

November 18, 2009

## Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 11/18/2009

Stephen W. McKnight  
*Northeastern University*

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**Northeastern University**  
*Office of the Faculty Senate*

**TO: FACULTY SENATE**  
**FROM: STEPHEN W. MCKNIGHT, SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE**  
**RE: MINUTES, 2009-10 FACULTY SENATE, 18 NOVEMBER**

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Present: (Professors) Alshawbkeh, Alverson, Board, Chilvers, Daynard, De Ritis, Gaffney, Gatley, Goodale, Hafner, Herman, Kruger, Lifter, McKnight, Mierelles, Morrison, Mourant, Podlaha-Murphy, Portz, Price, Ross, D. Sherman, T. Sherman, Sherwood,

(Administrators) Director, Falcon, Finkelstein, Loeffelholz, Luzzi, Moore, Powers-Lee, Ronkin, Spieler, Zoloth

Absent (Professors) Balachandra, Born, Karma, Muftu, Rosengaus, Thrush

Provost Director convened the meeting at 11:51 AM

- I. The minutes of 4 November were deferred.
- II. Professor Morrison reported that SAC has met twice in regular session and once with the Provost.

The Pharmacy Science Chair Search Committee has been staffed as follows:

Professor Richard C. Deth, Bouvé-Pharmaceutical Science  
Professor Ban-An Khaw, Bouvé-Pharmaceutical Science  
Professor Michail V. Sitkovsky, Bouvé-Pharmaceutical Science  
Professor Tracy L. Robinson, Bouvé-Counseling and Applied Psychology  
Professor Ahmed Busnaina, COE-Mechanical and Industrial Engineering

The Senate Agenda Committee has been asked to convene a search committee for the chair of the Psychology Department. Staffing is underway.

- III. Questions. Professor Gaffney noted that some task forces for restructuring, specifically the task force on the Department of Education, have not scheduled open forums for input. He also asked if task force reports would be presented to the Senate. The Provost offered to look into the issue of open forums and noted that issues requiring Senate approval would be brought forward.

Professor Gaffney questioned the role of education at NU given the paucity of tenured faculty at the Department of Education. The Provost noted that the Department is currently divided between CAS and CPS and that the task force will make recommendations.

- IV. Senior Vice President Mantella offered an overview of 2009 and the current status of and priorities for 2010.

The total degree-seeking enrollment for 2009 was 27,020; full-time undergraduate enrollment for 2009 was 15,699 with retention showing the most growth. Enrollment goals were met in 2009 with gains in the admission rate, SAT scores, the percentage of students in the top ten percent of their high school class, percent of international students and percent of students from outside New England. Retention continues to improve despite a small dip in freshman retention in 2009

(91.4% from 92.7%). The graduation rate is 75%, up from 69.5% in 2008, and tracking toward 80-85%,

There are 13,674 applications for 2010 compared to 12,916 for 2009 with strides being made in having a rich and robust applicant pool in addition to elevated SAT scores. Students accepted to NU were most often also accepted at Fordham, American, Drexel, WPI and RPI; near-term aspirant private research institutions are BU, BC, NYU, Syracuse and GW. Top private and public competitors (Tufts, U-Mass, UConn, U of Miami, and others) are now being more closely looked at by college-bound students as well.

Foci for the upcoming year are the changing market, yield, retention and the need for flexibility. As the number of high school students declines, especially in the Northeast, regional diversification becomes more important.

Characteristics most important to students admitted to NU in 2009 were majors of interest, academic reputation and value for the price, the latter of which showed significant increase. It was noted that experiential education is not among the top three. Vice President Mantella suggested that while experiential education is not necessarily driving applicant choice, the yield rate is influenced by it.

When compared to near-term aspirants and top public competitors, results are varied: NU compared favorably on availability of majors; academic reputation lagged behind private competitors but was stronger than public competitors; and value for the price was equal to BU and below private and public competitors.

Responses to NU noted by admissions staff people in over 100 cities and 36 countries were positive in the following areas: 4/5 year options; increased academic options (dual majors, interdisciplinary opportunities); global options; and the competitive context.

Demographic and economic challenges will persist and competition for high talent students will increase. NU's assets are its momentum and the new directions it has taken.

Retention remains a focus with initiatives to reach out to financially at-risk students, to tailor new student orientation, to highlight living-learning communities and premier living space, and to promote full utilization of FACT.

Professor Gaffney brought up the possibility of confusing messages to applicants as regards restructuring of colleges. He also expressed concern that some departments may rely too heavily on non-tenure-track faculty teaching freshman and sophomore classes. The Provost expressed added concern about the number of TAs lecturing in entry-level courses which is not typical in other private institutions. Data is being collected on both issues.

Regarding communicating to 2010 entrants about the upcoming restructuring, Dean Ronkin has been addressing the subject at open houses by explaining that it is a natural evolution and Vice President Mantella is working closely with the Provost to ensure that communications are logical and coherent.

Professor Portz noted that graduate outcomes are a challenge to determine and it is difficult for departments to obtain information on where students are two to five years out as alumni information does not get back to departments and university-level information is not useful. The Provost agreed that such data could be useful in determining the impact of curricula. Such data is apparently collected but not disseminated and he will look into it.

With regard to the issue of retention, Prof. Powers-Lee urged all faculty members to take advantage of the Faculty and Advisor Communication Tool (FACT) which allows advisors to identify students who may be having trouble in several courses and to intervene before academic or other problems cause students to drop out.

In response to an observation, Vice President Mantella expressed confidence that NU is collectively working toward the notion of flexibility across units as well as four and five year options, post-freshman entry and other areas. As to retention, NU has done more this year to make headway but work must continue. Graduation rates for near-term aspirants are between 80-83%; the aspirant group is 84-85%.

Professor McKnight expressed concern at the notion of a four-year two Co-ops option which is seven and one-half semesters and very difficult on the academic side. The Vice President acknowledged the challenge and added that the intent is to show value in the amount of experiential learning available. The question is whether there is a way to look at the curriculum broadly so that students do not feel they must make trade-offs when choosing one option over another.

- V. The Senate thanked Senior Vice President Mantella and turned to the issue of flexibility. The Provost pointed out the importance of flexibility and its impact on yield and retention. He noted that some NU programs require 8-10 more credit hours for the major than some aspirant institutions. He asked the following questions: Should NU educate students how to learn rather than adding required courses “just in case” they may need them? If NU were to develop a curriculum today, what criteria would be needed? What is the absolute minimum required to acquire the degree? He asked faculty to examine the curriculum to determine if there is too much or too little required.

The Senate noted the need to reflect upon flexibility, take better advantage of existing models, and expand the mindset in order to imagine and engender different possibilities. The Senate agreed that some feel more flexibility means an inferior program and are concerned to provide as much content as possible in order to prepare students. The need for permeable walls between Colleges was emphasized, and it was noted that the additional requirements needed by dual majors allow less flexibility.

Dean Zoloth noted that despite perceptions, accreditation does not drive the issue of credit hours and BCHS offers courses at many levels of credit.

Dialogue concerning who teaches freshman and the need for culture change so that those classes are taught by prestigious faculty was undertaken as well as the need for faculty to undertake to learn the culture of another discipline when undertaking interdisciplinary courses.

The Provost urged the Senate to continue this discussion within their units. Additional thoughts and comments may be sent to the Provost or to Vice Provost Powers-Lee.

The Senate adjourned at 1:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen W. McKnight, Secretary  
Faculty Senate