

NC STATE UNIVERSITY
Fall 2023 General Faculty Meeting
October 17, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order and Announcements - Herle McGowan, Chair of the Faculty

Chair Herle McGowan opened the meeting, highlighting current faculty opportunities for input on UNC system policy changes and the NC State strategic plan's next implementation phase. McGowan emphasized the significance of faculty input in shaping policies and strategic planning efforts, encouraging active participation in upcoming forums and surveys.

2. Approval of the Minutes, February 21, 2023 General Faculty Meeting -Chris DePerno, Associate Chair of the Faculty

The minutes from the February 21, 2023, meeting were approved without changes.

3. Chair's Remarks - Herle McGowan, Chair of the Faculty

Herle McGowan's remarks focused on faculty wellbeing, sharing survey results indicating concerns about increasing workloads and a breakdown in community and communication.

Chair McGowan highlighted concerns over faculty workload and communication, stressing the importance of community building and engagement to address these issues. The remarks set the tone for a meeting focused on actionable solutions to improve faculty wellbeing and academic environment.

Today we focus on faculty wellbeing. Throughout last year and into this one, I've heard concerns from faculty about mental health and wellbeing, which is what inspired today's topic. To prepare, I sent a survey to all faculty asking them to report practices that support their wellbeing as well as areas where they wish they had additional support. In reviewing responses about the latter, there was a strong sense that faculty are facing increasing workloads and feel that communication and community have broken down.

Now, as a statistician, I feel obliged to point out that these survey responses may not represent the entire faculty community. But I also know you would not be here today if you did not care about this topic,

so I would like to learn from the collective wisdom and varied experiences and perspectives in this room.

Today's meeting is designed to elevate the faculty voice, soliciting feedback and concerns about our wellbeing as well as discussing potential solutions. I will take the information and ideas discussed today and, with the help of the Faculty Senate's Executive Committee, turn it into an action plan for the senate—what are the ideas and requests that warrant further consideration? What recommendations can we develop and send to the Provost? Now, I cannot promise that everything you discuss will be implemented, but I can promise a process of consideration that uses integrity and transparent communication. This process will take time, but I will provide updates via future faculty senate meetings.

The success of this process depends on participants providing constructive feedback and being willing to listen to and learn from each other. Success also depends on having senior administrators who care about the faculty perspective and will genuinely consider any recommendations that come from the Faculty Senate. I've been fortunate in my time as Chair to see the Chancellor and the Provost in many different settings, including meeting one-on-one. From this experience I have gained a much better idea of just how many demands and constraints they face on a daily basis. They have to balance the needs of many different stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and the Board of Trustees. Even with that list, I'm sure I'm forgetting some. They have to evaluate costs and benefits to the entire university community, not just one group. And sometimes that means we will not like or agree with all of their decisions.

That is the reality of any institution that is this large and complex. As we seek improvement in university resources, procedures, and communication, I ask you all to keep that in mind. There is no "us vs. them." We can express legitimate frustration and seek necessary improvement without placing blame. We can disagree and still look for a path forward together. I hope today will be both cathartic and productive. I hope each of you will leave this meeting with 1-2 concrete resources or practices that you will use to improve your wellbeing. I also hope you leave today with an increased sense that shared governance is still working at NC State, though I acknowledge it will take more than one meeting to demonstrate that.

4. Chancellor's Remarks and Q&A - Randy Woodson, Chancellor

Chancellor Randy Woodson provided an update on the budget, highlighting that raises are imminent for NC State employees, with a 4% across-the-board increase retroactive to July 1, 2023, and will be distributed by October 31st for monthly employees, with bi-weekly employees seeing the increase in their October 27th paycheck.

The budget also includes significant investments in faculty expansion; \$10 million recurring commitment for the expansion of the College of Engineering and a \$5.5 million recurring commitment to the College of Veterinary Medicine, reflecting an enrollment increase. The faculty and salary increase represents a \$25 million recurring commitments to the university, with additional costs like State retirement and health plan adjustments amounting to \$4.5 million.

Chancellor Woodson also shared details of various other budget allocations, including a \$1 million recurring commitment to the Small Business and Technology Development Center, \$400,000 for the Clean Energy Technology Center, and \$6 million for the College of Education to support workforce training for adults with intellectual disabilities. A \$2 million non-recurring commitment was also made to support the FFA program, along with funding for the Christmas tree genetics program.

Woodson concluded his budget overview by noting a 9.3% year-over-year increase in the budget, attributing much of this to raises and commitments for program expansions. He highlighted NC State's commitment to becoming a Jed campus, an initiative aimed at enhancing mental health support for students, faculty, and staff through the adoption of best practices recommended by the Jed Foundation, a national organization dedicated to mental health and suicide prevention.

5. Provost's Remarks and Q&A - Warwick Arden, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Provost Warwick Arden provided updates on the University strategic plan highlighting that the current plan spans from 2021 to 2030, divided into three-year implementation phases. He noted that the university is entering the final year of the first phase and will soon develop the next three-year plan, inviting input by November 3, 2023 at go.ncsu.edu/strategic-plan-feedback.

Arden detailed salary increases of 4% this year and 3% next year, and the recurring funding boosts for various educational programs, underscoring the growth of the student community. He also highlighted significant non-recurring funds allocated for new construction and renovation projects, including \$200 million for a new engineering building, \$70 million for a veterinary building, and \$140 million for the renovation of Dabney; \$41.5 million for the renovation of Mann, and other substantial funds for buildings and renovations.

Finally, Arden mentioned upcoming comprehensive five-year reviews for two senior positions. The reviews for Senior Vice Provost and Director of Libraries, Greg Raschke on November 1, 2023, and for the Dean of the Poole College of Management, Dr. Frank Buckless on November 9, 2023.

6. Faculty Wellbeing

Kelly Vance, Wellness, Childcare & Perks Coordinator, University Human Resources
Alexis Steptoe, Assistant Director of Wellness, University Wellness and Recreation
Breakout and Open Discussion, All Faculty

Kelly Vance and Alexis Steptoe presented resources and initiatives aimed at supporting faculty wellbeing, including wellness programs, childcare options, and perks available to faculty members.

Among the highlighted programs was the Lighten Your Pack Program, a comprehensive initiative designed to offer a broad spectrum of resources targeting mental health challenges. This program was praised for its innovative approach in providing accessible tools to foster a supportive campus environment. Additionally, the presentation acknowledged the partnership with Headway through Blue Cross Blue Shield, which has made mental health care more affordable for faculty and staff by reducing counseling session costs. This effort was recognized for its significant impact on making quality mental health services accessible to a wider audience.

The presentation also delved into the importance of resilience training, emphasizing how intentional changes in thoughts and behaviors can greatly enhance individuals' ability to cope with adversity and stress. The Wolfpack Wellness Badge Program was discussed, highlighting its success in encouraging faculty to explore and engage with six dimensions of wellness. This initiative not only promotes wellness but also offers recognition to those committed to incorporating these practices into their lives.

Ms. Vance ended her portion of the presentation by touching on the cultural and creative aspects of wellness through NC State Live and the Craft Center and My Intent Project. Celebrating over 51 years, NC State Live was acknowledged for its contribution to social wellness by presenting professional performing arts. The Craft Center and My Intent Project were noted for their role in personal development, offering opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in creative projects that foster reflection and intent setting.

Alexis Steptoe's presentation emphasized the importance of promoting well-being within the NC State community, focusing on practical strategies for personal and communal health. Steptoe, with a background in health education, health promotion, and public health, aims to make complex health information accessible and actionable for individuals and communities.

She discussed the importance of a shared wellness language at NC State, introduced around 2015, which predates her start date in 2017. She highlighted how, despite individual differences in backgrounds, values, and approaches to well-being, having a common understanding of wellness helps unify the campus community. This common language is crucial for fostering a sense of shared values and goals, particularly in a large campus environment. Alexis also introduced the wellness strategy developed during the same period, aiming to build a thriving community that includes students, faculty, and staff. This strategy focuses on people, places, culture, and various elements critical to advancing wellness, such as policy and safety.

Ms. Steptoe elaborated on the concept of self-care, emphasizing its importance as care provided for you, by you. She stressed the significance of identifying personal needs and taking steps to meet them, engaging in nurturing activities, managing stress healthily, and treating oneself with kindness. Steptoe challenged the notion that self-care must be picture-perfect or Instagram-worthy, pointing out that it often involved practical, sometimes unglamorous tasks like financial planning or caregiving. She underlined that self-care should be individualized, fitting into one's existing life rather than conforming to external should-dos.

Steptoe then shifted focus to the barriers to practicing self-care, with time being a recurring theme. She acknowledged the common challenges faced by everyone, including herself, in balancing work and life, setting healthy boundaries, and managing competing priorities. By doing so, she fostered a sense of solidarity and understanding, acknowledging that striving for a perfect balance was unrealistic and that life was more like a tango of constant adjustment.

The presentation transitioned to discussing emotional well-being, defined as the ability to be self-aware, cope with challenges, and develop resilience. This focus underscored the importance of emotional wellness in the broader context of self-care and overall well-being. Steptoe invited participants to reflect on their own practices, challenges, and the essential nature of emotional wellness in achieving a balanced and fulfilling life.

She ended her presentation by emphasizing the vast scope of self-care beyond just physical wellness, pointing to NC State's model which included six elements of wellness but acknowledged that for some, aspects like spirituality, environment, or occupation might also be crucial. The focus, however, was on emotional wellness and the role of self-care in enhancing resilience, coping mechanisms, enjoyment of life, maintenance of positive relationships, reduction of mental health symptoms, and the alignment of one's actual self with their aspirational self despite external constraints like infrastructure issues or inflation. Steptoe used the metaphor of a car to illustrate how self-care helped manage stress and maintain resilience, likening our bodies and minds to vehicles that weren't designed to operate under prolonged stress without maintenance. This analogy underscored the importance of self-care

in preventing 'breakdowns' and enhancing our ability to recover from life's challenges through effective stress management and the utilization of support networks.

Breakout Room Discussions

The first group reported on the challenges in teaching, highlighting the issue of faculty replacement policies where the loss of two teaching faculty could lead to the hiring of a single research faculty, potentially not well-suited for teaching core courses. Carolyn Bird shared these insights, emphasizing the need for instruction from individuals with practical experience to provide students with more than a theoretical understanding. Suggestions included balancing faculty hiring practices to ensure a proper mix of teaching and research faculty and addressing departmental incentives to prioritize academic instruction over research.

The second group, led by Srijan Sengupta and focused on issues related to graduate students and research funding, discussed the significant changes in the scientific funding ecosystem and the pressure on faculty to secure external grants. This environment creates stress for both graduate students and principal investigators (PIs), with the former concerned about their financial support and the latter about maintaining their labs. The group identified a trend of increasing PhD enrollments without corresponding support, calling for a broader discussion across departments to address these uniform issues, suggesting that the Faculty Senate could be a platform for such dialogue.

Walter Robinson reported on the group's findings, emphasizing the critical role of social wellness, especially in the context of readjusting post-pandemic. He shared insights on incorporating social wellness into departmental values and the utility of casual drop-in spaces for fostering informal interactions among colleagues. Robinson also mentioned the enthusiasm of the Office of Faculty Excellence to support faculty communities through various initiatives aimed at increasing engagement in community and events. He proposed the idea of "brand ambassadors" to promote these activities within their units and colleges. Moreover, he suggested using wellness days for community service as a means to strengthen community bonds.

The conversation further explored the challenges in improving communication within the university administration. Michael Taveirne highlighted discrepancies in perceptions of communication effectiveness between upper administration and faculty/staff. He suggested that clearer policies and procedures could enhance understanding and transparency, particularly in sensitive matters such as student deaths. Taveirne also stressed the importance of ensuring diverse representation on committees and task forces to include a wide range of student perspectives and avoid overburdening individuals with diverse viewpoints.

7. Issues of Concern (IOCs)

Faculty Issues of Concern can be submitted at any time to a senator, or to the Office of the Faculty Senate via email Faculty_Senate@ncsu.edu.

8. Adjourn

Chair McGowan adjourned the meeting at 5:02 PM.