
Parliamentarian Ferald Bryan was present.


I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Rosenbaum: I’d like to call the February meeting to order.

Meeting called to order at 3:07 p.m.

II. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

A. Rosenbaum: First, we have the adoption of the Agenda. We don’t have any walk-in items or changes. I need a motion to accept the agenda.

J. Kowalski: So moved.

A. Rosenbaum: Jeff, okay. Second?

S. Willis: Second.

A. Rosenbaum: Sue, okay. All in favor of adopting the agenda, say, “aye.”

All: Aye.

A. Rosenbaum: Any opposed? Okay, we have the agenda.

III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 19, 2011 FS MEETING (sent electronically)

A. Rosenbaum: Next we have the minutes of the January 19th Faculty Senate meeting, and I apologize for getting them to you as late as you got them. So, I know those of you who like to
read them over several times before the meeting were probably disappointed. Nevertheless, I need a motion to accept the minutes.

**P. Henry:** Motion.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Okay, Pat. Second? I need a second.

**A. Lash:** Second.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Okay, any corrections, changes, discussions, errors, omissions? Everyone enjoyed the minutes thoroughly?

**A. Lash:** They were very well done.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Thank you very much. Okay, All in favor of adopting the minutes as written, signify by saying, “aye.”

All: Aye.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Opposed? Okay, good, we have past minutes.

**IV. President’s Announcements**

**A. Rosenbaum:** I have just a couple of announcements and Nancy Castle has also asked for some time to talk to us about her role as Service Learning Coordinator, and I have agreed to do that. The items that I have for us are relatively insignificant. One is a detail that people asked for last week, and that was that we learned last week that the Board of Trustees Executive Session minutes tend to be released from time to time, and someone asked how we would get those Board of Trustees minutes. Someone gave the opinion that you need to file a Freedom of Information Act request, and that may yet be true, but we looked into this and if somebody wants to see the Executive Session minutes, requests can be directed to Sharon Banks-Wilkins, who is the secretary to the Board of Trustees. She receives the request and then gets approval from Legal Services. If anyone wants to see what goes on, that’s the way you go about doing it. What we were also told is that the minutes of the Executive Session are written in such a way that they are pretty vague. So, depending on how much effort is involved, you might or might not want to go through it. But nevertheless, anyone who has interest in those Executive Session minutes, that’s how you get it, Sharon Banks-Wilkins, who is the secretary to the Board.

I also had an interesting comment from Austin Quick, and he has asked me to note to the Faculty Senate that the buses, the Huskie buses, are paid for out of student funds, and they are generally available to faculty without fee, but there are two routes for which faculty are charged $0.75, and those routes are the one that serves Walmart and the hospital, and the one which serves Taylor Street and Schnucks. So, apparently, faculty have been trying to get some shopping done on the students’ nickel. So, he has asked me to really advise you that you must pay that $0.75 and that faculty who fail to do this are in violation of the agreement that apparently we have with Student Services. So, I said I would mention it. At first, he made it sound like faculty had to pay $0.75
for all for the bus rides, but that’s not true. So, you can use the Huskie bus to get around campus, but don’t try to get to Schnucks on the Huskie bus. Any questions about that? Is anybody, yes, Earl?

E. Hansen: Is it just faculty and not administrators, right?

A. Rosenbaum: It is anybody that doesn’t pay student fees. Are you asking if they’ll charge President Peters $0.75 to ride the Huskie bus if he wants to go to Schnucks? I don’t know. I’ll look into that if you’d like. Okay, so that’s the Huksie bus and as disappointing as this is, let’s try to pay that $0.75 when necessary. Those are the two announcements I have before I turn the floor over the Nancy Castle. Does anyone have any questions or anything? Okay, Nancy, I’ve given her, what did I say, five minutes Nancy, to inform the Senate about your new role as Service Learning Coordinator.

N. Castle: Starting?

A. Rosenbaum: Right now.

N. Castle: Now, okay. Many of you who open the emails that we get from the administration saw that I have been asked to help facilitate service learning on campus. So, I have a couple course buyout; it’s not like a position where I got transferred over. I believe that my work with the strategic plan, I was kind of the lead person on the engagement efforts for that. So, that’s kind of what brought me to their attention, and I just wanted to let you know that here’s my action plan and I look forward to you contacting me about any or all of it. My action plan is to first figure out what we’re doing on the academic affairs side with regard to those opportunities that we take advantage of, to send our students out into the community. We might call it community service, we might call it service learning, we might call it community engagement, and there’s a whole variety of ways that we do that, but to try to get a handle on what we’re already doing because there are a lot of us on campus doing some part of that that could probably even stand just some moral support from each other. There are also units on campus in Academic Affairs that are undertaking some of those efforts and so just try to get a handle on cataloging it really, who is doing what, do the same kind of thing with Student Affairs. They have the database on volunteerism, they’re the people who do externships and coops and so on and so they’re also in a position where they’re engaged in activities where students go out into the community. Also on this campus, the Administration and Outreach Division, that’s the division that reports to Ann Kaplan and it has the Center for Governmental Studies, it’s got the Association Resource Center. I mean they too are engaged in opportunities and activities where they interact with people in the community and really what I’ll be doing is figuring out what each unit is doing, and I hate to use that term like in their silo, but in the silo, but then also try to be looking at what kind of infrastructure can we take advantage of to maybe streamline some of our efforts. I can tell you that I’m also going to be working with the external community somewhat, and I’ve gotten feedback already that they would love to see Northern be more streamlined, if there could be like one door or two doors for how they get to us, they would prefer that and so if we can figure a way to do that and nothing, no decisions have been made. I will be looking at each of the silos and trying to come up with recommendations for how we might do that because to the outside, they would like to have a streamlined way to get to us.
the inside, we would have to come up with a way to do it that people who already have great relationships with agencies and so on, on the outside, keep those, but perhaps, we as a university can be a little more organized or streamlined about how we interact with the community.

So, those are my marching orders really and any step of the way, you’ll likely be getting an email from me, asking if you’re doing anything, if you are, what, if you’d like to be doing something, what could we do to help you and along those lines, I’m working with Faculty Development in the Provost’s Office to bring an expert to campus who would help people who, you know, easy ways that you might incorporate service learning into your classes if you want to. Working with FDIDC, we’ve done, in the last 10 years, eight workshops and service learning and so I’ve got lists of people who have attended those and I know a lot of you on campus who are doing some version of service learning. What we haven’t been able to do over the years is provide follow-up to that and mentoring and a way to organize people who are doing it and that’s part of what I’m being asked to do. Related to that, there is an organization called the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement. They’re having their annual conference at the Palmer House this November 2\textsuperscript{nd}–4\textsuperscript{th}. NIU is a co-sponsor of that conference and the call for papers will be coming out really any minute now and so I’ll be sure to get that to you. We would really encourage people to apply to present what you may be doing in terms of community engagement and service learning.

My last request is anybody who has got any questions, contact me. Email is the best way because at this point, I’ve got like three offices on campus or three places I need to be. So, email I’m always on. I will likely get in touch with you. If you could be thinking of people in your department, or even you, one thing that community agencies hit me up about last week was in April, typically 15 different students will call the director of, name the agency, and say, “For this class I’m taking this semester, I have to interview a professional in this field, so can I come and interview you?” So, they’re happy to do that except if we could come up with a way, and I’m happy to take the lead on this, if we could come up with a way where maybe we have like two different days, three-hour blocks of time where we could do round-robin interviews and all the students could come to that as opposed to calling these agency directors and other professionals where then they’re trying to make 15, one-hour time block appointments, that would be a huge service that NIU could be providing to the community. So, be thinking about that and I’ll send an email and if we can pull anything off like that, that would be great to kind of take a stab at it this semester.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, any questions for Nancy? Nancy also gave us a document, it’s only about a page and a half long, that we have agreed to post on the Senate Blackboard website that sort of summarizes what she has just told us plus adds a little bit more detail. So, we will have that posted up on our Blackboard website and you can read it in its entirety. I assume Nancy’s email address, well you all know how to find that anyway, so no problem.

One last update before we get down to some of our reports. As many of you have been aware, we made a request to the administration several moons ago for salary data so that we could do some analyses and answer some questions about the rate at which different constituencies within the University are receiving raises. That data has now been provided to us. It does not include all of the points that were requested. We’re not completely clear at this point whether we would
be able to get everything that we wanted to get from it. We will have to sort of play with it a little bit and see, but you should at least know that that data has been given to us and the Raise Equity committee has also been given access to it and so we hopefully will be having some progress on that over the next couple of weeks and perhaps as early as the next meeting, we might have something to say but certainly by the April meeting, we would expect to at least be able to say that we can or cannot answer some of our questions. So anyway, it’s one small step for faculty kind I guess. We’ll see what happens with that but, anyway, I just wanted you to know where that stands. Any comments? We have a couple of the Raise Equity Committee people here? Anyone want to make a comment? No, okay, good.

V. ITEMS FOR FACULTY SENATE CONSIDERATION

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

VII. REPORTS FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEES

A. FAC to IBHE – Earl Hansen – report – Page 3

A. Rosenbaum: The next item is our report from our advisory committees and the first one we have is the FAC to IBHE. This is Earl’s report. Earl has already submitted the report, I don’t know if you wanted to make a comment?

E. Hansen: Not really, but if they have questions, they can ask.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, so you have Earl’s report in your packet. Does anyone have a question for Earl on the FAC to IBHE report? No? Okay, thank you, Earl.

B. BOT Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Personnel Committee – Kerry Freedman and Ferald Bryan – no report

C. BOT Finance, Facilities, and Operations Committee – Alan Rosenbaum and Greg Waas – no report

D. BOT Legislation, Audit, and External Affairs Committee – Jay Monteiro and Todd Latham – no report

E. BOT – Alan Rosenbaum – no report

VIII. REPORTS FROM STANDING COMMITTEES

A. Academic Affairs – Charles Cappell, Chair – no report

B. Economic Status of the Profession – Sonya Armstrong, Chair – no report

C. Faculty Rights & Responsibilities – Brad Cripe, Chair – no report
A. Rosenbaum: Okay, the next report that we have is from our standing committees. There were no Board of Trustees meetings or subcommittee meetings, so we don’t have any reports on those. The next report is from Resources, Space and Budget and either David or Laurie is going to give us this report. David, are you going to give it?

D. Goldblum: There should be a copy of the report in the back of the packet. These meetings always start with us getting a sense of whether or not Dr. Williams is sleeping at night, and he said he is sleeping at night still, so conditions can’t be too bad here. He says the overall State debt is around $16 billion. From our perspective, we’re still owed about $77 million from the State, which is about 70% of what they owe us, which is a little bit worse than it was last year. Also, we have not received any MAP money yet. We have paid out MAP money to students, so we’re out that money as well. We did talk quite a bit about the change in the State income tax. The details are there. He said it should generate about $6 billion a year, which is a lot smaller than the debt, but he thinks, he is optimistic that it should start to make things better in the State if everything else is done responsibly. We did talk about some of the bonds that they have issued at the state level to meet pension obligations and quite a bit of discussion was revolved around the efforts to reduce pension costs at the state level. We’re aware of the fact that new hires now have different pension rules than existing faculty. He did say there’s actually talk about extending that to existing employees retroactively, so capping pensions at a certain salary level and benefits as well. He said we should be watching that carefully. We talked a bit about the Cole Hall renovation, saw some plans. The money apparently is in place on campus now, so that’s going to be going ahead and also some discussion about how NIU is trying to raise money to make the campus more attractive to students given the competition we have with other out-of-state universities and for-profit universities. So, they’re aware of that and they’re working on the new dorm obviously but also renovation to the Student Center and other facilities to make the campus more attractive and hopefully increase enrollment to the levels we would like to see. I think that’s it unless Laurie has something she’d like to add to that.

A. Rosenbaum: And do we have the meeting set up with President Peters?

D. Goldblum: Yea, the meeting, the committee is meeting with President Peters on the 22nd of February and also with some lobbyists. We’re not quite sure what that means, but there will be some lobbyists there. Whether they’re NIU lobbyists…

A. Rosenbaum: Maybe we’re the lobbyists.

D. Goldblum: Yea, we might be.

A. Rosenbaum: Well, if anyone has some issue that you would like brought to the attention of President Peters or Provost Alden, I guess it would be worthwhile to talk to either Laurie or David and they can put that question to them on our behalf. So, any questions? I mean, you don’t have to come up with your questions now, you can certainly email your questions, I just wondered if you have any questions now on the open floor. One comment, every time someone
mentions pension reform, of course it makes our blood run cold. The State, apparently in its wisdom, has decided that the biggest problem in the state is our pension. So, that’s what they’re going after instead of all the wasteful spending that they engage in. For our purposes, I feel obligated to mention that our representative to this is the Annuitant Association and that all of us can and should join the Annuitant Association. It’s not just for people who are nearing retirement. It is also for our brand-new faculty members and the only language apparently that legislatures understand is numbers and so when you have large numbers, it gets their attention. If you don’t, they brush you off. So, the more people who join the Annuitant Association, the larger the constituency is and the more likely somebody will pay attention to anything we have to say, and this is really critically important. Some of the things they are doing involve trying to raise the retirement age, involve trying to put a cap on your amount that you can apply to your retirement. They may go back and try to change the percentage of money that comes out that we’re chipping in as opposed to the amount that the State is theoretically supposed to be putting in. So, these are major issues and the legislature apparently has a tendency to sort of act quickly and get out of town fast, so you can’t wait until something starts happening to start joining and doing things. We have to sort of anticipate that this is sort of bubbling up and be ready to resist some of these proposed changes. Some of them appear to be unconstitutional, but that doesn’t seem to have stopped them in the past. So, I think it’s best if as many of you as possible, it’s not very expensive, so think about joining Annuitants. David?

D. Goldblum: On the report here, the item 1F actually is the link to House Bill 146, which is what Alan was referring to, this extension of the restrictions on pension benefits. So, if you want to read it for yourself, that is the long web address there. I think the Annuitant Association, it’s cents a paycheck, a dollar or two a paycheck, I think it’s very, very inexpensive.

A. Rosenbaum: Right, very inexpensive. Yes, Deb? Can you get a microphone.

D. Haliczer: I’m so happy you’re bringing this up. The administration has posted on the NIU webpage the budget and pension information. I looked at that earlier today. I really encourage you to look at that because Ken Zehnder and Kathy Buettner’s people are all posting up-to-date information with links to these pieces of legislation. You’ve got to read those things and pay attention to what’s happening. Another thing that a lot of the Annuitant Association members have done is to join LinkedIn, one of the social networks that professionals use. You can join the SURS membership group in LinkedIn. So, think about that because we get blasts almost every day of people’s reaction to articles, links to newspaper articles and journal articles about pensions. So, keep on it, the Benefits Committee, your representative, Sonya, will be talking about these very issues next week.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, thanks Deb. The other thing to keep in mind is that besides being faculty members, you’re also citizens of the State of Illinois, and you have representatives that are supposed to be responsive to the citizenry. So, you could write to your representatives as well if you wanted to. The only thing that we should remind you is that when you write, you cannot write as an NIU employee, you have to write as a citizen and so you can’t do it on NIU letterhead or imply that you are associated with NIU. It probably wouldn’t do any good to say that, “I work for NIU and I’m not happy with what you’re doing to the pension funds,” anyway. So the fact that we’re not supposed to do that only helps us. I would also encourage you to write
to your legislatures and scream bloody murder. Maybe between those two, we can have some impact.

E. Rules and Governance – Nancy Castle, Chair – no report

F. Elections and Legislative Oversight – David Wade, Chair – no report

IX. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Plus/Minus Grading System

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, the next item is sort of the main course for today’s meeting. First, I want to thank so many of you for going back to your departments and actually taking votes. I think this is a very important thing. This issue has come up before. I don’t know if it has ever come to an actual vote. We did get votes from more than half the departments in the University, so we did not get anywhere as close to all the departments, but we did get votes from more than half. We got votes from, to be exact, 21 departments. Of those 21 departments that voted, 17 voted in favor of plus/minus grading. Three departments voted against it and one department had a tie. There were also some abstentions but not a huge number of abstentions, so this represented the departments pretty well. The vote, if I total it all up for you, and I have totaled it up, there were 201 faculty members voting in favor and 87 faculty members voting against. Keep in mind that this is a sample, so half the departments haven’t voted. It represents fewer than 300 faculty members, and that is not a huge percentage of the faculty in the University. So, with that in mind, we do have at least some sentiment in favor of the plus/minus grading system. I should also tell you that many senators included comments made by their departments about things that they were concerned about.

Among the things that people were concerned about had to do with the cost of doing this. So, more than a few departments raised that issue and were concerned how much is this going to cost. The committee itself made a request to Gip Seaver for an exact number and didn’t get it. I also went to see Gip, and he also did not have an exact number, but he downplayed the significance of that, so he did not think it was a major financial problem. The reason he didn’t think that is because we already have plus/minus grading in the College of Law, and so the software or whatever is already in place at this University. Because clearly, large numbers of other universities besides us have plus/minus grading, so this does not require programming genius, this requires just pasting in some language from some other software program and maybe not even that. He also noted that changes would have to be made in catalogs and other department documents, which we are aware of and again, many people in departments noted this. One of the big problems that people noted was that there are courses where students must get a grade of C or better in order to either be accepted into the major or to advance and the concern was what happens if a student gets a C-. Since they are unable, at this point, to repeat a course in which they’ve gotten more than a D, they would be stuck with a C- and not be able to repeat it and therefore, have to drop the major. So, this is a concern that was raised by several departments. I spoke to Gip about that as well and his feeling was that that is a faculty prerogative and if we don’t like that, we can change that as well. So, the faculty does have the prerogative to change whatever it is that’s not working in order to make it work if this is what we
I just want to correct one other item and that is someone asked me last week where this would go if we passed it and my response was that it would go to the University Council. I think that’s really not a correct route to take. In looking at the various documents, I think that this should go to the Academic Planning Council and its various subcommittees first. So, this should go to APASC, I think, from us and then if APASC decides to support it, they have to bring it to the council for final approval. So, it would seem that rather than going to the Council and then to APASC, if we approve this, we send it to APASC and APASC then vets it with the students and makes their decision. They would then have to bring that to the Council and I think that’s the more appropriate time for it to go to University Council. So, unless someone has an objection to that, if we pass this, if we do decide to support this recommendation, my suggestion is that we send it to APASC prior to sending it to the University Council. Of course, if my thinking on this is not correct, then we’ll have to sort of revisit it and make a decision but we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.

D. Wade: I am the chair of APASC, and I just want one quick thing, we deal with undergraduate matters only, so if you want to route this, you probably need to route it to the Graduate Council as well if the grade scale is going to apply to graduate students.

A. Rosenbaum: Right, that’s why I said the subcommittees of the Academic Planning Council.

D. Wade: But we are a committee of the Undergraduate Coordinating Council, so I think if it goes APASC, UCC, UC, if I’m correct.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay.

D. Wade: Just for point of order.

A. Rosenbaum: Alright, makes sense. But, it would seem like that would be a better idea than sending it to the Council first, do you agree with that?

D. Wade: They’re just going to refer it back to us. But it would save us a month of…

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, David?
D. Goldblum: I don’t need to know the three departments that were against it, but can you see any pattern of types of departments, whether they’re humanities or science, physical or natural science? I mean, is there any pattern to this or no?

A. Rosenbaum: You know, it’s hard to see a pattern in only three departments. I can tell you that one of them was a social science department, one of them was a hard science department and one of them was a more technology-oriented department. So, it was a mix. Yes, Pat?

P. Henry: One of the questions I think that also arose was the matter of it being up to the instructor’s prerogative if they did not want to use the plus/minus system that that could be their option. I think there was some skepticism as to whether that would be allowed to stand. Then, the second point that I think could be considered in some context is that this business of having nothing lower than a C, I think there’s nothing that says we couldn’t just decide to have A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C and then D and F.

A. Rosenbaum: Correct.

P. Henry: And that way, I think, again, if that may be something that the individual faculty member could decide or it could be part of the whole package. But, is it truly the case and have we definitive information on this?

A. Rosenbaum: It’s voluntary?

P. Henry: I, as an instructor, can say, “By George, I’m not using pluses and minuses and nobody will get on my case?”

A. Rosenbaum: Well, you know, again, it’s not clear where we would get a definitive ruling on that. From what I’ve heard from people in administration, they’ve sort of suggested that this is an academic freedom issue. So, faculty assigns grades, so nobody can force you to assign any particular grade and I think people who have gone to institutions or have worked in institutions where there is plus/minus grading know individual professors that don’t use the plus/minus system. So, I think whereas, I think when we sort of put it into the motion, it makes it seem like we need to do that and that we can’t just say you know academic freedom would permit us to either use it or not use it at our own discretion. I think it’s also fair to say though, if there is a plus/minus system in the University, professors that don’t use it could face some pressure or sort of face grade appeals from students who feel they would have gotten a B+ or an A+ or something like that, had there been plus/minus grading in that class. I don’t know where those would go, but you know, again, this is an issue that I think we don’t have to actually put into the motion, that we can simply claim academic freedom. Any comments on that? I don’t know this for a fact; this is my opinion.

D. Wade: I don’t believe grade appeals would apply because it’s not capricious. As long as they consistently treat everybody the same in a class, then I think they would be fine.

A. Rosenbaum: So, you know, I could see some of that maybe happening though before…
D. Wade: Oh, well yea, you know.

A. Rosenbaum: Yea, so I don’t know, but it seems that we would not have to make that part of the motion, which I think makes it a little more complicated.

M. Kostic: By the way, we discussed the issue and our department did not take a vote and people actually think it doesn’t matter really. I think this is the scale of our faculty could put their own grades in, and there is no mandate, as you said, how will I use it, but the only issue about the catalog’s requirement C or better, then C- will not satisfy it. We should be thinking how to handle it. We could keep if C really is important, keep C, so C- will not make it, and I’m not quite sure I’m here for too long to remember but I’m not sure, I think students could repeat any course, even if they get B, could re-register and go for an A or no?

A. Rosenbaum: No, they cannot. They can only repeat a D or an F.

M. Kostic: That’s a little surprising. I was expecting that you could pay for whatever registration and repeat the course.

A. Rosenbaum: No, but again, that is not part of the Constitution. We could change that if we choose to change it. The other thing we can do is, the Committee, I believe, is recommending the A+, A, A- system, but there are other systems that we could use, such as an A, A/B, B, B/C, and then D and F, so we would not have to have a C/D. So, there are other possibilities I think, and that’s open for discussion as well. I think some departments sort of bristled against the plus/minus system in that it gives you too many different gradations and questioned whether you could make distinctions between a B+ and an A-, whether you could actually do that with any reliability or whether this was just going to be error. So, some departments question that and might have been more comfortable with a system that has fewer gradations. So, we can certainly, in our discussions, either support the model 3, or we could decide to use a different model, and that would be up to the body. Yes?

S. Willis: I was just wondering if you had any feeling of the departments or the people that were opposed to it, how many opposed it on the basis of cost?

A. Rosenbaum: I don’t really have a sense of that, but we have senators here that clearly sent me those reports, so they could give the opinion on that better than I could. Jeff?

J. Kowalski: Regarding the question of cost, that was one of the concerns that the dean of our college raised when we asked him about this issue, and is the MyNIU grading system basically tied into this issue of cost, but in terms of Seaver’s response, that would be, would that fall under his response that it’s not as large a concern?

A. Rosenbaum: Yes, he didn’t seem to think that this was a major problem. Now, that doesn’t mean it isn’t, because he also was engaged, was beginning to engage in a process of looking into the exact costs and also trying to create a list of what else would have to be changed, because this will impact on a number of different catalogs and other policies in the University. So, he was
starting to get much more active on that. So, it may turn out, “Gee, I’m really surprised, I didn’t think it was going to be much but it’s a lot.” But he didn’t seem to think it was.

**J. Kowalski:** In my own opinion, any cost is an issue in this day and age for the university system, but by the same token, if we don’t determine whether or not we want to proceed one way or the other, then if it becomes possible in terms of cost or an opportune time arises, to think of implementing this, it would help to be on record as favoring it or not wanting to proceed.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Okay, David?

**D. Valentiner:** I just wanted to speak to the question about within my department, we had a discussion, and there was certainly some sentiment against it, but the issue of cost never came up, and the types of concerns that people brought up were, one individual had worked in a university where there was a plus/minus grading system and brought up a lot of practical considerations having to do with what he perceived as a much greater number of informal appeals from students at the end of the semester because there was a greater number of cut offs. He also talked about how it was more difficult to discern where the cut offs should be. So, sometimes within a distribution, you have all these cut points. Right now, we’re trying to find four cut points, and this would dramatically increase that, so that seems to be some equivocal decisions that the students recognize that they were equivocal. So, there were those practical concerns. There was also brought up in my field, because a lot of people were concerned about measurement, as in many fields, and there was a body of literature that was cited and brought to bear on this, which some people found to be convincing. This individual prepared some information and asked, in consultation with me – I asked him to do this, and I intended to distribute it here. I regret that I haven’t done that, but if we do pass something along to a subcommittee then I would ask that this additional information, we will just take it and send it to that subcommittee so that they can consider it. But certainly, there is some argument that could be made. Whether it has merit or not, it would have to be evaluated and you would have to decide for yourself, but certainly there is at least some argument that could be made on psychometric grounds and that it would be unwise to increase precision and the argument is that the reliability actually decreases as you increase precision. Joe?

**J. Jeffrey:** As one who began as a big skeptic of the whole proposal, I have to say, I’ve pretty much been convinced by the arguments that I’ve heard, primarily that the many other universities are doing this quite easily and successfully to my knowledge. To me, this seems to speak to, is it too hard for faculty to do? No, it’s not. Lots of other places do it. I just can’t take it seriously, frankly. The other thing that I consider very important is apparently there is no proposal that a faculty member who objected to it who felt that they could not accurately assess to this degree of precision will be forced to do it. The academic freedom seems to me to take care of a lot of things. I would, though, like to echo what Jeff said. I would hate to see us go on record as ignoring cost. Given the University’s financial situation, if this costs about $100, I wouldn’t want to see us do it. We’re broke. It may be desirable, but as broke as we are, we haven’t got money for MAP grants, we’re owed a gazillion dollars from the state. It may be nice, but I don’t think it’s a time to do things that are just nice unless they’re truly, really down and dirty cheap.
A. Rosenbaum: Okay, other comments? Yes, I can’t see, back there?

B. Henry: Can I just (inaudible) about the cost and the efforts for things. You know, I just wondered, do we, to me it seems like it’s a dissatisfier to students to have this A, B, C cutoff, you know the top of a B seems very different than the bottom of an A. So to me, I hear comments like that from students. Now, I don’t want 17 grade levels either because that’s hard to manage, but do we have a sense that when we’re looking at recruiting students, retaining students, moving students forward, encouraging students, whether one type of grading system might be better than the other and so there might be value added in that way.

A. Rosenbaum: We can ask the committee if they have any comment about that. The one thing I would add to that is that the last time APASC took this up, which was 2004-2005, the students lobbied very hard against it and APASC went with the students on that. Now, I think one of the differences is that system did not have the A+ in that system, so that might have been part of the problem. But, I think there is a concern that this will lead to what has been called by some grade deflation, but I don’t think it’s grade deflation from the actual accurate grade; I think it’s grade deflation from the inflated grades that we have to go through because we’re giving As when people should probably get high Bs because of the way the system is. So, grades are already inflated and this is going to get them down to probably a more appropriate level. But, does anyone have an answer to that question? Are there any studies?

C. Cappell: If you look at the report, the one article that we found was a McClure study of a Midwestern university, I think it might have been Ball State, I’m not sure of that. They were involved in some of these studies. The argument for motivation is a very logical one. When you see the kind of discourse that we put out in our report, it makes a good deal of sense that for final exams, for final papers, students will do a rational mini/max exercise and say, “Well, I only need to achieve this amount to lock in my B and if there are more gradations, that would make logical sense that they would have to be a little more conscious and motivated to do that. As far as I know, there is no study of that detail. This McClure study gave students an option, so it was a kind of controlled experiment, students wanted to opt for a plus/minus or not and then they examine motivation and engagement over this semester and found basically that there wasn’t a big effect in which grade system they chose. That’s not quite addressing the logical point, but it doesn’t support the idea that this is going to dramatically change student motivation one way or another.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Jeff? If we had more money, we could buy more microphones.

J. Kowalski: Just returning to that cost issue, I just wanted to make clear that I didn’t have any set figure in mind regarding minimal or maximal cost expectations. My point is more that I think it’s our responsibility to propose, so to speak, and that the administration will dispose that we propose what we think is preferable if the administration feels the cost is unacceptable at this time. I’m certain we will know that and that we, however, will make it clear that when it becomes possible to implement such a system, this is where we want to move.

A. Rosenbaum: And I think the fact of the matter is that because so many faculty have raised this issue, it’s clear that we’re not going to pick up arms and go to the barricades if the
administration tells us that this is going to cost an exorbitant amount of money. So, we can accept that as a reasonable excuse for not going forward at this time. But again, from what people have told me, and this is based, of course, on them not having exact numbers, they don’t seem to be worried about that. That’s not the direction the administration seems to be leaning towards, which is a relief. I mean, I think it’s good that they’re not starting right off by saying, “You know, well we don’t have the money for it.” They’re saying, “You know, if the faculty feel this is important, okay then move it and we’ll take it from there and see what we can do.”

W. Pitney: One concern that was expressed to me relates to the grade deflation issue and I’m wondering if the committee, someone on the committee might be able to speak to whether or not there’s information that exists as to whether or not the number of students receiving financial aid goes down or up in the instances where a plus/minus system has been implemented?

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Charles?

C. Cappell: No study that I reviewed directed that question per se. There was some rationale given in some of the other universities and cites and even in the literature that this could have an effect to deflate grades and they proposed that in a very positive sense as one method that would fight a pretty well documented grade inflation that has taken place all across the country. One study in particular found that there was a slight decrease over time in the underperforming students, their grades tended to go down a little bit with the added plus/minus distinctions, but the higher level students, there was really no effect and there might be even greater motivation for them to shoot for those pluses and higher scores. So, it doesn’t appear to be a great solution administratively to the motivation problem, which is a primary faculty interest, of grade inflation, which again is a faculty interest. It seems to rest in the arguments that faculty feel more comfortable with having greater academic freedom to make greater distinctions to reward and differentiate people from like the highest or the lowest perhaps A-grade to the lowest B-grade. That spread might not really reflect just one kind of point distinction that they would be happier with making greater distinctions. The other thing in terms of the psychometric literature that was raised, and we reviewed a lot of, particularly work from educators and psychometricians who raise that point about reliability and it is a fairly robust finding across surveyed research as well as assessment that necessarily increasing the gradations of a scale don’t really produce reliability or accurate measures of the underlying latent attribute. But again, my general sense, without having research in this area, is when you look at, with a grade range that’s actually implemented by faculty, you’re basically probably at a three-level distinction. I suspect that in most universities, Ds and Fs make up a really, really small proportion of grades, particularly as the academic caliber of the university increases. So, faculty are basically just operating maybe within two or three categories. So, going to a plus/minus system will raise that to about a five or a seven-level category distinction, which is, I think, not going to be inconsistent with notions of greater reliability.

A. Rosenbaum: David? You guys should all sit closer to each other.

D. Valentiner: You know I don’t know the specific literature my colleague was talking about, but it appeared to me that he was making a distinction between grades that involved some subjective decision making versus those that might be objectively graded such as, you think of a
chemistry test or some other type of fact-based or problem solving where there is in fact a definitive correct answer that has high reliability and in those cases, when you’re aggregating across many problems and many tests, the graded degree of precision is probably appropriate. But, when you come to other areas where nonspecific factors are likely to influence, I think that his argument was about four to seven categories is about what the human mind can discriminate between and it’s probably closer to four. So, there may be some discipline issues. But, let me say that I don’t know that literature, I don’t want to represent his argument or that literature and say that we have an informed evaluation of it here. I’m not sure that we do have an informed evaluation and that’s what concerns me. So, as things move up, I think that it would be important to make sure that we have some way to draw upon the expertise of our faculty to speak to this issue, to provide supplemental information and coming back to the cost issue, perhaps there’s a way we can express, if we do endorse this, we can express a priority. We consider it to be a high priority, we consider it to be a modest priority. So, as in some way to communicate how much value we would hope the administration would put on this recommendation because they have to balance it against the other costs and initiatives that they want to take for the University.

A. Rosenbaum: And I think that is why I wanted an actual vote and why we’re going to report an actual vote of departments so that they know how strongly the faculty feel about this. I don’t think in the past, there has been such a vote and so they just had a sense that it was passed, but there’s still about just as many that want it as don’t want it or very close. So, I think the vote that we come out with today will give the administration a good indication of how strongly we feel about it. I would also like to comment on that literature that’s being referred to. I think it’s being misapplied. I think when you’re trying to make diagnostic decisions, it’s more appropriate, but what do we do when we grade? I would guess 80-90% of us are taking a numerical number and making a cut point and assigning it to an A or a B. So, if you have a student who has an 87, instead of now deciding is that going to be an A or is that going to be a B, you’re deciding is that going to be an A- or a B+, I don’t really see the difference there. So, I think we take this scale, which is a pretty much continuous scale, and we break it at the points that we think it makes sense to break it, that’s what we do. So, I don’t really see how whether we have five or whether we have 11 makes much of a difference. I think if you have different gradations of a psychotic disorder, it’s going to be a lot harder to nail the one exactly right, but I don’t think you can apply that literature to this particular task, so I disagree with that. Sue?

D. Valentiner: He was speaking of the survey literature and not the clinical decision-making literature.

A. Rosenbaum: Well, he mentioned DSM I think for when he gave his example.

D. Valentiner: Well, again…

A. Rosenbaum: I don’t want to argue that.

D. Valentiner: I don’t represent that literature. I think that we probably don’t have the information here to make an informed evaluation of that literature.
A. Rosenbaum: And all I’m saying is I don’t think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out how to decide that an 87 is going to be a B+ or an A-. Sue?

S. Willis: Just belaboring that point perhaps slightly more than it needs to, but I would agree with whoever said that really we don’t have all that many gradation points, particularly at the graduate level. In graduate courses, you’ve got As and Bs and everything else is more or less equivalent. So, I think, particularly there, it would be nice to have some more gradations that you could use. In one of my previous incarnations, I’ve spent a lot of time looking at transcripts of graduate students. You essentially never see a D. You do see occasional Cs, but you see lots of As and Bs, an occasional C and every once in a while, an F. You never see a D. If I see somebody who gets a D in a graduate course, I feel like giving them a prize because it like never happens.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Pat?

P. Henry: Just sort of following up on that with regards to the C- issue again. To me, that one’s the real problematic situation because for teacher certification or for any number of other programs, you would really be sticking people if you gave them a C- and it seems like I don’t know if we need to resolve that in terms of what we pass on, but instead of just having, in other words, instead of having C+, C- and C, I would argue that it would make more sense and be more efficient to just say, “We have a C and below B- is C, D, F.” People do try and take courses over. I have no idea how many repeat the D, the ones that they got Ds and Fs in, but it’s a terrifically inefficient way to process students, to get students through school if you have them taking classes over. If we tried to make the argument that if they got a C-, they could take that class over, I think that would be craziness.

A. Rosenbaum: The other thing is that there are certain state regulations, like with teacher certification now where you have to have, you can’t have a C-. So, I think there are a couple of ways to view this, one is we could think about changing the system. Another way to think about it is that since the professors actually know the significance of giving a C- in one of these courses, that you would expect that a professor who thought this person should continue in the program wouldn’t give that C-.

P. Henry: Well, maybe they didn’t like that student, you know?

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, in the back?

T. Fisher: I was curious if anyone knew about the rough estimate or a close estimate of the number of faculty on campus?

A. Rosenbaum: I thought it was somewhere around 2800 to 3100 or something like that but I’m really not sure of that. Is that too many? That’s too many, isn’t it?

Unidentified: 1200.

A. Rosenbaum: 1200? Maybe I’m including too many other employees. Yea, I don’t know.
Unidentified: So we don’t know?

A. Rosenbaum: Does anyone have a better estimate than I have? Deb?

D. Haliczer: Somewhere in the neighborhood of 1200.

A. Rosenbaum: 1200, thank you.

Unidentified: Thank you.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, I had another hand in the back. Go ahead, I can’t see, you’re in the sun right there.

J. Flynn: To be honest, I’m new. This is my second Faculty Senate meeting, so this might be an out-of-place question, but I know that cost concerns are always important. But when I go back to my faculty and talk about this, I want to have some kind of ballpark figure since it’s now on the table that cost could be an issue. Is there any kind of an estimate as to how much instituting a plus/minus grading system would cost the University?

A. Rosenbaum: No, we don’t have an estimate. We’re also sort of at the point now where the votes have been taken, so we’re going to, the next step would be to either support it or not support it. Joe?

J. Jeffrey: I agree with Pat Henry’s comment about C- in the sense that we certainly would not want to see a student doomed by a C-, an irreparable grade problem. But it seems to me that that’s fairly easily handled by department standards. If you had, the departments would certainly know if they have a situation that a program in which a student must not get below a C and therefore a professor, an instructor better not give a C- because it’s irreparable. I don’t see that as a body here in the Senate, we need to establish an overall faculty policy for that.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay.

V. Collins: I just wanted the Senate to know that, in our department, the vote was kind of split, a little bit more in favor. But the prevailing concerns for those who were against had to do with the measurement concerns, that measurement error comes into play with, as we increase the distinctions of our system. So, that was a concern that was expressed by just about all of those who were not in favor. The other had to do with folks not being in favor of the A+, seeing that being different from what other universities are doing. So, folks were not happy with that.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, any other comments? Millie?

M. Kostic: I hate to do it twice, but some people were doing it more than me. I think we are overanalyzing it. This is just a finer scale and some faculty may choose not to split in so many pieces. Grading is nonlinear and we are now too much worried about how to achieve higher GPA. That’s like financial, those people who put us in this trouble, trying to make profit out of something which is not. So, I think we should at some point have a point here to discuss about
how to improve learning and education at NIU, how to improve reputation of the institution, not just how to fit things and those different studies. That’s just subjects for the study, themselves, I think. I think we could have a fine scale, no problem with it, nothing will change. But many faculty might not know actually that you could just split your grades into A, B, C, Ds. It’s up to the faculty, you said faculty freedom thing. Maybe for some of those professional accomplishments, C is the minimum and if it’s C-, they shouldn’t be achieving the whatever titles they have. The way the other person said, sure, we are human beings, we are aware of it and then we’ll adjust our scale for C to B, what we can see, therefore, our professional discipline for people to achieve the degree or title or whatever. So, I don’t see much of the problem here, just the finer scale and if let it be, so what.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Rosemary?

R. Feurer: I just wanted to, I’m from History and our vote was pretty lopsided in favor. 20 yes, 4 no, and 1 abstain. I had a hard time getting votes from some people because they didn’t really care that much in the end. But one of the faculty members who went through the University of Illinois’ transition said that the exact same angst about the transition went on there with faculty mulling it over and having a hard time with it and students as well. And when it was finally implemented, it was seamless and people really came on board. That was his perception, at least in the History Department, that it was much easier and they regretted all the angst. That’s my hopeful statement before I urge us to call the question or something on this issue.

A. Rosenbaum: All right, is there any comment that we haven’t aired that somebody would like to put in the discussion? Okay, Charles did we make a formal motion? Would you like to make a formal motion?

D. Valentiner: Excuse me, I just wanted to, the vote count?

A. Rosenbaum: Yes?

D. Valentiner: So will that be recorded and passed along?

A. Rosenbaum: Yes, I would like to pass the vote count along.

D. Valentiner: So, that would be one way in which we could communicate the degree of priority?

A. Rosenbaum: Yes.

D. Valentiner: For example, if it is unanimously yes. So, I’m in favor of this. I would like especially that nobody has to implement it, right? So everyone can, you can just say I’m not going to give any C-, right? But, I also hope that the vote count is relatively close and I’m just wondering, is there a way to do like an informal pole before we actually take the formal vote?
A. Rosenbaum: Well, I don’t understand why you’d want an informal vote. The vote will be, if it’s close, it will be reporting a close vote and people will see that it’s pretty mixed. In the back, I can’t see who you are? Gretchen.

G. Bisplinghoff: Actually, one of the big questions, since we seem to keep mentioning the optional nature, one of the big questions that we debated was covered pretty thoroughly in our discussion was the fact of this optional nature. Faculty, whatever you want to call it, freedom, that first of all, that this could be very, very complicated in multi-section courses. For example, with one faculty using one system and another faculty using another. Number two, folks said that it either had to be one way or the other. Either you had to say everybody changes over or you know, it can’t be optional, and we took two votes actually, since we’re at the point of taking two votes here. We took two votes and on this optional business, people very much voted against it. When we came to an idea of mandated, they were slightly for it, 13-9 with some abstentions. So, the question also from folks who had been in schools where this had happened and they said that it became mandated. You know, the optional was out there but eventually the pressure was that everybody had to go to this system because it simply wasn’t workable or there were so many problems that they encountered because of different systems being out there. So, that became one of our main issues that we discussed at that point and actually took two votes on.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Giovanni?

G. Bennardo: Well I still have the issue of optionality, if this is optional. Well, if a faculty decides not to use the A+ and -, the plus/minus system, he may create a problem for students because if somebody takes a class, some students have a class with him or her, you’re going to get a specific grade. If he takes it with another instructor the next semester, he might get a different grade with the same points and those grades may end up with a different GPA. Isn’t that the case?

A. Rosenbaum: Yea, I think that would be the case but again, if you took two courses with different instructors, you might very well get different grades anyway.

G. Bennardo: No, I’m talking about the same class with two different semesters taught by two different instructors. I mean, if you’re lucky that you get the right instructor, you get a higher grade just because he’s using the A, B, C, D. I mean, that’s not fair I think.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Rosemary?

R. Feurer: That happens now, as far as I can see, that if you luck out. We teach Intro to History and students fish for the right instructor who is going to give them grades.

G. Bennardo: Sorry, this is not the same issue. It’s not the quality of the type of instruction.

R. Feurer: No, I’m talking about grades.
G. Bennardo: The type of grading system that the instructor is using and if it is optional. I mean, if you introduce a system, what I’m trying to say is that if you introduce a system, I personally believe you need to introduce it throughout the University, everybody has to use it. You cannot leave this optionality because if you leave the optionality, you discriminate against certain students.

A. Rosenbaum: I don’t know if there’s anything we can do about the optionality. There’s academic freedom. Professors are going to assign grades as they choose. It doesn’t matter whether we call it optional or not. I think when we brought this optional/nonoptional into it, I think the committee intended that just to be saying to people, “Look, you don’t have to give those grades if you don’t want to, not because it’s in this motion, but because that’s the nature of academe.”

G. Bennardo: That’s different. I understand that, but if you institutionalize a system, that’s the system, then there is the freedom and the instructor can decide to manipulate it according to his own belief and knowledge and whatever, but that’s a different story.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, Rosemary?

R. Feurer: I just want to point out that I called the question quite a long time ago, just rules.

A. Rosenbaum: Well, I think it’s an important enough issue that we want everyone to be heard and we really want to get this right. I mean, obviously people are looking at this as an important thing and we want to represent it. So, if we have a few extra minutes here, it’s probably worth it. I just want to make sure that everyone has had a chance to speak. Are we comfortable? All right, Charles, would you like to make a motion?

C. Cappell: On behalf of the Academic Affairs Committee, I will make a motion that the Senate support a change in the plus/minus grade system to a grading system that has 10 distinctions, A, B and C with plus/minuses, a D+, a D and an F, and that this recommendation, if passed, be forwarded to the appropriate university committees.

A. Rosenbaum: Okay, we’ll get the exact wording right but the essence of this is that if you vote yes, you’re voting for a change to the plus/minus grading system that includes the A+ but doesn’t include the A-.

All: What?!

A. Rosenbaum: Excuse me, it doesn’t include the D-. Excuse me, sorry. You’re getting hungry, I can tell. Okay, so, includes the A+, does not include the D-. We have taken the optional language out of it, so we’re just going to weigh in on whether we want to move to a plus/minus grading system. If you do not like the plus/minus but prefer another system such as the A, A/B or something like that, then you would vote “no” on this. If it gets voted down, you can then introduce another motion for that new system. So, if we vote “yes” on this, we are voting to put forward the plus/minus grading system. I would also ask again that you represent your department’s wishes on this, your vote, whatever your department vote was, so that we have
a fairly good vote of the entire faculty, which we now know to consist of about 1200 people thanks to Deb Haliczer and no thanks to me.

**F. Bryan:** We need a second.

**A. Rosenbaum:** I need a second.

**P. Henry:** Second.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Okay, we have seconds. I guess we’ve already had discussion, so I’m not going to ask for any more discussion. I’m going to call the vote. All in favor, I want you to raise your hands because we’re going to count. All in favor, signify by raising your hand. We need a good count. Are we good? We’re going to give minuses to these.

**F. Bryan:** (inaudible)

**A. Rosenbaum:** That’s right, 36. All opposed? I see 3, is that correct, 3? Okay, the motion carries by a substantial margin.

**A. Lash:** Is there an abstain?

**A. Rosenbaum:** Oh, I’m sorry, anyone abstaining? I’m sorry, we have 4 abstentions? Okay, thank you, I apologize for that. Okay, the motion carries by a large majority. We have no new business. Anyone have any other comments. I know you’re probably all exhausted. I thank you for your efforts in this regard.

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

**XI. COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**XII. INFORMATION ITEMS**

A. University Assessment Panel – December 3, 2010 minutes
B. Committee on Initial Teacher Certification – November 12, 2010 minutes
C. Committee on Advanced Professional Certification in Education – December 6, 2010 - minutes

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**A. Rosenbaum:** I’ll take a motion to adjourn?

**D. Valentiner:** Motion.

**A. Rosenbaum:** Second?

**Unidentified:** Second
A. Rosenbaum: We’re adjourned. We will see you with an update on how this goes in March.

Meeting adjourned at 4:17 p.m.