

Northwestern University
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
Simpson-Querrey Auditorium and Videoconference
May 8, 2024

The Northwestern University Faculty Senate held its standing monthly meeting on May 8, 2024 in Simpson-Querrey Auditorium and over Zoom videoconference. President Regan Thomson (Chemistry) called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

The president noted that the minutes from the April 3, 2024 meeting were approved electronically and entered into the record. He also said the agenda for the meeting had been amended. The Senate would not discuss the renaming of the John Evans Alumni Center that evening and would instead pick up that item next fall.

The president then, on behalf of the Faculty Senate's Executive Committee, nominated Senator Ian Hurd (Political Science) as Faculty Senate President-Elect. The president asked if there were any nominations from the floor. Seeing none, the president noted that there will be one candidate standing for election at the Senate meeting in June.

The president then entered a closed session to consider honorary degree nominees.

The president then began his [report](#).

The president said the Faculty Assembly was held on April 29, which included a presentation on the budget and a statement by President Schill on the campus demonstrations and the recently negotiated agreement with the campus protesters. A [recording](#) of the meeting is available on the Faculty Senate's website. He mentioned no questions were answered by the administration, but several faculty made statements expressing a wide range of viewpoints. Many questions were also asked online. Those questions, while unable to be answered live, he said, have been collated and sent to the President and Provost.

The president gave a brief update on the Department of Education investigations into antisemitism on campus. The investigations arose from a complaint that Northwestern violated Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act. The complaint was filed by Zachary Marschall, editor in chief for Campus Reform. The investigation is ongoing. Updates on open Title VI cases can be found on the [Department of Education's website](#).

Lastly, the president shared two reminders: The Senate will meet with President Schill's Committee on Free Expression and Institutional Speech on Tuesday, May 14th, at noon. A Faculty Senate reception will also be held at President Schill's residence on Tuesday, June 4th, from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

The president asked if there were questions related to his report.

Senator Thrasos Pappas (Electrical and Computer Engineering) asked if the Senate's vote on honorary degree nominees is binding. Past President Ceci Rodgers (Medill) said it was her understanding that if the Senate votes against a candidate for an honorary degree they will not proceed for approval by the Board of Trustees.

Senator Luís Amaral (Chemical and Biological Engineering) thanked President Thomson for his attempt to engage the Faculty Assembly in a broader discussion. He acknowledged how much work it is planning such an event, and he wanted to note his appreciation.

The president then introduced a statement for the Senate to consider for approval. He said that he and other individuals in the Senate had been grappling with what the Senate's position on the outcome of the protests might be given the wide range of viewpoints across the University. As such, he drafted a statement that the Executive Committee helped edit, but beyond that, their approval only went as far as the statement appearing on the agenda for consideration. He said his intention was to avoid making a judgement on the nature of the demonstration, the content of the agreement itself, or the conflict in the Middle East, but rather to support the attempt by the administration to achieve a peaceful outcome through negotiation. The president then submitted the following for consideration:

The [mission](#) of Northwestern University embodies a commitment to excellent teaching, innovative research and the personal and intellectual growth of its students in a diverse academic community. The priorities of the University are founded upon the following principles: We transform society. We grow as leaders. We champion access, diversity and belonging. We encourage debate. We embrace breadth and depth. We pursue excellence across all disciplines. We strengthen our community. We care about one another.

As stated in the [Faculty Handbook](#), “Northwestern welcomes the expression of ideas, including viewpoints that may be considered unorthodox or unpopular. The University encourages freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry, freedom of dissent, and freedom to demonstrate in a peaceful fashion. Regardless of their own views, community members share a corresponding responsibility to welcome and promote this freedom for all. They also share a responsibility to maintain an atmosphere conducive to scholarly, creative, and educational pursuits and to respect the safety and rights of all individuals.”

As members of the Faculty Senate, we strive to uphold this mission and these guiding principles. The recent demonstrations on our campus have tested these ideals and we recognize there are divergent viewpoints among our community. Despite these differences, we support the general approach of negotiation adopted by the University that led to the peaceful dissolution of the student-led encampment. This result strongly reflects the values of our University as stated above, and as elected members of the Faculty Senate we support these values and the arrival at a peacefully negotiated resolution.

Senator David Kalainov (Orthopedic Surgery) said he agreed with the statement. He said what bothered him though were the explicit signs, some of which weren't even protesting the war in the Middle East. He said he would've preferred to see those signs taken down immediately by the University.

Senator Tarita Thomas (Radiation Oncology) said the first two paragraphs really embrace the mission of the university, and that is a good way to begin a statement such as this. However, the part worth considering is “the general approach of negotiation adopted by the University.” In her view, protesting should always be allowed as long as it does not disrupt others who are trying to use the

campus safely. She said—with the lawsuits and some students claiming they felt unsafe because of the protests—supporting the general approach of negotiation might harm some of the students.

Senator Ezra Getzler (Mathematics) said he sought feedback from members of his department. He said those he spoke with were in favor of tabling the motion on the floor. Although he indicated he did not want to curtail discussion, and would wait to make the motion until later in the meeting. He then made some remarks, based on feedback he received, on the protests themselves. He noted that the protests were exceptionally loud and went on relentlessly, making it difficult to concentrate. He said his own view was that if the University could have negotiated the disuse of amplified sound, then the protests could have continued in such a manner. He also expressed concern about the negotiation being reached without input from representative bodies, especially since the agreement commits the University to long-term commitments.

Senator Seth Lichter (Mechanical Engineering) said this agreement was negotiated with largely no input from the faculty and no input from the Senate. He said he had another reason not to support the third paragraph. Mainly, he did not know what the approach to negotiation was, and thus supporting the statement in total would be dishonest. He said he assumed others might see the statement as one of support for President Schill before he appears before congress. However, he said the Senate could not cast aside its morals for such a statement of support, but instead should reaffirm its values, which in turn would still help President Schill when he goes to Capitol Hill.

Senator Lichter then made a motion to amend the statement's third paragraph in the following way:

As members of the Faculty Senate, we strive to uphold this mission and these guiding principles. The recent demonstrations on our campus have tested these ideals and we recognize there are divergent viewpoints among our community. It is imperative, therefore, that we not tolerate language that incites violence but rather encourage dialogue, that we give no license to injustice, no assistance to prejudice, but through our words and actions promote diversity of expression.

The motion was seconded and the floor was open for discussion.

Senator Amaral cited the violence occurring during the protests at other schools. He then recounted some of the troubling episodes of violence and asked whether or not senators would prefer that to a

negotiated agreement. He said faculty may not agree with the full terms of the agreement, but it was not the faculty's job. He said it was the job of President Schill and the students to negotiate, and they did, and there was virtually no violence, which he fully backed. He also made a point related to the interference from Congress in University matters. He said President Schill should be supported for standing up to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce attempts to undermine universities.

The president asked senators to please focus on the proposed amendment to the statement and not anything beyond that.

Senator Rebecca Zorach (Art History) said her understanding of what prompted the change of wording was related to the “general approach of negotiation.” She said she did not believe the intent of that part of the statement was to say all senators agree with exactly the way the negotiation occurs or exactly with the outcome of the negotiations, but rather that the Senate approves of negotiation as a strategy to avert the kinds of violent scenes Senator Amaral described. She said faculty have a moral obligation to support and protect all students. Senator Zorach said she hoped the Senate could find some way of using the wording that supports negotiation that doesn't lead to a misunderstanding about the strategy pursued by the administration. She said conversations around these issues should be had peacefully, not sending in the police.

Senator June McKoy (Medicine) said she agreed with the amendments. She said leaving the word negotiations might have implications outside the Senate's control, and thus could cause misperceptions of the Senate.

Senator Therese McGuire (Kellogg) said that she shared the original statement with one of her constituents and they zeroed in on the word negotiation. She said it made her colleague feel uncomfortable. She said she liked the language Senator Lichter proposed and that perhaps a balance could be struck by adding something about the peaceful resolution.

Senator TJ Billard (Communication Studies) echoed Senator Zorach's statement that the “general approach to negotiation” is not an explicit endorsement of the specific negotiations made or the lack of faculty governance in them. They also said, as a scholar of social movements, they were distressed to hear faculty say that protests need not disrupt. They said disruption brings people to the

bargaining table and faculty should encourage that type of negotiation. They said, for example, union strikes are a form of disruption, and to imply that disruption is an evil to be avoided is absurd. They said they were also concerned about the rewrite because the phrase “that we not tolerate language that incites violence” echoes both things said about the protestors and misrepresents what the protestors were saying, when in fact the only violence that occurred was from the police. They said they read the amendments as a condemnation of the student protestors’ rhetorical claims.

Senator Thomas said she applauded the change to the third paragraph. She said, as a physician, her main duty is to preserve life and honor it. She said a strike by a union is very different than a protest on a college campus. She said she was concerned that the Senate making any statement might be out of place because they weren’t a part of the negotiations.

Senator Mary Zimmerman (Performance Studies) said she supported the amendment. She said the language of general approach felt slightly wishy-washy. She said what she thought the Senate wants to applaud is the peaceful resolution. She said she would support the addition of that phrase. She also said that not everyone can be consulted, and she understood why so few were a part of the negotiation. Its why universities and organizations have leaders, she said.

Senator Angela Lee (Marketing) thanked her colleagues for their insights. She said she was learning a lot. She said the revised language could be changed to include “behavior” instead of language, which may take the onus off the student protestors.

The president asked if that was a friendly amendment.

Senator Lichter said that would be a beneficial change and agreed to such an amendment.

Senator Amaral said the new language implies language about the protestors that perhaps many faculty don’t agree with.

Senator Lichter said the new language he proposed are guardrails of expression on campus. As far as the peaceful resolution, he said that can be achieved if everything is conceded to one party. He said putting that phrase in this statement is an implicit endorsement of one side, which should be avoided.

Senator Mark Johnson (Biomedical Engineering) acknowledged this was a really difficult situation with a lot of strong feelings involved. He said he didn't agree with all the steps taken, but the University did reach a compromise and a peaceful outcome was achieved. He said he was thankful for that, and he wanted to congratulate President Schill for that result at the very least. He said the vast majority of his colleagues felt the same way.

Senator Hurd said he was in line with Senator Johnson's comments. He said he was proud of how Northwestern handled the situation. He said it's the job of the President and Provost to set the tone and the direction for the University, and in this case, he said he thought they did it remarkably well. He felt it was appropriate for the Senate to applaud that, especially in comparison to other universities. He added that he thought there was a lot of consultation with faculty from the President and Provost during the demonstrations, which seemed quite progressive. For him, what President Schill said about the agreement, that they agreed to do things the University should do regardless of the protests, carried a lot of weight. He said he preferred the original statement more than any of the amendments for that reason. He also said the amendments put the University in a position of policing language in a way that is untenable and assumes all senators agree on what injustice is. He said the original statement acknowledged that senators disagree about the substance of these protests, too, but the heart being the University's ability to navigate those disagreements to a peaceful end.

Senator Kevin Swong (Neurosurgery) called the question. His motion was seconded.

The motion to end debate on the amendment was approved.

The Senate then voted on the motion to amend the statement's third paragraph, as cited above. The final tally was as follows: 28 for, 27 against, and 3 abstentions. With a plurality and not a majority, the motion to amend the statement's third paragraph failed.

Past President Ceci Rodgers moved to postpone the motion to approve the statement indefinitely. The motion was seconded and the floor was opened for discussion.

Senator Hurd said he was in favor of continuing debate. He thought the Senate was close to agreeing on a statement that would endorse the peaceful resolution.

Senator Sara Solla (Physiology) called the question on the motion to postpone indefinitely. Her motion was seconded.

The president asked for unanimous consent to go directly to a vote on the motion to postpone. Seeing no objections, the president allowed the floor to continue discussing the motion to postpone indefinitely.

Senator Zorach mentioned the timing of this statement. She said postponing indefinitely is essentially making no statement at all.

Senator Getzler reiterated that his department is not particularly supportive of negotiation.

The senate then voted on the motion to postpone the statement indefinitely. The motion failed. The results were as follows: 22 for, 44 against, 1 abstention.

The Senate then returned to motion to approve the original statement.

Senator Amaral said the crux of the statement comes down to whether or not senators have opposition to the peaceful resolution of the protests.

Senator Mark Johnson proposed striking the words “of negotiation” in the third paragraph of the original statement. His motion was seconded and the floor was opened for discussion.

Senator Lichter said some people may see peaceful resolution as appeasement. He used the analogy of a group of students protesting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), citing the negotiated terms of the Deering Meadow agreement as a framework for the agreement with the hypothetical students protesting DEI. In such a scenario, he said the University would pay for five white supremacist students to attend and pay for senior members of the Ku Klux Klan to mentor them. He said many people would find that objectionable, but it is a peaceful resolution.

Senator Solla said the text reads “peaceful dissolution of the encampment.” She said the text approves of the approach to end the campus encampment. She said the Senate should not be discussing the content of the accord. She said she was in favor of President Schill not calling the police. The Senate can have a separate discussion on the content, she said.

Senator Hurd said the amendment is clear. He said the new statement articulates the fact that the University chose to take a peaceful path forward.

Senator Billard said this statement comes at an important time as there is speculation the Board is upset that President Schill did not use more force to end the protest. They said the Senate should not stand for students being met with violence when exercising their academic freedom and free speech, and that objection to violence is what the statement seeks to validate.

Senator Liz Hamilton (Libraries) said she disagreed with the approach the University took. She said the police were called when the protest started, two hours before the demonstration policy was officially amended. She said they did knock over some of her colleagues, and while it was not nearly as bad as what took place at other universities, those actions should still not be condoned. She noted her dissent of the statement for those reasons.

Senator Greg Beitel (Molecular Biosciences) said he liked the word “general” i.e. not addressing the specifics of the approach.

Senator Pappas called the question. The motion was seconded. The Senate then approved the motion to end discussion.

The Senate then voted on the following amended statement:

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The motion to approve the above statement from the Faculty Senate on the recent outcome of campus demonstrations was approved. The outcome of the vote was as follows: 45 for, 9 against, and 2 abstentions.

The president thanked the Senate for their efforts. He asked, because the meeting had gone over the allotted time, that the other agenda item, the resolution from the Social Responsibility, be postponed to the next meeting. He asked senators to share it with their colleagues in advance of a vote at the June meeting.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Spitz
Secretary to the Faculty Senate