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Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 10/13/2004

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr., SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2004-05 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 13 OCTOBER 2004

Present: (Professors) Alper, Bansil, Blank, De Ritis, Ellis, Glod, Hansberry, Herman, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Marshall, McKnight, Melachrinoudis, Morrison, Peterfreund, Powers-Lee, Reynolds, Robinson, Schaffer, Sherman, Sherwood, Vaughn, Wiseman, Wray
(Administrators) Falcon, Finkelstein, Hill, Moore, Onan, Soyster, Spieler, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Bannister, Bobcean, Futrelle, Heiman, Margotta, Shafai
(Administrators) Abdelal, Stellar

Professor Lowndes convened the meeting at 11:54 a.m.

I. **Minutes.** The minutes of September 22, which were sent to Senators electronically, will be revised and redistributed (correction on page 3, third paragraph) for consideration at the next meeting.

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

A. **Fringe Benefits.** Concern was expressed at the last meeting about same-sex couples and their fringe benefits. The fundamental question was that those who live out of state not be adversely affected by the recent ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Vice President Pendergast has responded that nothing will change for a period of fourteen months. HRM is pondering the matter, but there is no *a priori* disposition to take away fringe benefits.

B. **Meetings.** The Agenda Committee has met three times since the last Senate meeting, twice in regular session and once with Vice President Pendergast regarding changes to the University health plan. Information sessions on the health plan have been scheduled and members of the university community are urged to attend.

C. **“Life at the Top: A Report to the Faculty Senate.”** Professor Lowndes presented some of the highlights of his report, which had just been distributed to Senators. He noted that some of the information contained in the report is not easily accessible. Other data were imminent and would be provided soon in an updated report. The report provides background information on a number of issues that will arise this year having to do with our quest for top-100 status. Table 1 shows the breakdown of *U.S. News and World Report* ranking categories and weightings, subfactors and their weightings, and NU’s rankings. The key issue is that we are already in the top 100 for peer assessment, student selectivity, and graduation rate performance. Most important is that peer assessment, which has a 25% weighting, ranks us at 97th. In contrast, we do not do as well in four other areas—faculty resources, 159th; graduation and retention rates, 131st; financial resources, 133rd; and alumni giving, 131st.

He was most concerned with faculty resources and the graduation and retention rate. In the faculty resources category, faculty compensation and the number of full-time faculty with terminal degrees reflect problems for the University to address. *U.S. News and World Report* defines “faculty” in different ways throughout its report, so we need to be clear about what we are defining. “Faculty Compensation” is the average faculty compensation for what he called the professoriate—tenured, tenure-track, assistant, associate, and full professor. On the other hand, the percentage of faculty with a top terminal degree includes all full-time faculty and apparently Coop coordinators. The percentage of faculty with the top terminal degree is 80% for the University, which is not at all good in comparison with other institutions.

We do not know the average graduation rate, but we do know that we are ranked 99th for the average freshman retention rate. He reminded the body that the graduation rate in *U.S. News and World Report* refers to the average graduation rate for freshmen entering in 1994 through 1997 who graduated in six years or less. Therefore, the University's retention efforts, which have kicked in for freshmen, would not yet have fully affected the graduation rate in the current rankings. Our current graduation rate is on target at about 64%, with a 70% goal for 2008. While we may need to work our way through the six-year cycle to improve that graduation rate, it is important for the University because it also determines our revenues and hence our financial integrity.

Financial resources, another problem, may not be easy collectively to change because many top-100 institutions with medical schools can throw some of those costs into their higher per-student expenditures. In the same way, the faculty cannot act to improve our alumni giving, which is a 5% factor.

Table 2 provides comparisons with Drexel, other institutions ranked with us at 120th, and all institutions ranked between 98-119 above us. With all of these comparisons, the greatest ranking problem that emerges is with our faculty resources rank at 159th, but the graduation and retention rate, financial resources, and alumni giving categories are also areas for significant improvement.

Professor Kruger pointed out that the primary dimensions affecting the faculty resources ranking are faculty compensation and the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees.

Professor Lowndes noted that Table 3, covering NSF data ranking research expenditures for 1990, 1995, and 2001-02, describes a bleak picture for research funding. Recent federal support to the University has shown little growth and, further, this is so even though it includes two very large grants for CenSSIS and for Physics. One current multi-million dollar grant to the University will terminate early next year, so that the excellent announcements recently of new major grants will not necessarily move us forward as much as we might have hoped. If one were to compare sponsored research dollars rankings with *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, the chances are good that if you are in the top 100 in one, you will be in the top 100 in the other.

Table 4 indicates that the number of doctorates awarded at Northeastern has been declining over the last four or five years. In 1998, we graduated 87 doctorates and ranked 134th; in 2002, we graduated only 50 doctorates and had slipped to 183rd. During 1990-2002, the number of doctorates awarded nationally increased by 11%, but at Northeastern the number declined by 18%. As with research funding, the size and caliber of our doctorate programs surely affects our academic reputation

Table 5 provides comparative information on tuition and fees. NU is obviously getting expensive but not excessively so. We are ranked in the bottom third of all the national private extensive doctoral institutions in terms of tuition and fees, and there are some 20 institutions in Massachusetts alone with tuition and fees higher than those at Northeastern.

Table 6 contains a summary of selected assets, liabilities, revenues and expenses from University annual reports. Professor Lowndes underscored the dramatic increase in our long-term debt since 1996-97 as we erected new buildings and facilities. While many improvements have been made to the campus, it has been at a cost that must now be paid. The financial aid discount effort has been successful, but it has undergone an enormous increase over the last several years, overshadowing all other initiatives except the long-term debt. The latest data will remain confidential until it has gone to the Board of Trustees, but will be presented shortly as an updated report as soon as it is available.

Table 7 provides a comparison of investment in the basic colleges with all other administrative areas from 1990 to 2004. Professor Lowndes pointed out that, according to the data he was able to obtain, the colleges' budgets went up far less than those of all other areas from 1998-2004.

III. Question and Discussion Time.

A. Professor Powers-Lee asked whether the faculty data included the SPCS. Professor Lowndes did not

believe so and pointed out that it would not change much, as SPCS has only about twelve full-time lecturers. He had been told, however, that Coop coordinators were counted in certain categories.

- B. Professor Sherman raised a concern, shared by other faculty, that a large percentage of our student population is well served by certain faculty without PhDs, who nevertheless have an enhanced ability to empathize with those students, thus contributing to retention. Professor Lowndes responded that, although one might be concerned that a spreadsheet manager would look only at numbers, Provost Abdelal is sensitive and knowledgeable enough to make wise decisions in that area.
- C. Professor Peterfreund expressed concern that, in looking at financial resources and tuition prices, the numbers beg the question of whether our students are getting what they pay for when we are compared with other high-priced schools. For example, Syracuse University has an office similar to our Center for Effective University Teaching (CEUT) with a staff of twenty-two, while we have only two. Professor Lowndes referred to a concern expressed recently by Dean Soyster that students go from the well-appointed West Village dormitory rooms to less than desirable classrooms, and may not even be taught by members of the professoriate.
- D. Professor Morrison pointed out that the financial resources rank was somewhat misleading because *U.S. News and World Report* considers total students including those in Coop, rather than just those in school, so the denominator is bigger and lowering our rank by about 10-20 positions.

- IV. **2003-04 Special Committee on Academic Policy – Summary Report on General Education.** Professor Herman suggested that the body have a general discussion of the principles derived from the committee's survey of practices and the assumptions about how much of an enhanced general education curriculum the University can handle. The committee would then go on to develop a workable template. The committee developed the 19 preliminary operating principles after talking with national experts and looking at what is being done at peer and aspirational institutions to ascertain how successfully they are achieving their objectives. The committee, mindful of the fatigue factor in the people who had worked so hard on the semester conversion, wanted to make General Education as achievable as possible within the current curricular framework.

Professor Herman moved the following resolution, and the motion was seconded. The resolution read as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED That the Faculty Senate endorses the principles contained in the Academic Policy Committee's Report and Recommendations as the basis for developing a University-wide General Education requirement. It calls upon the 2004-2005 Agenda Committee to charge the Academic Policy Committee it appoints to construct, from these principles, curricular parameters from which individual Colleges and Units can build.

Motion: Professor Herman moved to proceed as if in a committee of the whole, and the motion was seconded.

Vote to go into committee of the whole: PASSED by unanimous voice vote, 32-0-0.

(The report of a committee of the whole does not become part of the minutes of the Senate meeting and is therefore appended.)

The committee of the whole having risen, debate returned to the resolution.

Professor Peterfreund suggested substitution of "The Senate" for "It" in the second sentence, and this was accepted as a friendly amendment.

Professor Herman reported that a small number of learning-community experiments are already being conducted, one in the School of General Studies, another in the Honors Program, and one composed of

undecided liberal arts majors. Testing the idea is important to ensure that learning communities are successful before imposing them on the entire student population.

Professor Vaughn commended the committee for conducting pilot studies and suggested that the committee come back with a more concrete proposal. Professor Herman explained that the committee would bring back for further discussion the template it develops, and the committee would work on the two kinds of resources needed—the incremental resources to implement the program and the resources to administer it. When the committee comes back to the Senate, it will present a template and the resource model that would support the template.

Motion. Professor Alper moved to delete Recommendation 15, and the motion was seconded.

Professor Herman explained that all the schools with a four- or five-year general education program have someone to perform the essential scheduling, coordination, training and assessment.

Dean Soyster asked the committee to consider in its deliberations the accreditation requirements of the College of Engineering.

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

Vote on Professor Alper's amendment: FAILED, 2-22-4.

Dean Soyster pointed out that a minimum of two and a half years of science and engineering courses are required by an externally accrediting agency, and he urged the committee to include this consideration in its curriculum. Professor Herman assured him that the committee would consider all Colleges' accreditation requirements.

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

As amended, the resolution read as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED That the Faculty Senate endorses the principles contained in the Academic Policy Committee's Report and Recommendations as the basis for developing a University-wide General Education requirement. The Senate calls upon the 2004-2005 Agenda Committee to charge the Academic Policy Committee it appoints to construct, from these principles, curricular parameters from which individual Colleges and Units can build.

Vote: PASSED, 25-1-3.

Adjourned at 1:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.
Secretary

Report of the Committee of the Whole
13 October 2004

Professor Vaughn expressed concern that the report called for more writing-intensive requirements and very little science. He recommended that the curriculum promote quantitative skills.

Professor Blank asked the purpose of the requirements. Would they help us get into the top 100? Would they help students in their careers? He asked whether making a student who is good at mathematics go on to a literature requirement beyond what he had learned in high school would be an unnecessarily heavy burden and suggested that we might lose students because of it. In response to the first question, Professor Herman explained that all the research indicates that most of the schools to which we aspire already have these kinds of requirements. Students lost because of this requirement would not be going to the kinds of institutions to which we like to compare ourselves. In response to the second question, Professor Herman noted that present-day graduates will change jobs between seven and ten times during their careers, and will change careers two to four times in their working lives. This means that they need to understand a wider array of disciplines in order to move between sets of skills, sets of knowledge, and sets of abilities to succeed. That is the purpose of a general education requirement.

Professor Peterfreund pointed out that there are intangible benefits from general education that speak to the retention and the signature program issues. It is a way to build a group identity and a learning community. He cited the results of a job market study on the value of a Liberal Arts education that discovered English majors in jobs that are traditionally considered to be the province of business graduates.

Dean Finkelstein pointed out that one of the forces accelerating the movement toward general education is a knowledge-based global economy. Giving our students breadth of knowledge to move within disciplines and to move vertically within organizations will give them a competitive advantage.

Professor Marshall recommended a smaller, simpler core curriculum to encourage more dual majors across disciplines. Although people may change jobs several times, he would expect that those jobs would be somewhat related. Professor Herman replied that in fact the committee was simplifying its approach to general education as an integrational program. The point of clustered learning is to create consonance and coherence.

Professor Powers-Lee asked how many of a student's 32 would be taken up by the courses in this program, and how Recommendation 5 would be implemented. Vice Provost Hill explained that the committee had submitted about eight courses, and that some existing CAS courses might migrate. Professor Herman added that the general education requirement would be set up with a cluster of courses, which could be counted as fulfilling the core requirement. In many cases it will not be necessary to make distinctions between major courses and general education courses. The eight courses mentioned by Vice Provost Hill would depend on the balance between general education and major courses and the freshman learning community, so that there might be as few as five courses or as many as eight or nine, depending on the template that a student follows..

Professor McKnight expressed concern that the general education requirement would not fit with the flexible pattern by which College of Engineering students now can take general electives and minors outside the college. Professor Herman replied that the committee had been aware of this concern and did not want to make it difficult for students to take an array of courses. However, we are dealing with distribution electives and general electives, and that is where we want to build the general education program. He assured the body that the outcome of this exercise would not constrict students in their ability to have a minor, take electives, or construct a dual major. In fact, the number of required courses may be smaller in some cases.

Dean Soyster noted that Engineering has perhaps the most liberal curriculum in the country, which allows a student to get a BS in Engineering and, without taking extra time, to have a minor in another area. More than one-third of COE students graduate with minors. He cautioned the committee to look carefully at a core curriculum in which 25% of courses are specified in the general education requirement.

Professor Alper expressed concern at the expanded writing intensive requirement in Recommendation 3. He would prefer that the writing requirement be integrated within students' major disciplines. Professor Herman explained that the writing intensives are not English courses *per se*. Writing intensive courses will be in the clusters of courses and in the majors.

Professor Blank suggested encouragement of minors and dual majors rather than broad-based requirements.

Professor Sherman pointed out that, no matter where a student majors, the ability to articulate a position and communicate effectively will make that student more employable upon graduation. He endorsed a vision of the writing requirement as applicable to the discipline in which the student majors.

Professor Kruger wondered whether the committee had considered the importance of oral communication in the workplace. Professor Herman responded that the committee had indeed considered this along with visual literacy and information literacy, all of which would become part of the general education program.

Professor McKnight noted that the ability to communicate is vital for engineers. Those who are articulate and persuasive are highly valued, but, as the teaching of writing is labor intensive, the question arises as to how to fit it into our curriculum. Professor Peterfreund responded that we clearly do not have the faculty resources to do this right now, but we hope the Academic Investment Plan or other incentives will provide the necessary faculty (who will not be English professors). The programs that work well along the lines of the committee's thinking are called "Writing in the Disciplines" or "Writing in the Sciences" and are available at institutions (Stanford, Cornell, Duke) that draw their faculty from the home discipline. Those faculty are trained to deliver writing as part of the content course in a discipline.

Professor Herman cited the Department of History as an example. In a normal history course, the student hands in a term paper and gets a grade, whereas in the writing intensive course, the students hand in drafts to an instructor who has also been trained to develop students' writing as part of the course. The difference is that, instead of turning in a paper, the student's writing is worked on by a professor who understands the content yet can help the student to write clearly, succinctly, and in a felicitous style.

Vice Provost Hill pointed out the problem of scale; a class of 49 students is too large to permit a writing intensive course. The enrollment cap in Middle-year Writing is 25 per section, and the freshman writing cap is 19. We must provide the resources for a writing intensive course with a class of 49 students, or we must have a different way of allocating a course enrollment structure in order to deliver an additional two writing intensive courses.

Dean Finkelstein pointed out that listening is also a communication skill, especially in a technical field. He expressed concern about the implementation of writing within a discipline without overloading the requirements and the constraints inherent in trying to schedule faculty in the courses.

Motion. Professor Herman moved that the committee of the whole rise and resume discussion of the resolution, and the motion was seconded.

Vote to rise: PASSED by unanimous voice vote, 32-0-0.