I. CALL TO ORDER

L. Freeman: Good afternoon everybody. It’s my pleasure to call the Wednesday, Oct. 6, University Council meeting to order.

Meeting called to order at 4 p.m.

II. VERIFICATION OF QUORUM

L. Freeman: Pat, can you verify that we have a quorum.

P. Erickson: We do have a quorum, and I also want to remind everybody to complete your attendance slip that’s at your place. And then just leave it there, and it will be collected after the meeting. Thanks.

L. Freeman: Wonderful.

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

L. Freeman: Can I have a motion to approve the agenda, and if you would mention your name for the record, that would be helpful to all of us since it’s hard to tell sometimes with masks on.

T. Borg: So moved.

L. Garcia: Second.

L. Freeman: Okay, all in favor?

Members: Aye.
L. Freeman: Opposed, same sign. Great.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 MINUTES – Pages 3-5

L. Freeman: Can I now have a motion – moving on to Roman numeral IV – to approve the September 8, 2021 minutes that are found on pages 3 to 5 of the packet?

H. Nicholson: So moved.

F. Bohanon: Second.

L. Freeman: All in favor?

Members: Aye.

L. Freeman: Any opposed? Great.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

L. Freeman: Moving on to Roman numeral V, this is the time in our open meeting when we open the microphone to those who have public comment. And I understand we have public comment today?

P. Erickson: Jeffry Royce has a public comment.

L. Freeman: Great, Jeffry, please take the microphone.

J. Royce: Good afternoon. I want to start by being very clear about how very much I love this institution. I feel it every day. I speak out whenever possible. And I believe in it down to my very core, far more than five short minutes can convey. As most of you know, I got involved in shared governance to tackle issues and concerns, not to pat everyone on the back; so, I’ll jump right in.

I will be leaving NIU at the end of the month. I accepted a position down at UIUC; and while I’m excited for this new chapter, I am feeling rather hurt about how we made it to this point. And I really can’t say for certain whether I’m primarily pursuing a career opportunity or escaping a toxic employment culture. It’s likely a combination of both. What I do know is that I have so much more to give this place at a time when we so desperately need it. But my work/life balance is at a breaking point, and there’s no end in sight. And I know I’m not alone in feeling this way. It simply boggles my mind that we’re hemorrhaging staff across campus, rolling back offerings, struggling to get through it all, and yet we still can’t find a way to retain and recognize those remaining employees who’ve been holding this place together. In most cases, we don’t even bother to try.

Sure, we can blame this on the lasting impacts of COVID and the national shifts in the employment market, but these issues have been chronic to this campus for far longer, and we all know it. It’s long past time to openly acknowledge the real problem here – that generally speaking, in addition to crushing workloads, our Civil Service salaries are disgusting. Spend ten minutes on the Civil Service site and you’ll quickly notice a pattern where NIU compensation ranks near the bottom of the list comparatively to our sister institutions. Frequently, we are at the bottom, and by a wide margin. I can’t help but ask our administrators, does this not embarrass any of you? Does it not
make you question the validity of whether the salary analysis HR performs, which continually keeps our people at the bottom? Why not demand better for the people you lead, not just the employees in your orbits, but those on the ground barely making it by unnoticed. I daresay a bit of an income gap might be tolerable if it weren’t also for our tendency to under-classify our positions and over-extend our employees, provide inadequate levels of support, as well as the utter stonewalling of any promotional growth.

This goes so much deeper than just being about the money. And any administrator on this campus who continues to dismiss concerns in this fashion needs to gaze in the mirror and try to reflect on what caused them to fall so entirely out of touch and when. This is about value and recognition. This is about professional respect and consideration. This is about acknowledging all the extra time, stress and impact on our families. This is about living up to the claims of our mission, vision and values. This is what I thought being a Huskie was all about.

I use the term, toxic, on employment culture earlier with careful consideration, because it impacts all of us in ways we might not even be aware of. I don’t believe any one person or group of people is responsible for this culture, but rather that it was built brick by brick, year by year, initially motivated by budget concerns and perpetually expanded by following unwritten policies and procedures that no one here today even knows the origins of.

This came into focus for me personally following an interaction some months ago with a relatively new employee, which has really weighed heavily on my mind in the time since. As they were leaving for the day, they pulled me aside to ask, hey, who might I talk to about requesting a raise? I initially replied with a snort and began a sarcastic response about all the procedures, barriers and time involved in such a request, until I noticed a sudden change in their demeanor, which signaled to me an unexpected feeling of discouragement, even through their face mask. I paused, horrified, as I slowly realized that this question had been asked in earnest and not in jest, and that this person hadn’t even been a Huskie for a full year yet, much less be aware of the reality of this topic on campus. I apologized profusely, took extra time to sit down with them and discuss their real options moving forward, while being extra careful to manage their expectations. The reason this unsettled me so deeply is because I stood before this very body just the day before and commented on behalf of the Operating Staff Council and I quote, “We have so many outstanding, loyal, proud NIU Huskie staff who can’t even mention their salary concerns, because they fear it won’t be taken seriously.” Not 24 hours later, I laughed at an employee who brought me some concerns, because they heard I was an advocate. I, of all people, laughed at them. This was me delaying yet another brick on top of that culture. This made me look into the mirror and wonder when the thought of rewarding hard work and dedication became a foreign concept to me.

This employee ultimately requested a desk audit and, over ten weeks later, has yet to hear anything back, which is a total disgrace and a shame on us all. It’s time for that culture of bricks to come down. I know in my heart that everyone in this room truly believes that, by and large, our employees are incredible. And while we always strive to be good stewards of taxpayer resources, it’s time to agree that we need to be better stewards of our employees’ career investments and contributions, as well. I think that starts right here in this room.

Thank you for this. Serving in our shared governance has been an absolute honor. I value everyone of you, and go Huskies.

L. Freeman: Thanks, Jeffry. Thanks for your honest comments, but also thank you for all that
you’ve done for NIU over the years.

VI. NIU PRESIDENT LISA FREEMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

VII. ITEMS FOR UNIVERSITY COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

A. University Goals – President Lisa Freeman

L. Freeman: Moving on, the next item is president’s comments. And I’m going to merge Item VI with Item VII, Items for University Council Consideration, as I give a prepared presentation on the process that we use to set university goals and ask this group to reflect a little bit with me on a preview of part of what will be presented in the university goals. And I see that the PowerPoint is up already, thank you so much.

Since I became the president, part of the university’s obligation to our governing board, the NIU Board of Trustees, is to annually present goals that capture our aspirations. There have been a couple of changes to the process since it started. First, the nature of the goals has changed over time. Initially, the goals were annual goals with metrics that were very discreet and countable. And over time, the process has moved to include multi-year, as well as annual, goals. And the indicators of progress have shifted from very specific and discreet metrics to be more evidence based.

Also, the goals used to be established to run from July 1 to June 30 for a fiscal year; and they’re now on more of an academic year schedule, running from October 1 to September 30, with formal presentation and adoption at the November Board of Trustees. This is a better calendar for a number of reasons. First, it allows the goals to be set after we have fall enrollment data and the previous fiscal year financials. But it’s also a better system, because it allows me to get feedback from key stakeholder groups and fine-tune the goals as we move between the time that the goal discussion process starts and the time they’re approved by the Board of Trustees.

Here you see a calendar that summarizes the work that is officially done from the time we start finalizing and sharing the university goals. And you can see, if you look carefully, that the font gets darker toward the bottom of the slide. The Board of Trustees and I work diligently together between August 31 and September 23, to get a draft of the annual goals. There’s work that goes on prior to that over the summer – and I’m going to talk about that a little later – but that’s the time period for me working with the trustees. After that period, the goals are shared. This year they were shared with the senior roundtable and the deans. Part of the goals were previewed with Faculty Senate a week ago, and today I’m previewing part of the goals with you. And then there’ll be a little bit more cleaning up of the goals between now and October 8. At that point, the goals will really be set. The Jell-O hardens a little bit with each step that you see between August 31 and October 1. And then the goals will be presented more formally in total to academic affairs leadership, the Tuesday leadership group, which is chairs and directors, the University Advisory Committee to the Board of Trustees. They’ll be posted in the Board of Trustees meeting materials on November 15 and then considered formally by the board at the November 18 meeting. It’s great that we have an opportunity to spend some time together looking at aspects of the goals before they’re completely established.

I said that there was work done to inform the goals this past summer, and that was a collaboration between university leadership, particularly Vice President Chinniah, Provost Ingram and I, to faculty members from our College of Business, Mahesh Subramony and Bart Sharp, and colleagues
from the Association of Governing Boards. The Association of Governing Boards is a membership organization. There are 2,000 higher ed institutions that are members. And they really are there to be a strategic partner with governing board and university leadership to talk about the best ways to advance student services and student success, and enhance institutional vitality through strategic partnership. And we deliberately engaged AGB, because we wanted a group that knew us, but wasn’t of us, to help have the conversation over the summer.

So, what did that summer work and conversation look like? There was an extensive review of materials; our mission, vision and values statements; transcripts of interviews that the provost and vice president/CFO had with various constituents over time. There were interviews with groups that were on campus, members of the leadership teams, but also the president’s budget roundtable and a few others. And from those was created a SWOT analysis, and that SWOT analysis fed imperatives for change and sustainability. And then those two documents were taken into August leadership retreats with members of the senior roundtable and the deans. From those leadership retreats, emerged conversation about the key facilitators and inhibitors of change on our campus, as well as innovation strategies, pillars and principles. And all of this work was used to inform the university goals.

In the next few slides, I’m going to go through the SWOT analysis, the imperatives for change, some of the innovation strategies. I’m not going to go through the whole pillars and principles piece. And then I’m going to talk about the university’s goals and preview one specific goal with this group for feedback and fine-tuning.

The planning work yielded a SWOT analysis, and that SWOT analysis is represented on this slide and the next. And I’ll tell you that, although, in any academic setting, there is always room for additional wordsmithing and enthusiasm for doing so, the groups who reviewed the SWOT analysis generally agreed with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats assessment.

On this slide, we see the strengths and weaknesses. And just to remind you, in a SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, where the strengths are what gives NIU advantage over others, and the weaknesses do the opposite. The strengths that emerged in our planning work are shown on the left, and I don’t they’re a surprise. We’re proud of our status of an engaged, student-focused research university. We change the lives of our students and their communities. And our faculty and staff are dedicated to the mission. The identified weaknesses are show on the right, and they are addressable. We need to align more intentionally around NIU’s priorities to think about how resources are allocated and actions are incentivized, and to invest in the leadership development of our employees, our faculty and our staff. And the university’s annual and multi-year goals are designed to address these.

In a SWOT analysis, the opportunities and threats represent external factors, where opportunities are the elements in the environment that NIU could use to our advantage; and the threats are elements in the environmental that could be detrimental. And we have significant opportunities. Our mission aligns with national conversations around an equity mindset. We have learned to be innovative and to pivot during COVID and before. And we do create resources from relationships. The threats shown on the right side are not unique to us. A major part of our budget is controlled externally. The demographics of our student body are changing, and every public university is in the same boat with respect to the last. And we’ll be trying to position for themselves for success with different students in a changing world.
The SWOT informed development of the imperatives for change and sustainability, and these are going to serve as the foundation for our multi-year planning efforts. When I think of these, they’re the keys to success, things that we can’t avoid if we are going to be successful. But the good news is that, for the most part, these aren’t new ideas. They were things that we were already doing, starting to do or moving toward.

Increasing alignment, enhancing professional development, being more strategic in our resource planning, implementing a financial model that’s sustainable and responsive to the challenges that we face, including challenges such as the ones that Jeffry described, and leveraging relationships as resources – looking at how we can partner in support of our core mission, both internally and externally and position NIU as a valuable asset and a point of strengths.

I said these are going to be the foundation for multi-year planning, and I think that’s a term that we throw around a lot; but I wanted to just take a minute with you today and say what I mean when I say multi-year planning. When I say multi-year planning, I’m talking about implementing a forward-thinking process that’s true to who we are and informed by our changing environment, a planning process that’s focused first on what NIU must look like in 2025 if we’re going to be able to advance our vision, deliver on our mission and stay true to our values, a process where we create and commit to a multi-year roadmap for getting there. So, it’s not about a particular line in the budget. It’s not about a particular unit’s aspiration. It’s about how does NIU stay relevant. How do we stay true to our mission, visual and values? How are we socially responsible and fiscally sustainable? And what do we want to look like in the future? And then how do we get there from where we are now? Hopefully, that makes sense to everybody.

To do multi-year planning, to be future-focused, to create a journey, change is part of the process. And so, I think it was really important that we sat down as leadership and had very honest discussions about what facilitates and inhibits change in our culture on this campus. The honest conversations that we had as deans and members of the senior roundtable are shown on this slide and the next. I think you can see from this slide that there is an appetite for doing things differently to better serve our students and live our mission, vision and values. And we know that we can change, because we have changed. But that doesn’t mean change is easy. There are aspects of our culture that make change hard here.

And in the summer retreats and the discussion that followed, we focused a lot of our attention on what could be done to overcome our barriers and reluctance to innovate. And our faculty colleagues, Mahesh Subramony and Bart Sharp, summarized this work and created innovation strategies, pillars and principles. Some of the things on this slide are more easily addressable than others. Things like aligning the budget cycle and the needs of departments and when they need access to information, those are things that may be challenging to do, but there is a path there. Things that are more cultural are going to harder to change, but more important to change.

And so I told you I’m not going to show you the full pillars and principles, but I do want to show you the strategies that were suggested for promoting a positive narrative around imagination and possibilities and enabling innovation. And it was also noted during the retreats by the vice presidents and deans that it was important for us as leaders to be accountable and to hold others accountable for acting in accordance with the NIU mission, vision and values. And of those values, most importantly – or very importantly – are unwavering commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion.
The leadership team and I were very mindful of the guidance that we received when we were developing the university goals. And so, as I start to talk to you about the university goals, I think you’ll see the strategies that are on this slide are things that we try to think very hard about embedding in the goals. Strengthening leadership capability across the university; empowering cross-functional teams to solve complex problems and pursue opportunities; celebrate our successes more frequently and more passionately; incentivize interdisciplinary collaboration across colleges and units; increase access to information, provide more decision support; and enhance professional development opportunities for all employees.

Those of you who have followed the university goals over time know that they’re organized around the six core themes that align with our strategic action planning framework, and those are shown on this slide. There are two or three goals under each theme. And last week in Faculty Senate, I previewed the goals most relevant to faculty interest and responsibilities under themes 2, 3, 4 and 5: student recruitment success and experience; academic excellence and curriculum innovation; diversity, equity and inclusion; research, scholarship, artistry and engagement.

Today I really want to focus on the goals under theme 1, and I want to introduce formally to this group the concept of shared leadership, because empowerment and shared responsibility are strengthened by shared leadership. Shared leadership is a model that’s been studied by those who study leadership, those in organizational psych, organizational culture; and it’s been found that shared leadership helps organizations to be more adept at learning, innovating, performing and responding effectively to external threats.

Shared leadership is an encompassing framework that fosters co-ownership of goals, adoption of processes that emphasize adaptability, interdependence and collaboration. And when I thought about everything that I heard from the folks we spoke to over the summer in constructing the SWOT analysis and the imperatives for change; when I thought about what was shared in frank conversations with the deans and the vice presidents; when I thought about what was in the transcripts of the conversations, it really seemed to me that shared leadership needed to be a key element of our upcoming academic year, university goals and beyond across all six of the themes.

And so, there is a multi-year commitment in this year’s goals embedded initially under shared responsibility and empowerment, to use more shared leadership models on our campus, to invest in professional development, team-based work and better access to information. Let me say a little more about that. Now, I know some of you are sitting out there, and you’re going, well, we have shared leadership, because we’re sitting in University Council, and University Council is shared governance, and aren’t shared governance and shared leadership the same. And they’re not the same. They’re complementary. They share some common elements, but they are different in some ways.

So, both shared leadership and shared governance, as I’ve shown on this slide, are based on principles of distributed decision making and collective input. And that’s something that’s very familiar in a university setting. Comparing shared leadership and shared governance in terms of how authority and decision making is delegated, in shared governance the delegation is based on roles. The Faculty Senate and the faculty own the curriculum because of their roles as faculty members. Shared leadership teams are more flexible in the way they identify expertise and draw on different perspectives. In shared governance, we have fixed structures. We have governing documents that tell us who is in Faculty Senate, who is on University Council. Shared leadership teams are more adaptable structures. They can be brought up as task forces and let go. They can be
sat as councils or commissions that are advisory but are cross-functional. We have both shared leadership groups and shared governance groups at NIU and, historically, they’ve worked very well here together.

If you want, a couple of examples of shared leadership groups that have had very high impact on our campus, I would think in 2015 we put together a task force on diversity, equity and inclusion that engaged almost 100 people from across the university. It was co-led by Sean Frazier and Laura Vazquez. Again, they were given those roles, because of their expertise and the things that they were passionate about, not because of where they sat in the organizational chart. That large group put together a very thorough report that then informed our decision to hire a chief diversity officer and then a three-year diversity, equity and inclusion plan that followed. This past year, coming out in July, was the report from the remote working task force, which again, was a cross-functional group, engaged 55 people, had varied expertise not based on position, but really based on knowledge and perspective. And that one is moving forward. So, I hope that gives you a little bit of a difference of shared leadership and shared governance.

The research shows that there are some characteristics that all shared leadership teams have. They’re flexible configurations. They can be related to projects or shared goals. They engage multiple perspectives and expertise, engaging in problem solving, innovation and change. The leadership is based on that expertise, rather than on positions so that, even within a team, leaders and followers can be interchangeable. The concept of shared leadership is based on a belief that leadership is a process and not an individual. In that context, it can be supported by professional development and access to information and encouraging team-based work.

And so, the shared leadership models that have been used on university campuses have been found to be very effective in managing complexities that are related to social and cultural differences and being drivers for change. Now, the success of shared leadership group does depend on support from decision makers with authority, as well as the broader community. So, shared leadership teams need to be charged, and their authority needs to be accepted by the people who will be impacted by their recommendations. And that can be done through empowerment, through information sharing and, again, through professional development. So, I think you’re starting to hear a theme here about shared leadership.

If you look at what is actually in goal 1A, the first goal in the university goals under empowerment and shared responsibility, the over-arching goal is to build capacity for shared leadership across the university. We want to do that to inspire innovation, as I’ve already told you, and also to foster a less risk averse culture, to make people feel that they have the agency to make suggestions and suggestions that say, let’s not do things the way we’ve always done them. To show how we will do this, we will empower cross-functional teams to address complex institutional problems and pursue opportunities. And I believe their shared leadership structures embedded under each one of the university goals will provide the shared leadership teams with professional development, will leverage partnerships to support team-based work so the teams feel that they have support, will increase their access to information – this can be data sharing and decision support, but it can also be just providing space and forums for brainstorming and sharing successes and failures. And then, again, recognizing and celebrating the success we’ve already achieved through shared leadership.

Along with recognizing and celebrating success, there’s also the goal of continuing progress. Goal 1B for the university goals this year under empowerment and shared responsibility are really continuing to build on the work of two great shared leadership efforts. The one that I referred to a
few minutes ago about the remote working task force. That report is posted on the president’s website. And Sarah Garner, who oversees the Policy Library and Bill Hodson from HR are already meeting to figure out what the next steps are in terms of deactivating arcane policies, putting in new frameworks and building the structures that will support our employees if they feel that they need support in asking questions about what works for them and for their units.

The other big shared leadership initiative of the past year was that focused on administrative efficiency project prioritization. I think that was a tremendous effort. It was very inclusive across campus. There were lots of ideas put forward, but there was also a recognition that we couldn’t do every one of them, that they had to be sequenced, that they had to be prioritized, there had to be some responsibility assigned; and, again, that’s moving forward. So, that’s the automation and digitization initiatives to help our processes become smoother.

I think I’m going to end there and ask for comments and questions. You’ll all get to see the full draft of the university goals fairly soon, but I really thought in our major shared governance group, I wanted to kind of make the distinction about shared leadership and answer the questions that you might have about the difference between shared leadership and shared governance, or anything else about the work that led up to the university goals. So, I’ll stop there and ask if I have time for a couple questions. Okay.

D. Douglass: Thank you so much. I saw this presentation last week at Faculty Senate. I appreciate seeing it again. It seems a little shorter this time.

L. Freeman: I went through more goals at Faculty Senate.

D. Douglass: I like the focus on this one, especially given the atmosphere of this meeting today. My questions is about – I love the emphasis on shared leadership and governance in tandem. Could you give us an example or a hypothetical scenario of how a shared leadership task force might be formed, what that might look like, who it starts with and who they would talk to. I’m just curious about the on-the-ground impact of that.

L. Freeman: I think we have some sitting examples of shared leadership task forces, and we have some acute come-around-a-problem and then expand examples on our campus. I’m looking out at the audience, attendees here, and I see Felicia Bohanon, and I see some others who sit on our presidential commissions. The presidential commissions are essentially shared leadership groups, because they’re cross-functional; the people are there because of their interest and their expertise, rather than their positions; and they’re tackling complex problems and offering recommendations. If you look at the work, for example, of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, there have been a couple of really good examples where that commission said, I think we have an issue on our campus with the way our tenure and promotion policies serve [inaudible]. I think we have parental leave issues on our campus. They were concerned with COVID impacts. There have been a number of issues that they’ve brought forward. They’ve done some research. They’ve made a proposal to administration. And their proposal has had to go through shared governance to become policy on this campus. But shared governance was grateful for the way those voices were raised, the recommendations and research that was done. And the administration was grateful for everyone coming together to elevate a problem, along with a solution, and think about what that would look like. So, the presidential commissions are a good example.
I know the Presidential Commission on Race and Ethnicity is really interested in using data to inform innovative ways to diversity our faculty and staff. And I think that’s another shared leadership group that’s going to continue to work on its own. But as I said at Faculty Senate, Dr. Edghill-Walden is working on a Community of Practice for everyone on our campus who cares deeply about diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging and anti-racism. And that Community of Practice will be another shared leadership group that can inform the actions of administration or hand things off to shared governance. But also shared governance will be in that shared leadership group through the Faculty Senate Social Justice Committee. So, again, leaders come and they change their positions based on the shared leadership structure.

The remote working task force that I talked about, it had 14 members. Dean Fred Barnhart and Professor Jessica Reyman were the two leaders over the entire effort. But there were six groups under them that looked at policy, student experience, faculty experience, benchmarking, and I’m blanking on whatever the sixth one was. And those efforts were co-chaired by people for their expertise. So, Miriah [Ranken] from Human Resource Services and Sarah Garner were over the policy group. They both had expertise, but you would never look at our organizational chart and say, like, oh, Sarah and Miriah, you’re the ones who would lead this. But that’s who was put in charge. Each of those six groups chose people for expertise. Although the whole thing was shared leadership, each of the subcommittees was also a mini shared leadership structure. But then they went out and engaged people all over campus, so we ultimately had 55 people contribute to that report. The recommendations that came out of from that report were amazing. The rapidity with which that quality product was provided to the university was very, very impressive. But now what’s coming out of that report is going to have to go into administrative process and, ultimately, some of it may have to come to shared governance to execute on what goes on.

I think that we have other opportunities on campus to look at shared leadership groups. I don’t want to steal the thunder of my vice presidents, but I’ve been talking to each one of them about where shared leadership would fit in their units. And I think we’re going to see some very positive changes coming to units that really impact people on this campus.

Hearing no additional questions, we come to my favorite part of the meeting where I hand the gavel over to the Faculty Senate president. Thank you for your attention, I appreciate it.

P. Chomentowski: Thank you, President Freeman.

VIII. CONSENT AGENDA

P. Chomentowski: We’ll move on to Consent Agenda, number VIII. And we have no new consent agenda for this meeting.
IX.  UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A.  Proposed amendment to NIU Bylaws
    Creation of new Article 12, Supportive Professional Staff Personnel Advisor and
    Operating Staff Personnel Advisor – Pages 6-8
    SECOND READING/VOTE
Holly Nicholson, Operating Staff Council President

P. Chomentowski: So, we will move on to Unfinished Business for today’s meeting, section IX.
We have a proposed amendment to NIU Bylaws, creation of new Article 12, Supportive
Professional Staff Personnel Advisor and Operating Staff Personnel Advisor. You can find the
information on it on pages 6 through 8 in your University Council packet. This is a second reading,
so can I have a motion and a second to approve the proposed amendment for today.

D. Collins: So moved.

D. Douglass: Second.

P. Chomentowski: Holly Nicholson, who is the Operating Staff Council president, will speak on
behalf of this proposed amendment. Holly.

H. Nicholson: Thank you. For anybody who wasn’t part of University Council last year, I’ll just
explain what this is. We had the first reading in May. For a long time, we’ve had a faculty and SPS
personnel advisor. The operating staff never had the opportunity to have a position like that. And so,
in 2016, we created a pilot position and elected John Hulseberg as our first OS personnel advisor.
And then the following year, SPS followed suit. They recognized that many of their needs were
different and unique from faculty. And they have also been piloting a program. Both programs have
been extremely successful, helping hundreds of employees across campus and having hundreds
more [inaudible] with leadership. So, this article is intended now to officially recognize the two
positions. Currently, we only have the faculty/SPS advisor still in the bylaws. Concurrently, there is
a revised faculty advisor bylaw going forward through Faculty Senate. But here today, we’ll discuss
the SPS and operating staff personnel advisor. Does anybody have any questions, or would you like
me to go through any of the specifics here in the bylaw? I’d be happy to answer any questions.
Okay, we seem pretty happy. I’d love to answer them now before the vote.

P. Chomentowski: I believe it is time to vote on this proposed amendment, so Pat, can you take the
voting members through this process, please.

P. Erickson: Sure. First, let’s make sure everybody knows if they are a voting member. And I hope
you can see that up there. If you have a question on whether or not you’re a voting member, just
raise your hand and ask me now. If you are a voting member, make sure you have a clicker. They’re
up at the front table there. For those who are new today and also as a refresher, we remember that
there is no need to turn the clickers on or off. They activate automatically. There’s also no need to
erase any previous votes. They automatically erase votes when you enter a new one. Pretty soon I’ll
open the software to vote. And at that time, you’ll press 1 for yes if you agree with the motion to
approve the proposal; 2 is no; 3 is abstain. As long as I have the poll open, you can change your
mind. Just click another number, and your old vote will go away, and the new one will replace it.
And so now, let’s just open that. And so you can vote now – 1 is yes, 2 is no, 3 is abstain.
We have 24 voted so far. Is anybody having trouble with their clicker or does anybody want a little more time? Okay, then let’s see the results of that. And that clearly passes.

Yes – 22  
No – 0  
Abstain – 2

**H. Nicholson:** Thank you, everybody. This is monumental for staff, thank you.

**X. NEW BUSINESS**

**P. Chomentowski:** Okay, we’ll move on to New Business, item X. And this is pretty simple. We have no new business for today’s University Council meeting.

**XI. REPORTS FROM COUNCILS, BOARDS AND STANDING COMMITTEES**

A. Faculty Advisory Council to the IBHE – Linda Saborío – report

**P. Chomentowski:** So, we will just move on to Reports from Councils, Boards and Standing Committees. The Faculty Advisory Council to the Illinois Board of Higher Education, Linda?

**L. Freeman:** Does that mean that we’re going to have a lot of new business at the next meeting.

**P. Chomentowski:** Maybe, yes.

**L. Saborío:** Good afternoon. Today I’m reporting on our FAC meeting, which was held on September 17. We have a new executive committee, and the transition meeting was held on June 25. The outgoing officers shared their roles and responsibilities with the incoming officers, which I’m one of them, I’m the vice chair now of the FAC. The first executive meeting was held September 3, and it included our legislative liaison and three other caucus chairs. We decided that meetings are going to be held virtually through November. But there may be a possibility for meeting in person for later in the semester. We really like to meet in person. We miss gathering and chatting with each other, as you all know. But this has yet to be determined. We were scheduled to meet this month down in Springfield, and they told us no thank you, we’re not ready for you yet. So, we’ll keep trying.

We had Jennifer Delaney, who is the IBHE board member and the public university faculty rep reported. And she highlighted from the August IBHE meeting new spending and funds available to higher education. Some of this is coming from appropriations from the General Assembly. One of the areas they’re not using the federal stimulus money, the governor has been shifting funds to the IBHE. And she said there is extra money for early childhood work, which would be nice, right? And based on calculations since the August meeting, $97.3 million in new dollars has been put toward post-secondary education. I was not aware of this, I don’t know.

**L. Freeman:** We might want Dean Elish-Piper to brief us on the consortium when you’re done, Linda, because she’s been really at the forefront of these efforts and can clarify that.
L. Saborío: It sounds like there’s a lot of really good work happening there, so that would be nice. The IBHE is going through the strategic plan checklist to see what can be accomplished long-term versus short-term, as I mentioned in Faculty Senate. Another example, there was early childhood work and also the common app that all universities are now using. She recommended that we watch a presentation from the president of Chicago State regarding her work in the wake of George Floyd and post-secondary access for African American students in the state, and I haven’t had a chance to see that yet, but I would like to look at it.

L. Freeman: NIU had three people on that task force.

L. Saborío: Another example of task force, yes. The General Assembly in the spring tasked the community to think about performance funding for higher education. This is the first time we were hearing this too. This committee is scheduled to start in October and will run through 2023. It’s a long-term process, as we all know, but it can potentially reshape how our institutions are funded. And I know they’ve always had a performance funding

L. Freeman: Our performance funding to date has been a very small piece. I’m lucky enough to be our institutional representative.

L. Saborío: It does state on the committee that there will be two individuals representing faculty on there, is that correct?

L. Freeman: That’s correct.

L. Saborío: As I mentioned at Faculty Senate too, we have six working groups. There is student/faculty mental health is [inaudible] focus away from legislation and expanding it to faculty, students and staff, as opposed to just students. They started just looking at just students. As I said, it would be interesting to look at how the three main types of campuses represented within the FAC – they’ve got the two-year, the public and the private/independent – approach mental health in these different settings. And this could help identify good practices. That’s the first one.

The second working group is the dual credit/online learning and alternative credentialing. Again, looking at the effects of free community college and dual credit programs. And they raised questions about what is happening in the high schools that creates a disconnect in skill level when students enter college from high school, even after taking dual credit courses. So, still a lot of work in that area.

Performance-based funding, we actually have a working group on performance-based funding. They discussed the S.B.0815 and the formation of the commission on equitable public funding, university funding act. Looks like there are several positions that have not been filled within that commission, and positions that should, we, hopefully, or hopefully will advocate for faculty.

The fourth group is institutional closures, and they discussed whether it is institutions that might be vulnerable right now, or whether it’s programs within institutions that might be vulnerable. And what are the things that should be going on as the question of closures is raised, and how do we talk to faculty, students and staff to ensure engagement. There are a lot more institutional closures than I think many of us realize.
Five was equity, racial justice and diversity. And then six is the student debt and affordability. I happened to join that group, decided to join that group this year. And we’re going to be looking at several different talking points, such as communication regarding what is available to students to cut down on student debt, what opportunities do they have and how is it being communicated, what are the current strategies that are being used within Illinois, and what fundings are available to students at different levels. There’s so much to unpack there. We just got started. I think we’re going to be looking at two-year institution waivers and scholarships in other states to see what works.

The next meeting will be held October 15 via zoom. And that concludes my report. Does anybody have any questions? A lot to unpack there. I think it’s going to be a busy year. Do you all feel that way? Yeah? A bit overwhelmed right now, I know. Thank you very much.

P. Chomentowski: Thank you, Linda. Laurie, do you want to provide a brief update?

L. Elish-Piper: The state of Illinois has identified $200 million that they’re going to invest in the up-skilling of early childhood employees who are considered members of the incumbent workforce; so people who work in childcare centers or in community-based programs, Head Start, Preschool For All, any sort of setting, because what’s really happened is we have a lot of folks out there who don’t have the credential that they need in order to either step into a higher level position or in order to be professionalized in terms of the work that they do, working with young children.

This consortium that’s been formed requires membership from all of the public universities that have early childhood programs and all of the community colleges that have early childhood programs. And so, we are in, it seems like, perpetual planning mode. But we are in planning mode right now to be able to launch. The exciting thing about this is that the funds will basically be focused on providing full cost of attendance scholarships for individuals who complete the associate’s degree or the bachelor’s degree. That includes their tuition, their fees, their books, their licensure exams, and even some cost-of-living expenses will be covered as well.

And so, ISAC, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, will be managing the funds and the scholarships. That application will go live in November. The goal is for bachelor’s degree to produce by 2024 about 1300 and some change folks who either earned a bachelor’s degree or are persisting toward earning the bachelor’s degree, knowing that everyone may not finish by 2024 when the funding runs out. But the idea is that they’re showing that they’re moving toward that. And for the associate’s degree, it’s a bit over 5,800. So, a pretty significant number of individuals.

An exciting piece for NIU is that we are currently in the process, both in the College of Education and the College of Health and Human Sciences, looking at our currently enrolled students who are pursuing an early childhood degree and identifying which of them are members of the incumbent workforce, because they will be eligible for the scholarship. And here’s the real exciting piece, that it will be retroactive to the fall if they were involved in the fall. So, imagine that, students who think that they have to pay a bill are told you don’t have to pay the bill. And then they thought that they had debt that they needed to deal with will find out that that’s covered.
And so that will be part of it, but we’re also being charged with working with employers across the region to identify people who work in their spaces, who will be eligible, and then working to enroll those students in our programs. Some of the students will complete the program in the College of Ed and will lead to professional education licensure. And others will complete the program that’s more focused on child and family development in the College of Health and Human Sciences.

It’s an exciting opportunity. It’s a bit challenging, because state agencies work very slowly. We’re waiting for a lot of enabling conditions at the state level to happen. So, we’re waiting for the official MOAs to sign off on. We’re waiting for the infrastructure funds coming in to allow us to do some of the hiring that we’ll need to do in order to recruit and teach and support and advise these individuals. And then we’re also waiting for the statewide prior learning assessment program that will be used to give these adults, who have been working in early childhood spaces credit for their prior learning experience. Until that becomes officially available, we’ll use our locally developed strategies to be able to get that going.

We’re excited about it. I think it’s a great opportunity. The other piece that I hope comes out of this is looking at the rate of pay for individuals who work in early childhood spaces. Those who work in public schools earn the same as basically other teachers. And that I would argue, generally speaking, is relatively considered to be a living wage. But a lot of folks who work in childcare centers, work in Head Start, work in community-based programs, their rate of pay is oftentimes so low that it’s very difficult to retain them, and it’s very difficult for them to be able to support themselves and their families. One of the things that the consortium is hoping will happen is a continued push to try and find ways to invest in increasing those wages, knowing that having high-quality early childhood education is essential for everything do, and also that those early years are so vital for children in terms of their development and their future trajectory.

That in a nutshell is what’s going on in the consortium. Questions?

L. Saborío: [inaudible] public institutions only or for private.

L. Elish-Piper: Private institutions will be allowed to participate in the consortium. And right now the Illinois Board of Higher Education is meeting with the different private institutions that are interested. They will only be able to charge tuition and fees equal to the tuition and fees at the most expense public university in Illinois. And so, at this point, we don’t know which ones will officially be joining, but there are several that have expressed interest and would be part of that goal number. They would contribute to meeting that goal should they be approved for membership.

L. Saborío: [inaudible]

L. Elish-Piper: Yes, Marie Donovan. She’s very involved; I saw her yesterday. Thanks.

L. Freeman: And just before we end Linda’s report, I just wanted to clarify what’s going on with the funding formula commission a little bit. In Illinois, there’s a historic formula for funding universities, and nobody really understands what the basis for it is. If it was ever known, it’s been lost a long time ago. And there’s a very small performance component, and nobody’s happy with the performance component either, because you can do better every year and still get worse in the performance funding formula. And it’s very non-transparent. We have basically an irrational, historic formula for most of our funding and a dysfunctional performance funding.
So, everybody is enthusiastic about doing something different. The presidents and chancellors were very strong in advocating during the IBHE strategic planning process that everyone has to be held harmless, because having a conversation where there are going to be winners and losers is not going to be effective to move the needle forward. And so that’s why we’re having this commission. It has a lot of representation from the different universities. The schools of thought that will be advocated for with different strengths by different universities – one extreme position would be it’s 100 percent based on attendance. Another extreme position would be it’s 100 percent based on equity and the percentage of underserved students that you serve. Another extreme position is that the mission of the university doesn’t matter, that there should be no consideration for research universities. The flip side of that would be that there should be a lot of consideration for mission.

So, I think those are the three threads that are going to be active in the discussion. And I think NIU is a very complex and interesting university, so we’re going to have strong opinions in all of those. I’ll keep the group posted as the commission meets. The commission, who has a bunch of presidents on it, won’t be doing the math work. There will be working groups that spring off of this in an iterative process. But I promise to keep University Council up to date.

P. Chomentowski: Thank you very much.

B. University Advisory Committee to the Board of Trustees – report
Felicia Bohanon, Holly Nicholson, Peter Chomentowski
Katy Jaekel, Karen Whedbee, Greg Beyer

P. Chomentowski: We’ll move on to the University Advisory Committee to the Board of Trustees. The last Board of Trustees meeting was held Thursday, Sept. 23, which was a full meeting. There were a few action items that the board voting on under the university recommendations forwarded by the board committees. They were what Holly actually spoke about at the last meeting, which was the wireless expansion, network expansion upgrade, replacing the telephone systems and upgrade, and also building access control upgrades. And these were voted on and passed by the board.

One information item that I’d like to bring up is that under University Reports Forwarded by the Board Committees, that I’d like to share about the 2020, 2021 faculty emeritus recognition. The 2020 and 2021 faculty emeritus recognition is a long-standing tradition of granting emeritus to faculty who retire in good standing. Fifteen faculty members were honored, and I wanted to share that Kendall Thu was honored for 2021. Kendall is doing well. I’ve been talking with him. He’s enjoying retirement. He does answer my emails often so it’s been nice conversing with him.

Do any of the other members of the UAC-BOT have anything they would like to share from the meeting? No one?

C. Rules, Governance and Elections Committee – no report

P. Chomentowski: We’ll move to the Rules, Governance and Elections Committee. We have no report for that group.
D. Student Government Association – report
Devlin Collins, President
Dallas Douglass, Speaker of the Senate

P. Chomentskowski: For D, Student Government Association, Devlin Collins and Dallas Douglass have a report for us today. Gentlemen?

D. Collins: Good afternoon, everyone. Student Government is working on a few big initiatives right now. The main initiative that we want you to know about this week is, after conversations with Dr. Lisa Freeman and also Anna Quider, the university’s state relations officer, we are joining to assist NIU with gaining support on this double the Pell Grant initiative and push through with other student governments to get more support on the reconciliation bill that’s in the senate right now.

So, those of you who are unaware of reconciliation, there is a piece within there that applies specifically to Pell Grants offered to NIU students. Right now, the current maximum that a student can receive on a Pell Grant is $6,495. This initiative essentially doubles that amount, without changing eligibility for the Pell Grant, to $13,000 per student that they will be eligible for. We’re really looking to gain more support with other student governments in several states where there are some Democratic holdouts for this bill. But the main purpose is so we can get more student to show support in this and get more politically active so that we can get more of our lawmakers and representatives to act about these type of things.

Dr. Freeman was so kind to inform us about this, and we really believe that this is an initiative that should push for the wellbeing of all students, not just at NIU, but those on the national level, as well.

D. Douglass: That’s the update side of things. I would say maybe on your side, what we might ask of this body and of other governing councils at the university is to be aware that this initiative is happening. The website that we’re using is doublepell.org. I’d recommend checking it out. There is a page linked on there where you can fill out your information and it will email your representatives for you.

Our initiative, in coordination with other student governments, many in California, we’re hoping to get West Virginia and Arizona on board, where those two Democratic senators are holding out, our goal is to get as many students as possible to bomb that page and essentially fill our representatives’ in boxes with the desire for students to push this initiative.

As I’m sure you’re all aware, the Biden administration is working on getting two years of community college paid for and free and accessible to students. However, the Double Pell Initiative would apply not just to community colleges, but also to four-year institutions. Currently, I believe the number was $24.5 million of Pell funding comes into NIU for students who are eligible. This would double that amount completely, which is incredible. That’s a lot of money coming in. And not only that, but from a student perspective, this is life changing. $13,000 is tuition; it’s essentially free college. And we know that the student body demographics are changing. We’re going to need initiatives like this to help support the student body coming in, especially post-pandemic. So, we’re looking to all of you for your support and guidance as we tackle this initiative.

D. Collins: Just on a final note, we’ve already begun reaching out to other student governments. California State has already reached out to us, so that was about 43 campuses that we’ve already
been in contact with regarding the initiative. Right now, we are looking to network with Illinois campuses specifically on a larger scale so that we can also do the exact same thing and combat on to the next state. Right now, we’re just on a state-by-state basis. The latest update that we have gotten from Anna Quider is that reconciliation, there is no number that they were looking for, it was about $3.5 trillion. But we need to move as soon as possible, because that number has already dropped down to $2.5 trillion instead to try and get those holdouts to sign on to the bill. So, we’ll be adding on to this as soon as possible this week, and we’ll be carrying on with this initiative until we see the bill passed.

So, that is the big update for SGA.

**P. Chomentowski:** Any questions? Thank you very much.

E. Operating Staff Council – Holly Nicholson, President – report

**P. Chomentowski:** We’ll move on to E, which is Operating Staff Council. And once again, Holly Nicholson will have a report.

**H. Nicholson:** Thank you. The departure of staff from campus that Jeffry mentioned in his talk is hitting our council and our constituents very hard. People who join OSC are leaders. They love NIU. They love working here. When they leave, or they feel defeated or demoralized, it really says something. We’ve lost four colleagues from our council in the last couple of months, three in the last couple of weeks alone, and many more from the operating staff as a whole. Those from the operating staff who we talked to typically say they don’t want to leave NIU, but they can’t afford to work here or they have no opportunity for job growth. And this is very sobering.

OSC leadership has had some important meetings during the last month. The first was with auditors from the Civil Service System. The auditor cleared up some common misconceptions that we, and others across campus, have about where their responsibility lies for some of the issues that staff face. For example, the system’s offices does not have any jurisdiction over salary ranges, tiers within classifications, merit increases or internal salary and classification equity. Those are things that we can make change, ourselves, within our HR system.

We also spoke to what Jeffry said about NIU salaries being at the low end of the ranges, and the auditor responded that DeKalb is in the middle of nowhere. So, basically, saying that we shouldn’t expect much of our salaries. Obviously, we have a lot of thoughts about that, and that being inaccurate for so many reasons.

Next, we met with the new SAVP for HR, Bill Hodson. And we came to that meeting in a spirit of partnership and collaboration. We were very solutions-focused at that point – enough talking, let’s fix it. We want people to work here, and we want them to stay here a long-term. Bill came to the meeting prepared to listen, and he graciously invited us to another meeting; I believe it’s next week. At that meeting, some potential solutions we want to bring forward include help with childcare costs on campus. We actually had a public comment in one of our OSC meetings. Somebody actually got very emotional. They had to leave NIU, because they couldn’t afford the childcare anymore; so, we’re really trying to work on fixing that. A process for a job description and add-pay adjustments where an employee’s departure leaves an area understaffed and overworked. And
reimagining HR in such a way that employees there are paid appropriately and valued, building morale in HR in such a way that the whole campus ultimately benefits. Those are just a few things that we’re working on and advocating for.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the great work that earned us accolades for shared governance; faculty experience; diversity, inclusion and belonging on the Great Colleges to Work For list. We have a strong shared governance system that we can be proud of, and it’s really great to be acknowledged for that. It is a joy to participate in our shared governance system, and I’m appreciative of the leadership that encourages and fosters shared governance in action and not just words, as in many other places. And also, I cannot overstate the importance of inclusion and belonging. And I’m proud and thankful everyday to be part of an institution that values it, lives out those values, infuses it in our mission, goals and planning.

However, I also believe we should and will push ourselves to excel in the other categories, as well. And those categories were compensation and benefits; faculty and staff wellbeing; job satisfaction and support; competence in senior leadership; and supervisor and department chair effectiveness. I know efforts are already underway in several of those categories. However, the amount of talented staff members that we are losing because of a lack of compensation, job support, supervisor effectiveness, really brings home the work that we have to do. And it needs to be done quickly. Having left these issues to lie for so long and being embattled in constant crises, the situation is not sustainable and hasn’t been for a long time. So, let’s take care of it now while we’re developing our multi-year budgeting processes and reimagining HR. Thank you.

**P. Chomentowski:** Thank you, Holly. Any questions?

F. Supportive Professional Staff Council – Felicia Bohanon, President – report

**P. Chomentowski:** We’ll move on to Item F, which is Supportive Professional Staff Council. And, Felicia, the microphone is yours.

**F. Bohanon:** I know that a lot of the concerns that Operating Staff Council are dealing with facing, just contemplating, those are the same issues that Supportive Professional Staff Council is working on also. I know, particularly, when we talk about employee loss, just individuals not being able to continue work for NIU due to salary concerns and the limited amount of compensation. And so that’s one of the things that, particularly in terms of Supportive Professional Staff Council, that we’ll have the workplace climate survey that is going out to all of our members. Based on that, we will be producing a report before the end of the semester, and bringing our recommendations to the university. We also are working on replacement of our SPS personnel advisor. Based on the changes that have taken place, we had Jeannie Meyers, who retired. We are anticipating that she will be replaced within the next 30 days. Those are the major things that we’re working on at this time. Thank you.

**XII. INFORMATION ITEMS**

A. Policy Library – Comment on Proposed Policies (right-hand column on web page)
B. Minutes, Academic Planning Council
C. Minutes, Athletic Board
D. Minutes, Baccalaureate Council
E. Minutes, Board of Trustees

19
P. Chomentowski: We’ll move down to information items. One information item, I’d like to point out is letter R, which is the dates for the next University Council meeting. Our next University Council meeting will be held on November 3, 2021, in this room, in Altgeld Hall, Room 315. Please make a note of that. And then we’ll have another one on December 4. So, we have two left for this fall semester.

Does anyone have any last comments or discussion?

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

P. Chomentowski: We’ll move to adjournment. Can I have someone make a motion to adjourn the University Council meeting for today, and a second, please.

H. Nicholson: So moved.

D. Collins: Second.

P. Chomentowski: All those in favor of adjourning today’s meeting, please say aye.

Members: Aye.

P. Chomentowski: All those opposed, please say no. Any abstentions? All right, meeting is adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 4:13 p.m.