT RESOLVED That the ITPC will develop a mechanism for evaluating, prioritizing and recommending the infrastructure for new and emerging technologies (including wireless technologies) appropriate for various constituencies in the university.

The floor was yielded to Professor Yilmaz, whose subcommittee had developed this resolution. Professor

Yilmaz noted that in his twenty-five years here he had not seen a mechanism at Northeastern to evaluate, prioritize and recommend the adoption of new technologies.

There being no discussion, the Senate turned to a vote.

Vote: PASSED, 30-0-0.

VI. **2003-04 Special Committee on Academic Policy Committee Summary Report on General Education .**
Professor Herman moved to accept the report, and the motion was seconded.

Professor Herman explained that the one omnibus resolution would establish a set of principles as stated in the report on which the faculty could achieve general agreement. Subsequently, the committee would develop an institution-wide template from which all the colleges might think about how best to accommodate or work within that template.

Vote to accept the report: PASSED by unanimous voice vote.

Adjourned at 1:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.
Secretary