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Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 12/01/2004

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: CHARLES H. ELLIS, Jr., SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
SUBJECT: MINUTES, 2004-05 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 1 DECEMBER 2004

Present: (Professors) Alper, Bannister, Bobcean, De Ritis, Ellis, Futelle, Glod, Hansberry, Heiman, Herman, Krishnamoorthy, Kruger, Lowndes, Marshall, Morrison, Peterfreund, Powers-Lee, Reynolds, Robinson, Shafai, Sherman, Sherwood, Vaughn, Wiseman, Wray
(Administrators) Abdelal, Falcon, Finkelstein, Hill, Onan, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Bansil, Blank, Margotta, McKnight, Melachrinoudis, Schaffer
(Administrators) Moore, Soyster, Spieler

Professor Lowndes convened the meeting at 11:56 a.m.

I. **Minutes.** The minutes of October 13 and 27 were approved.

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

- A. **“Life at the Top” Updated.** Professor Lowndes highlighted some of the points in the updated version of his report, “Life at the Top,” which will be relevant for the budget discussion that will take place in January and which is attached to the minutes as Appendix A. In Table 1, he added information that gave an NU ranking in relation to all the institutions. Although this does not change the obvious conclusions concerning the Faculty Resources category, our worst performer, it nevertheless gives a broader perspective including many institutions behind us in Tiers 3 and 4 with higher rankings than ours. This, combined with the information in Table 2, shows the need for significant improvement in the Faculty Resources and the Graduation and Retention categories. Along with the percentage of classes with under 20 students, the faculty resources area is driven by two components, compensation for faculty (35%) and the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees (15%).

The expanded Table 5 now gives the most current tuition and fees for 2004-05 as well as change in percentage and tuition increase. The table shows that of the 46 national, private, doctoral-extensive institutions, Northeastern was ranked 32nd for tuition and fees for 2004-05. The average tuition and fees increase for 2004-05 for these 46 institutions was 5.7%, and only four of these institutions gave percentage tuition and fees increases for 2004-05 less than Northeastern (4.5%).

Table 5 also shows that there were 19 higher education institutions in Massachusetts alone that had higher tuition and fees than Northeastern for 2004-05. The average percentage tuition and fees increase for these 19 institutions for 2004-05 was 5.9%, and only two of these institutions gave percentage tuition and fees increases less than that for Northeastern.

Professor Lowndes shared an additional piece of information, not in the report, which was that we are also lower in tuition increases for 2004-05 than the so-called “Lucky Thirteen” institutions that are our matchmates. The average percent tuition and fees increase for the lucky thirteen group for 2004-05 is 6.8% and only one of the lucky thirteen gave percent tuition and fees increases less than NU.

With the recent release of NU’s 2003-04 financial statement, Table 6 in “Life at the Top” now contains additional information on the following: our long-term debt decreased slightly but is still high; the financial aid discount jumped markedly from 2002-03; and the operating surplus dropped by about \$10M from the previous year.

- B. **Meetings.** SAC met twice in regular session, once with President Freeland, and once with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees.

The Trustees had received copies of “Life at the Top.” The agenda for that discussion focused on (1) faculty resources and the need to improve that component, and (2) on faculty participation in the development of the new Master Plan. SAC pressed for improvement on space issues concerning classrooms and research facilities.

In the meeting with President Freeland, SAC raised similar issues and also re-introduced the issue of the growing concerns about the fringe benefit of online courses for faculty and staff. The President agreed again to look into the matter of online courses for faculty and staff. Professor Lowndes added that SAC had delayed charging this year’s Faculty Development Committee to look into it pending action by the administration. It had seemed a fairly trivial matter to rectify, but perhaps that is not the case and the Senate will have to address it after all. The discussion on classrooms and research space was interesting but did not result in a promise of more space. President Freeland had explained that, while the plans for the buildings to be constructed over the next five years are not firm as yet, there is an agreement between the University and the City of Boston that would have us withdraw much of the property that we lease and then rent to students. In return for NU’s withdrawal, the expectation is that the city will approve two new buildings currently intended as dorms, but there is some sense that this could be changed without incurring any ill will with the city. President Freeland, however, explained that up to \$300M might be committed in long-term debt for the new buildings and ongoing projects. Additional classrooms and research space may not be on the horizon for at least five more years because the money is committed elsewhere.

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

- A. **NU Press.** The faculty committee appointed last year to advise us on how to proceed in seeking a consortium agreement has succeeded. NU will become the sixth member of the University Press of New England (UPNE) academic publishing consortium, along with include Brandeis, Dartmouth, the University of New Hampshire, Tufts, and the University of Vermont. A Northeastern faculty member will serve on the UPNE Board of Governors, and another will be appointed to the UPNE Editorial Board. That accomplishes much of what we wanted, which is to continue the University Press imprint and at the same time contain the financial obligations that accompany publishing. An announcement has been issued to the University community to this effect.
- B. **Budget.** While it is the season to be jolly, it is also the season to talk about the budget, which is not necessarily jolly. We are in that intensive period of determining our revenues and obligations. The process will continue until mid-January. In previous years it has been the practice to try to finish the Budget Committee deliberations and make recommendations to the President sometime in December, but this year it was decided not to try to compress the discussion of the many complex issues, and to set the second week of January as the targeted date to make the budget recommendation and then hold discussions between the CFP and the Budget Committee.
- C. **Research Magazine.** Provost Abdelal reported that the new research magazine has been sent nationwide to academic leaders, all provosts, deans of science and engineering, and some presidents. He was pleased that the magazine looks more interesting than many publications of its kind and expressed the hope that readers from various fields would be intrigued with its contents. He thanked the advisory committee for its collaborative effort in putting together the magazine and especially Ann Comer, Provost Office Communications Manager.

IV. **Report on Enrollment Management—Senior Vice President Philomena V. Mantella and Provost Ahmed T. Abdelal.** Professor Lowndes assumed the chair for this agenda item. Professor Lowndes explained that this is the annual presentation requested in the Enrollment and Admissions Policy Committee resolution passed by last year’s Senate. He introduced Senior Vice President Mantella to give the first part of the presentation.

Vice President Mantella's slides are reprinted in Appendix B to these minutes.

Vice President Mantella expressed thanks for the opportunity to address the Senate on enrollment and related issues. She indicated that she would present the landscape of enrollment over the last several years, applicant dynamics, retention, the 2004 cycle, our new competitor institutions, the Kane Parsons market survey, and the historical mission of the University.

Applicant Dynamics. Applications at NU have increased markedly since 2002. Our applicant dynamics are driven primarily by four elements: the number of applicants from the Middle Atlantic region; the growth from other regions; the Colleges of Business, Bouvé, and Arts and Sciences; and the improved applicant profiles. Our single greatest asset is the change in the applicant pool to having 81% above the national SAT average. The resulting flexibility in selecting and shaping a class lets us now accept only 42% of applicants. The growth in the applicant pool from the West is up 220.8%, from the Midwest 123.3%, from the Middle Atlantic 96.3%, and from the Southwest 96.6%. For the first time, the Mid-Atlantic region surpassed Massachusetts as the largest source for applications, and other regions in the west and southwest are also growing rapidly.

The top ten areas of interest by prospective students are A&S Undecided, Business Undecided, Communication Studies, Psychology, Biology, Pharmacy, Criminal Justice, Political Science, Nursing, and Engineering Undecided. Senior Vice President Mantella showed how the top 10 major choices had changed from 1996 to 2004. Students look at Northeastern for a number of reasons, but one of the most compelling incentives is the range of majors. Moreover, the number of Undecideds has become one of our largest growth areas. The general education curriculum to be considered by the Senate that would make it easier for students to move from program to program has become even more important as a draw for students.

Admissions to the health sciences area have been cyclical over the years since 1996. Business Undecided and Bouvé Open Option have grown the most percentage-wise, but majors in International Affairs, Pharmacy, English, Nursing, Political Science, Biology, Entrepreneurship, and Communication Studies all have grown more than the University's application growth.

Performance Against Goals. Vice President Mantella explained that while NU has goals on all levels—department, college, and university, she would focus on the aggregate goals. We have set a course between now and 2008 on application selectivity, for applicants above the national SAT, enrollment, enrolled mean SAT, yield rate, top 10% of high school class, Massachusetts and other regions, students of color, and international students. The comparison between goals and actual performance look good. We exceeded our completed application goal for 2004; our selectivity goal was 45% selectivity and the actual was 42% (24,239 acceptances). We exceeded our applicant SAT goal (percent above national average) by 5% (77% goal, 82% actual). Our enrollment target of 2800 fell short by just 24 students, rather than the over-enrollment (3200 freshmen) of the previous year. While we have a large number of applications, the market is changing. The old market is declining at a higher rate, and the emerging market is creating a large volume for us at this time. This is the first year that our wait list had exactly the same profile as our admitted class, while in previous years we had to make compromises. Our mean SAT for this year was 1211 against a goal of 1210.

Retention is driven by the relationship of admissions selection criteria, financial aid level and stability, housing, and first-year QPA. Retention this year was positive, and we seem to be doing quite well from the perspective of selecting the right students. We accepted 10,200 for fall 2003 and the 31% yield produced the over-enrollment. This year, we started with a 9200 accept target, but we also reduced financial aid awarded. The resulting 27% yield led us to accept students from the waiting list to fill the class, which turned out to be a good strategy because wait-listed students tend to self-screen. What changed the number of students who accept us? The financial aid discount, scholarships awarded from the operating budget, was driven by the number of freshmen with SAT's in the 1300's and 1400's. In 2003, the number of such students jumped our discount rate at the front end, so in 2004 we had to rebalance that. We could not afford to continue to give that amount to such a large number of students. Fortunately, we had the applicant pool and the wait list to support this.

Goals Perspective. Every college contributes differently to each of the goals. Part of the focus in goal-setting by Vice President Mantella and Provost Abdelal is on how to meld unit and university goals in

the best possible way.

Enrollment goals were met for all but two of the colleges, Computer and Information Science and the School of Engineering Technology. One of our major challenges is our shift over a period of years from being a low-cost private institution, with largely regional matriculants and Coop to offset the cost, to becoming a high-cost, residential institution. Family income levels for our students are lower than those at competitor institutions. Our students, on average against a \$40K annual cost, have an average need of \$25,903. Through a combination of federal, state, and institutional aid, we could provide for \$18,302 of that need in 2004. Although we have made excellent gains, it is still an uphill battle to close the gap, and this can influence our retention and graduation rates. The freshman discount rate rose from about 20% in 1997-98 to about 35% in 2003, and we rebalanced to 32% in 2004. This is in the discount range of the top 50 institutions in the country. As the rank goes down, the discount goes up because to compete in the market they have to apply more aid to have a lower net price. Competing with the amount of aid other colleges can offer remains a challenge. Also, we need to provide a level of funding that will not be detrimental to upperclass students.

NU's New Competitors. Vice President Mantella conducted an analysis of our admissions competitors. Overlap admissions competitors are institutions to which our applicants also apply. The Kane Parsons survey helps us to identify competitors, and we look at the other schools that students name on their financial aid forms and the list of schools to which they have their SAT scores sent. We have raised the bar in our competition; most current competitors are Tier 2 institutions but a few are Tier 1. She showed lists of institutions whose competitive positions with respect to Northeastern admissions had declined, increased, or remained the same.

Freshman retention rates put us at the level of the group we call the "Lucky 13", and our graduation rate is now tracking much closer to 70% than 60%. According to the Kane Parsons study, we still have a challenge in terms of keeping our competitive position. Students who turn us down do so because of cost, reputation, location, graduate school likelihood, and close-knit campus community. Those who select NU do so because of hands-on learning, post-graduate job opportunity, location, and opportunity for independent study. Our location is a deterrent to those who do not like the city, but is a draw for those who are comfortable in an urban environment. Other advantages specified are housing, campus activities, small classes, faculty-student ratios, and reputation in a field.

Other concerns have changed significantly. While students are placing less emphasis on career preparation, they do respond to our message on the strength of Arts and Sciences and our professional programs, and on the "Higher Learning, Richer Experience" theme. The five years to graduation can be a deterrent to some prospective students, especially if they are in a hurry to go on to graduate school. The Honors Program is critical to our ability to attract high-performing students. Vice President Mantella concluded with the recommendation to stay the course on the admissions-retention relationship and to maintain our price-value equation.

Provost Abdelal's slides are reprinted in Appendix C to these minutes.

Provost Abdelal explained that his perspective on enrollment resides in the context of resource issues. He cautioned that it is important to secure the resources necessary to support our aspirations and to integrate curriculum, enrollments, and budget. He acknowledged that he had more questions than answers.

Aspirations. In addition to our aspiration of attaining top-100, we want to enhance the faculty-student ratio, the rankings of professional programs, National Research Council rankings of PhD programs, and recognition of NU as a national research university and as a premiere urban university with a premier Coop program.

Emerging Issues. Northeastern is going through a transformation that encompasses many dimensions. Among the issues coming to light is that, as selectivity in admissions has increased, certain majors have become less competitive in attracting freshman applicants. The options to counteract this are to revise the curriculum, to introduce inter-disciplinarity, or to consider elimination. He said that for the first time this fall we have suspended some majors in Bouvé. In some cases reconfiguration of a major may make it more

competitive.

Another emerging need is for strategies to attract high caliber transfer students. Actions to consider include the following: balancing enrollment between freshmen and transfers; allocating resources to increase the size of programs for highly qualified transfers; increasing professional graduate enrollment to replace transfer enrollment incrementally; making the School of General Studies a receiving/incubating unit; advertising BS/MS programs more widely; and enhancing Coop opportunities for transfer students.

Although the Coop model is a primary hallmark, we need to find ways to compensate for its cost. He had calculated that courses per faculty member are within national norms for research universities, but credit hours per faculty member seem to amount to less than our peers. Considerations to remedy this include the number of majors, the frequency of offerings, and the possibility of dual upper-division master's courses. We, unlike our competition, invest about \$8M in the Coop Division budget. Having two divisions reduces efficiency in terms of the number of students being taught per faculty member. If we compare NU with the research universities in the Delaware database, we are within the national norm by department, but we are less competitive with other research universities in the number of credit hours per faculty member by department. Perhaps, to be more efficient, we should reduce the number of majors and look at the frequency of offerings. We might consider courses that are taken by both advanced undergraduates and beginning graduate students, which is a fairly common model at many research universities.

If we are going to expand our base of resources, we must increase enrollment size in our professional graduate programs. Are we using too narrow a definition to encompass all the opportunities available? Perhaps we should develop and market more research-based programs and more non-thesis MS/MA programs for professional graduate training.

The floor was opened to questions.

Professor Vaughn asked about our win rate against the increasing competitors. Vice President Mantella responded that we had an increasing trend into 2003, and then some decline in 2004 when we lowered the level of aid.

Professor Kruger asked whether we might gain some traction with international students by offering them not only an American style education but also the opportunity for Coop. Vice President Mantella replied that, despite the constraints involved in obtaining visas, we are seeing some success with this market at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Professor Kruger asked about financial aid issues for international students. Vice President Mantella responded that, to get a visa, a student must show the capability to pay the full cost, so we give very little aid to international students.

Provost Abdelal predicted that the initiatives in which departments and colleges are currently engaged will help in strengthening our position in the international market. We are partnering with financial and business people in different parts of the world who are building new private educational institutions. Student populations in other countries, who are already paying significant tuition, are interested in American higher education, and we are working with them.

Professor Kruger asked what, other than Coop, was meant by "hands-on learning." Vice President Mantella explained that this was the way the questions were summarized but it meant Coop, which is clearly a value-add. One difficulty is the extra year to get that added value, but to the extent that we can create some alternatives, we will get more value and less detraction.

Professor Peterfreund expressed disappointment that we have declined in credit hours per faculty member. He did not think the problem would be solvable until we have an appropriately sized teaching force; it would then solve itself.

Professor Marshall suggested that three four-month terms be considered to address both the summer and Coop calendar problems. Professor Abdelal responded that a subcommittee of the Deans Council is looking at the calendar and will bring recommendations to the Senate.

Professor Ellis asked how the credit-hour-per-faculty-member value was calculated. Does a faculty member teaching two courses teach two 4-credit courses, one 4-credit and one 2-credit course, or other combinations, or does it mean credit hours times student enrollments in the course? Provost Abdelal replied that it means credit hours times student enrollments. Professor Ellis pointed out that the reason for the decline might be that in trying to get to top 100 we set up far more classes with fewer students. With the limit of 19 students for courses like freshman English, and what he had hoped might happen with math, they are actually good things pedagogically (and for gaming *U.S. News*), even though they may be less efficient. Provost Abdelal replied that it would require more analysis to determine whether the decline is where it should be. He added that transparency in sharing data makes for a healthy discussion.

Professor Lowndes, referring to the better students who opt for minors, double majors, and the general education program concentrations that were discussed by the Senate earlier, expressed concern about impending problems with the percentage of courses that these endeavors would take and how they would be counted. Did we make a mistake, he wondered, when we converted to the semester calendar by staying with the 4-credit course system, as it limits the number of courses a student can take? Vice President Mantella responded that she was not cognizant of the issues that brought about the 4-credit system, but, from the perspective of students wanting flexibility and as much value as possible in attaining their degrees, she would agree with Professor Lowndes that the matter of addressing limitations and the range of choices for students should be discussed. She asked whether the 4-credit system had been debated. Professor Lowndes recalled that, although he was not on the Senate at the time, there had been some discussion having to do with workload concerns, but now we have a proposed workload policy which, if implemented, would be measuring apples with apples. He added that most institutions have a 3-credit course system, and the appropriate flexibility that goes with it.

As time had run out, Professor Lowndes thanked the presenters and, there being no objection, the meeting was adjourned.

Adjourned at 1:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles H. Ellis, Jr.
Secretary