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Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 11/17/2004

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr., SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2004-05 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 17 NOVEMBER 2004

Present: (Professors) Alper, Bannister, Bansil, Blank, Ellis, Futrelle, Glod, Hansberry, Heiman, Herman, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Margotta, Marshall, Peterfreund, Powers-Lee, Reynolds, Robinson, Schaffer, Sherman, Vaughn, Wiseman, Wray
(Administrators) Abdelal, Falcon, Finkelstein, Hill, Onan, Spieler, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Bobcean, De Ritis, McKnight, Melachrinoudis, Morrison, Shafai, Sherwood
(Administrators) Moore, Soyster

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

- I. **2003-04 Faculty Development Committee Report.** Professor Glod moved Resolution #1, and the motion was seconded. The resolution read as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED That faculty peer-assessment and self-assessment systems be set up in all academic units to promote faculty development and to provide a comprehensive framework within which to evaluate teaching effectiveness during tenure, promotion, and merit reviews.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That the Faculty Senate urges the Provost to provide the Center for Effective University Teaching the resources to assist all academic units in setting up their assessment systems.

Professor Powers-Lee lauded the committee for its efforts in the area of assessment and recommended that the resources be applied to the Center for Effective University Teaching (CEUT) to develop model assessment programs because departments do not necessarily have the expertise. Professor Glod responded that one approach would be for the CEUT to present the model it has developed to the departments. Another might be for experts on assessment within the University to move beyond looking just at TCEPs.

Professor Peterfreund expressed appreciation to the committee for beginning the discussion but voiced concern about the earlier Senate resolution, approved by the President, mandating at least two forms of assessment, including one other than the TCEP. This resolution appeared to be an uncompensated mandate, a one-size-fits-all model of assessment, but teaching confers both manifest and latent benefits. Latent benefits can take a couple of years or longer to surface and would best be verified by surveying alumni. He would prefer that a high-stakes evaluation program be introduced on a trial basis and with adequate discussion preceding it.

Professor Bansil wondered if the committee had some models in mind. Professor Glod replied that the committee did not advocate a specific model and referred him to the report for examples. Some of those include creation of teaching portfolios, mid-course assessment, and other initiatives.

Professor Bansil asked whether the responsibility would lie with the CEUT or the department. Professor Glod replied that the committee saw it as a joint responsibility, utilizing the expertise of the CEUT but also meeting the needs of the department.

Professor Vaughn pointed out that university teaching should be based on content. He expressed concern at the emphasis on student assessment. Where, he asked, was any mention of a way for faculty to measure how much students have learned in a course? He wondered whether there is monitoring of courses' content and the rigor with which they are taught.

Professor Reynolds asked for clarification as to whether the resolution was recommending the development of a comprehensive framework for teaching evaluations or of a system by which individual academic units would address their own peer and self-assessment needs.

The floor was yielded to Professor Loeffelholz who did not think the mandate for faculty to be evaluated was clear, in that it was more developmental than summative.

Motion. Professor Herman suggested amending the resolution by rearranging and rewording as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED That the Faculty Senate urges the Provost to provide the Center for Effective University Teaching (CEUT) the resources to develop effective models for assessment of teaching and report back to the Faculty Senate on these. Based on Senate mandates the CEUT shall assist all academic units in setting up their assessment systems.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That, based on Senate-approved models and with CEUT assistance, faculty peer-assessment and self-assessment systems be set up in all academic units to promote faculty development and to provide a comprehensive framework within which to evaluate teaching effectiveness.

The motion was seconded.

Professor Kruger considered the resolution top-heavy in its focus on assessment. Assessment should not be the goal but rather the means to the goal. He felt that the resolution was too silent on the need to develop and support teaching through money, structure, and strategies.

Professor Peterfreund referred to Resolution #3 and suggested that CEUT do some basic research and come back with options, since innovation for its own sake does not always bring improvement. In his view, the report and resolutions bristled with assumptions of what constitutes effective teaching, but, without the latitude to encompass the diversity of disciplines that constitute a university, some junior faculty will be shorted in this high stakes game.

Professor Glod explained that the intent of the first resolution was development for all faculty. The third resolution was directed toward faculty in the tenure and promotion process.

Professor Powers-Lee was in support of the first part of the amendment but was reluctant to support a model without having seen it.

Professor Vaughn emphasized that the purpose of the resolution was faculty development rather than evaluation.

Provost Abdelal suspended further discussion in order to introduce President Freeland. He assured the body that he had taken careful note of those who wish to speak when the discussion resumes. When the Senate returns to the report, Professor Herman's amendment will be on the floor.

- II. **President Freeland.** President Freeland thanked the Senate for the opportunity to share perceptions, which he said is always a learning experience for him. He expressed his strong belief in shared governance and the role of the Senate in decision-making. Even though he does not always agree with the Senate, we share the same priorities, which is why it is important to have the dialogue.

President Freeland reported that most of the indicators of institutional health are pointing in the right direction. Admissions is a terrific and continuing story. The results with retention and graduation rates are a tremendous testimony to much hard work across this institution.

We are in the first year of the Academic Investment Plan's resource commitments. Thirty-five tenured and tenure-track new faculty reflect both turnover and expansion. He felt energized in meeting them.

Other already realized benefits of the Plan are the National Science Foundation designation for the nanotech manufacturing center, the center for drug discovery, and the center for inflammation and tissue protection.

The news about our rankings continues to be good. In response to the recent question, "After we achieve top-100 status, what will we do next?" President Freeland's reply is, "Wait a minute. We are not quite there yet and we

still have lots of hard work to do.”

Thanks to the efforts of many on campus, it is gratifying to see the new facilities completed, and to see the wide recognition that the quality of the architecture is receiving. West Village A was honored by the American Institute of Architects in Chicago, and Building H was reviewed favorably in the *Boston Globe*.

The capital campaign is moving along, and we have passed the \$150M mark toward the \$200M goal. From his point of view, \$200M is too small for the kind and size of university we are. The fact that it has been hard work to raise \$200M when the number ought to be more like \$800M gives cause to consider the resource question.

President Freeland lauded the recommendations on information infrastructure, the new School of Professional and Continuing Studies paradigm, and the emphasis on making sure students can move easily across disciplinary and departmental lines.

President Freeland continues to think of his focus on top-100 status as right, even if to some it seems embarrassingly crass or falsely quantitative. He defended the *U.S. News* rankings because they push us in the directions in which we need to go. Top 100 is simply a convenient way of expressing where we must position ourselves for survival when we charge students \$45K to be here. The improved quality of our students in the past fifteen years is a tribute to our admissions and enrollment strategy, and to our very good educational idea that is very attractive to young people. We are seeing the results of our efforts in retention and graduation rates. Our graduation rate is 60%, but we need to be at 70% to compete with the institutions against which we are tracking, and to augment the financial resources for the Academic Investment Plan.

Our academic reputation reflects our admissions selectivity and the great work by faculty scholars who are active in their professions.

Our biggest challenge is resources. Our competitive disadvantage comes because we are so dependent on tuition income. We need to work to change that through long and continuing effort. One way to think about it would be that we go into each year with a \$40M deficit to be addressed with fundraising. The institutions we track ourselves against are raising about three times as much as we are: this year we raised \$20M while the other institutions averaged \$60M, a gap of \$40M in the operating budget that we must make up somehow. *U. S. News* formulas also work against us in that students away on Coop are included in the calculations and the denominator of dollars spent per student.

As we move to the top-100 category we need to think beyond the practicalities of that aspiration and focus on the underlying issue of really being one of the best universities in the country—living it out in the classroom, in the library, and in the laboratory. The Academic Investment Plan represents a commitment of resources attempting to provide the maximum of which the institution is capable to support academic quality. We must first hit the benchmarks that generate the revenue to support the Academic Investment Plan. Secondly, we must decide how to allocate the \$75M over the next five years to strengthen the academic program, to allocate that amount among the competing needs for salaries, new positions, infrastructure, research, graduate fellowships, and promise-keeping issues. To contribute to our progress, the faculty has the decisive role to play in keeping our promises for academic quality.

President Freeland recounted a recent experience at a conference of college presidents in Washington, when the president of American University declared that he did not believe in marketing because the student experience is more important. In fact, the student experience is a very effective marketing tool because student’s word-of-mouth when they go home exceeds any marketing we could do.

President Freeland declared that class cancellation is another hobby horse of his. He said he will walk around campus the day before Thanksgiving to see if classes are being conducted. This is a serious university and classes must be met, or we will be sending the wrong message. He asked Senators to communicate with their colleagues the importance of meeting all scheduled classes.

President Freeland reported progress with respect to integration of academics and Coop. He had enjoyed the campus-wide forum last week and urged faculty to participate in such events. We are working hard to ensure that

job quality is commensurate with the promise of Coop that we make to students.

On the subject of top 100, we can move the needle tactically in a number of ways. He welcomed advice from the Senate on how to allocate resources and how to focus our energy, and he urged faculty to pay attention to the more important underlying issues about the actual quality of what we do with our students because, in the long run, that is what will matter.

Beyond the top-100 issues, President Freeland is focused on the new physical master planning process based on his promise to the City of Boston. (Building F is the last piece of the last ten-year master plan.) The city wants the master planning process as the way the community may have a voice in what happens in NU's physical expansion. The end result of the two-year planning process will be some agreements with the city about expanding the campus. The Super Bowl events did not help our position with the community.

Fostering alumni support is another of President Freeland's preoccupations. NU has too much remaining heritage as a commuter institution, with people not feeling sufficiently tied to the University to support it as other alumni support their alma maters, and we need to correct this. For example, we are trying to determine how to reach out to alumni. Those of the 1980s think of the University differently from those of the 1960s; Engineering graduates may differ from those of Bouvé in what they care about and what their attitudes are. While there is no question that we can succeed academically, we need to have a strong financial underpinning to sustain our efforts.

The floor was opened to questions.

Professor Futrelle noted that American University does much marketing via discussion items on television news. Northeastern can, and perhaps does, cultivate networks so that our own experts can participate in televised discussions. President Freeland agreed on the value of such exposure. Professor Futrelle suggested going to various sources of news media to learn what the "buzz" is and what is being said about other schools so that NU might pursue more good publicity. President Freeland noted that WCVB's "Chronicle" would be on campus this week to do a show on the transformation of the University, to air sometime in December.

Professor Alper noted that some of our students are unhappy at a perceived lack of support from the administration relating to the Super Bowl aftermath, in that the administration focused on a few students behaving badly.

President Freeland responded that he had received dozens of e-mails from students and angry parents, mostly about money paid for the concert that had been cancelled. He confessed that, while canceling the concert had been one of the unhappier moments of his presidency, it was the right decision. He had watched with great pain the videotapes of the students rioting on Symphony Road and Hemenway Street. It was important to send the message that we expect students to be respectful of the city of which they are a part. As a result of the cancellation, student leaders rose to the occasion and asked what they could do to improve community relations. They organized a community service day, virtually on the day the concert would have taken place, to symbolize to the community their desire to communicate a different message. In the same context, students stepped up and proposed to tax themselves in order to move forward on the campus athletic facility, and the student senate voted overwhelmingly to support an additional fee to help build an on-campus facility. In addition, the graduating students contributed the largest senior class gift ever. Since the events of last spring, our students have received well-deserved praise for the responsible ways in which they behaved during the World Series. The President went ahead to allow rescheduling of the concert that had been postponed, and has tried to send the message that NU students are more mature in their behavior than their counterparts elsewhere. The Super Bowl situation was not characteristic of Northeastern students. We are proud of them, and we commend them for subsequently behaving well.

Professor Herman pointed out that the administration and students took some time to arrive at saying and doing the right things. Although the initial responses were not all that they could have been, continued communication has improved perceptions on all sides. The powerful voter registration drive brought to the fore the importance of student presence in the city. The administration's support of student privacy, in withholding students' addresses from city agencies that demanded them, was well-received by the Committee on Student Leadership.

Professor Marshall noted that many people get panicky on the day before Thanksgiving and are reluctant to commit to meetings or classes because they need to get to wherever they celebrate. He suggested adding a “reading week” to the fall term, something like the spring break, to balance the two semesters. It would not necessarily be just a break but an opportunity to work on major projects.

President Freeland recalled that in the deep past fall terms generally went beyond the holidays and into January, providing more time to get things done. In his opinion, American higher education has gotten hung up on completing the first semester before the holidays and, with the pressure of Labor Day and the summer, it is difficult to fit everything in. The point is, once the calendar is set, it should be respected. It was upsetting to him to have seen the campus deserted the day before Thanksgiving when we have classes scheduled.

Professor Futrelle countered that the students just take off. President Freeland disagreed. Students have told him classes were cancelled. He felt strongly that the University is putting out value in teaching classes and therefore students should be responsible for the material presented. He acknowledged that the general climate around the country is to stop classes mid-day on Wednesday to give people time to get home and that it is an issue for some because of distance. It is an honest debate as to when exactly classes should end, and he was not taking a strong position on that, but he emphasized that once the schedule is set it should be respected.

Professor Bansil reported that, in thirty years here, he was not aware of anyone canceling classes. President Freeland asked for a show of hands in agreement, and only a few responded.

Professor Vaughn recalled a student newspaper poll taken in the 1970s that indicated one out of six classes cancelled. He had not been aware of the problem until reading that and had been appalled. President Freeland replied that he might repeat that survey and would be interested in the results.

Professor Lowndes expressed strong support for the President’s position on the post Super Bowl decisions, which sent an important message to the students within the University and also to our constituencies in and around the city. He also agreed with the President’s position on the unilateral cancellation of classes by faculty. Changing the subject, he noted the continuing concerns expressed repeatedly by the Senate and the faculty about the need to significantly increase the number of classrooms, and the extreme shortage of research space projected to occur within a year or so. He asked whether the master plan would include more classrooms and research facilities.

President Freeland explained that he was aware of the need for additional classrooms, but he was not certain the administration and the faculty were on the same page on what the projections are. The administrative view is that the current inventory, the inventory we will have as buildings come online, and the reduced enrollments will meet our needs. The perceived quality of classroom technology is a different story, however, and some distance exists between the Senate and the administration. While academic facilities are important to both sides, the immediate pressing challenge is to add residence facilities. The University had to terminate the leased properties program, which has been unpopular with the community, over the next five years period, but starting immediately. Through negotiation with the city we agreed to build two more new residence halls. This will use up our available ground space and it will be difficult to build for mixed uses as we have done with West Village G and H, and are doing with F. The tradeoff would be having fewer beds in order to have academic facilities also in those buildings. That is a discussion that ought to take place.

Professor Herman asked where, as we add 100 new faculty, their office and research space will come from. It is unfortunate that instructional space and other areas where faculty interact with students will be in such short supply in the forthcoming buildings, as this has had a very positive effect in other buildings. He expressed concern about the quality of technology that is aging and the desire to showcase the digital classroom. The Senate has been discussing the fact that we now make do with the current facilities by using not only all the Registrar-scheduled classrooms but also departmental facilities, conference rooms, laboratories, faculty offices, and other areas in order to accommodate all the things faculty do in a university. At Northeastern, we pride ourselves on program flexibility and the ability to serve student interests. The question is whether we can adequately fill students’ requirements for increasingly technology-dependent instruction and whether our reputation suffers as students go from their Grade A dorms to classes in Grade B instructional facilities. Although our students come with rising expectations, we seem to be growing more restrained.

President Freeland agreed, adding it is not a philosophical issue that in an academic community there should be sufficient empirical basis for projecting classroom needs and arriving at agreement. He acknowledged that he was troubled about not getting agreement about where we are and what our needs are, and he would focus a lot of attention on that, but the University has many needs and the problem is how to address them simultaneously with limited resources. When we have upper class students in fabulous residence halls and freshmen in antiquated, tired residence halls, we have to make the best judgments we can among these balances. President Freeland deferred to Provost Abdelal who added that we are short on classrooms of 20-30 student capacity, especially since we have increased the number of smaller sections. He also said that the digital classroom is under discussion.

Professor Powers-Lee asked about news coverage and community interactions since the community she sees in the news seems to be a small, adversarial group. She suggested working to engage a broader segment of the community. President Freeland responded that he was setting up a variety of measures to do just that. He noted that, in a political universe, a mobilized minority that goes out and shakes the trees and calls the mayor and state representatives receives more response than other, perhaps more reasonable groups.

Dean Finkelstein asked where President Freeland expects the University to be in 2008. President Freeland predicted that, once we achieve our top-100 goal, the question would be whether to aspire to top 50 or to become better in the areas that brought us to top 100. His hope would be that Northeastern's reputation would be the best in the world for education that combines, in one practice-oriented package, classroom and workplace, and liberal arts and professional studies. We also need to look at the optimal SAT range for what we do educationally and will start that process next year.

As time had run out, the discussion concluded.

Professor Lowndes thanked President Freeland for visiting the Senate and participating in the discussion. Citing a famous person, he said being president of a university was like running a cemetery in that many are beneath you but no one is listening – but the engaging discussion today showed that this was not always the case.

Adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.
Secretary