NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
Minutes of the Faculty Senate
April 1, 2025
3:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting No. 11 of the 71st Session   DH Hill Jr. Library   April 1, 2025

In attendance: Herle McGowan, Chair of the Faculty; Katherine McKee, Parliamentarian; Senators Allaire, Ange van Heugten, Burke, Campbell, Daley, Davis, Diaconeasa, Drake, Edmisten, Edwards, Fabiku, Krim, Hyman, Jasper. Lowe Reed, Meiklejohn, Moore, Paige, Phukan, Robinson, Schwartzman, Taveirne, Verhallen and Zaarour

Absent: Christopher DePerno, Associate Chair of the Faculty; Senators Bell, Blank, Breen, Fang, Hajbabaie, Hajibabai, Hou, Mishra, Mullins, Roland, and Taylor

Guests: Warwick Arden, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost; Dr. Catherine Hoyo, Professor in Biological Sciences, Dr. Aranya Chakrabortty, Professor and Associate Department Head, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Dr. Justin Whitehill, Assistant Professor, Forestry and Environmental Resources and Director of the Christmas Tree Genetics, Dr. Amy Grunden, Professor of Microbiology and Assistant Director of Research, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Dr. Robert Scheller, Associate Dean for Research, College of Natural Resources, Dr. Lex Kemper, Associate Dean for Research and Associate Professor, Department of Physics

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

The meeting was called to order by Herle McGowan, Chair of the Faculty. McGowan welcomed senators and attendees, emphasizing the importance of timely voting in Faculty Senate elections, which were scheduled to close on April 2, 2025. College-specific ballots had been distributed via email on March 19.

2. **Approval of the Minutes, Regular Meeting No. 10 of the 71st Session, April 1, 2025** - *Herle McGowan, Chair of the Faculty*

In the absence of Associate Chair DePerno, Chair McGowan facilitated the approval of minutes from the Regular Meeting No. 10, held on February 18, 2025, as well as the Special Meeting from March 4, 2025. Both sets of minutes were approved without objection.

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

Chair Herle McGowan reiterated the need for faculty engagement, particularly around ongoing discussions involving research infrastructure and governance. She reminded senators to

encourage colleagues to participate in elections and committee service, as these structures underpin faculty influence across the university.

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

Provost Warwick Arden provided updates on several institutional matters. He opened by reminding the Faculty Senate of the Interdisciplinary Teaching Excellence Award, which he had announced on March 20. This is a new recognition designed to honor faculty or teams who excel in integrating interdisciplinary approaches into their teaching. Arden provided the nomination deadline—April 9—and directed attendees to go.ncsu.edu/ITEA for full details on criteria, forms, and the selection process. Winners of this award will be recognized on the morning of May 9, during a ceremony to be held at the Plant Sciences Building, which he encouraged faculty to visit if they had not done so before.

Next, Arden shared two important leadership updates. First, he announced that Dan Monek would be taking over as Associate Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Policy, effective April 7. This appointment was officially communicated to campus via a message from Senior Vice Provost Kim Grainger on March 27. Monek will succeed Laura Nelson, who is returning to the College of Veterinary Medicine to serve as the inaugural director of clinical education. Arden thanked Nelson for her outstanding service and stated that her passion lies in clinical education, which she is eager to reengage with. In his new role, Monek will collaborate with the Office of Faculty Excellence to ensure that faculty-related policies and procedures align with NC State's institutional goals and are implemented fairly and efficiently.

Arden then addressed the appointment of Kevin Howell as NC State's next Chancellor, a decision that was formally announced on March 18. He emphasized Howell's deep connections to the university, noting that Howell is a proud NC State undergraduate, former student body president, and a law school graduate from Chapel Hill. Howell has previously served the university as Director of External Relations and Legislative Relations. Arden shared his personal experience working with Howell over the past two decades, describing him as an "outstanding individual" with a profound love for the institution and the ability to serve as an effective spokesperson.

The Provost also provided an important update on the temporary hiring pause that he initiated on February 14. This pause applied to units that report directly to him, including colleges and vice provost areas. The decision stemmed from growing concerns regarding financial stability and the looming possibility of a federal government shutdown in March. Arden noted that NC State relies heavily on federal funding, spending roughly $21 to $22 million per month from these sources. Fortunately, the federal shutdown did not materialize, and on March 19, the hiring pause was lifted immediately.

Although hiring resumed, Arden stressed that the university is continuing to work closely with Finance and Administration and the Office of Research and Innovation to develop a strategic financial plan for the upcoming year. While NC State is currently in strong financial shape—with nearly 50,000 applications received for approximately 6,000 first-year student slots—the

Provost urged continued vigilance. He highlighted uncertainty at both federal and state levels and emphasized that proactive planning is necessary to ensure that the university can weather potential financial challenges. He concluded by noting that hiring freezes or budget containments are common across higher education institutions during times of fiscal caution and reiterated confidence that with careful planning, NC State will continue to thrive.

He then opened the floor for questions, before turning the meeting back over to Faculty Chair Herle McGowan. No questions were recorded in the transcript immediately following his remarks.

5. **Academic Program Review (APR)** - *Dr. Walter Robinson, Professor in Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences*

Chair-Elect Dr. Walt Robinson presented an update on the Academic Program Review (APR) process, building on an earlier presentation from October 29, 2024, by Dr. Fashaad Crawford and his team. Robinson's primary goal was to inform the Senate about key changes and to begin an ongoing discussion about the implications for faculty and academic programs.

He began by explaining that the APR process is now a mandated University of North Carolina (UNC) system policy, adopted in May 2024, which requires every degree program to undergo review every seven years. The Chancellor must report results to the UNC System Office, and those results may lead to decisions to expand, contract, or discontinue programs. At NC State, this is non-negotiable—the institution must comply. The first summary reports are due by January 31, 2026, to be approved by the Board of Trustees before submission.

Robinson outlined the evaluation criteria set forth in the policy: student demand, workforce relevance, outcomes, cost and productivity, and the role of programs in addressing critical professions related to the health, education, and quality of life for North Carolinians. Additionally, campus and system leaders may introduce their own criteria, further shaping the review.

He stressed the role of faculty governance in the APR process, as recognized in the policy, and emphasized transparency, advanced warning, sufficient preparation time, and thorough faculty involvement. These principles were developed through guidance issued by a UNC Faculty Assembly task force over the summer, led by Ann Tickner (ECU), on which Robinson also served.

To meet the tight timeline for implementation, a working group of faculty and administrators has been formed at NC State. Their current plan is to conduct APRs by college, reviewing all programs within a college over one to two semesters, depending on size. Robinson clarified that this new process is distinct from NC State's traditional strategic program reviews, which are more holistic and improvement-focused. Instead, this new APR will follow a system-mandated matrix, with pre-populated data that programs may annotate or correct to provide additional context.

Programs undergoing review may face one of four outcomes: expansion, continuation, contraction, or curtailment. Robinson underscored that while adding context to data is possible, doing so will be a heavy burden, especially if unit heads and associate deans are not given early access to data. He warned that once the formal review begins, the process will move rapidly.

Expressing his personal views separate from the working group, Robinson criticized the metrics used in the APR as being narrow and not reflective of the mission or scope of a global R1 university. He gave examples such as graduate outcomes being judged by in-state employment and earnings, which would penalize programs whose graduates pursue out-of-state graduate education or lower-paying but impactful public service roles. He added that while faculty will be able to provide supplemental data and narrative, doing so will be time-consuming.

Robinson expressed serious concerns about the risks of program curtailment, which could result in faculty job losses, including those with tenure. He referenced a case at UNC Asheville, where two tenured faculty members were notified that their positions would be terminated at the end of the academic year due to program cuts.

To mitigate such risks, Robinson advocated for robust faculty oversight, especially in cases of unfavorable outcomes. He suggested modeling this oversight on the university's promotion and tenure process, where decisions pass through multiple levels of faculty review: departmental, college-level, and university-wide.

He concluded by reiterating that now is the time for faculty to be actively involved in shaping the APR process and ensuring that the implementation protects academic quality and faculty positions.

6. **Research Panel Discussion -** *Dr. Aranya Chakrabortty, Dr. Amy Grunden, Dr. Catherine Hoyo, Dr. Lex Kemper, Dr. Robert Scheller, and Dr. Justin Whitehill*

The Research Panel Discussion served as a long-anticipated opportunity for faculty researchers and research administrators to voice perspectives and concerns related to the university's research support structure, especially in light of the Research Administration and Support Services (RASS) Task Forces and their pilot projects. The conversation, guided by pre-distributed questions, was collaborative, candid, and aimed at identifying actionable improvements while acknowledging systemic challenges.

The panelists included:

- Dr. Catherine Hoyo, Professor in Biological Sciences
- Dr. Aranya Chakrabortty, Professor and Associate Department Head, Electrical and Computer Engineering
- Dr. Justin Whitehill, Assistant Professor, Forestry and Environmental Resources and Director of the Christmas Tree Genetics
- Dr. Amy Grunden, Professor of Microbiology and Assistant Director of Research, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

- Dr. Robert Scheller, Associate Dean for Research, College of Natural Resources
- Dr. Lex Kemper, Associate Dean for Research and Associate Professor, Department of Physics

Continuous Improvement vs. Systemic Frustration

The opening question invited panelists to reflect on whether the university currently fosters a culture of continuous improvement in research support or whether fundamental changes are still needed to prevent ongoing frustrations, such as those that prompted a recent open letter. One panelist stated that, while improvement is occurring, it has been slow. Progress was credited to Alyson Wilson and the implementation of listening-focused task forces. However, participants agreed that much more can and should be done, especially through more formalized and structured improvements.

Key Challenges and Suggestions

Several themes and issues emerged:

<u>Access to Federal Research Agencies</u>

Dr. Chakabortty emphasized that junior faculty, particularly in engineering, face difficulty connecting with agencies like DARPA, ONR, and AFOSR. He proposed that the university organize campus visits from federal funding agency representatives to help early-career faculty establish one-on-one relationships and improve proposal competitiveness.

<u>Understanding and Transparency in Processes</u>

Panelists stressed the need for better university communication about federal and state regulatory constraints that drive administrative processes. Many faculty are unaware of what is inflexible versus what can be improved. A clearer distinction between "immutable" and "mutable" policies would help manage expectations and foster collaboration.

<u>Overburdened Faculty and Research Staff</u>

Rapid growth in NC State's research enterprise over the past decade has outpaced the support infrastructure, leading to increased administrative burdens on faculty. The task forces were praised for starting to diagnose these bottlenecks, but the consensus was that a more strategic and data-driven approach to staffing and resourcing is urgently needed.

<u>Pre-Award vs. Post-Award Disparities</u>

While pre-award support (helping faculty prepare grant proposals) was generally seen as strong, post-award processes (managing funds and deliverables after grants are awarded) were flagged as severely bottlenecked. These delays can have significant negative consequences, particularly for time-sensitive projects with regulatory or contractual milestones.

Intellectual Property Support Deficiencies

Dr. Whitehill shared his frustration over a five-year struggle to license and trademark genetic material developed in his lab. The Office of Research Commercialization (ORC) is underfunded and forced to operate like a cost-recovery unit, limiting its capacity and prioritization. Panelists suggested rethinking the budget model for ORC and integrating core facilities and intellectual property support into the broader research infrastructure.

Decentralization vs. Centralization

Multiple panelists suggested that the current decentralized model—where each college maintains its own administrative systems and policies—creates inefficiencies and inconsistencies. While large colleges may function well independently, mid-sized and smaller colleges often lack the resources to manage research support effectively. Centralizing certain services, like animal research support and core facilities, was proposed as a way to improve quality and resilience.

Staffing and Retention Concerns

The panel addressed ongoing issues with recruiting and retaining qualified research administration staff, noting that turnover increased dramatically during COVID and hasn't fully recovered. The group acknowledged a pilot project focused on career development and pathways for staff and emphasized that improving working conditions, offering promotion tracks, and integrating professional development opportunities are essential to making these roles sustainable and desirable long-term.

Reflections on RASS Pilot Projects

Panelists provided mixed feedback on the nine pilot projects introduced by the Research Administration and Support Services Task Forces. While several members praised them for being achievable and potentially impactful in the short term (such as improving data sharing and proposal submission timelines), others voiced concern that the initiatives might be too limited in scope and risk overlooking larger systemic issues like outdated operating systems, decentralized inefficiencies, and high staff turnover.

Dr. Grunden noted that some of the inefficiencies stem from incompatible, outdated operating systems (e.g., PeopleAdmin, PeopleSoft) that have been excessively modified across units, making integration difficult. She advocated for a comprehensive reevaluation of digital infrastructure, suggesting that long-term cost savings in efficiency would outweigh initial investments.

Final Recommendations for the New VCRI

When asked what advice they would give to Dr. Krista Walton, the new Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (starting in May), the panel offered these suggestions:

- Re-centralize key research support services, particularly in areas where decentralization has led to inefficiencies.
- Advocate for more university-wide investment in research infrastructure and staffing, especially post-award administration.
- Leverage NC State's proximity to Research Triangle Park to enhance collaboration and increase external funding opportunities.
- Champion a cultural shift from compliance toward support and innovation.
- Pursue strategic, large-scale system updates rather than limiting reforms to short-term fixes.

7. Course Ready Q&A

This segment allowed senators to raise questions about the Course Ready platform and its recent updates. Concerns were expressed about the user interface and the frequency of required training updates. Senators requested better communication about platform changes. A representative from the support team responded, noting that feedback is being collected for an upcoming refresh and that optional training modules will soon be streamlined.

8. Old and New Business
   a. **Staff Senate Update - No update.**
   b. **Student Senate Update**

Ria Bakshi, a senior and long-serving director in Student Government, introduced the Best Practices Guide—a resource developed for faculty to help them better navigate mental health-related challenges in their classrooms. The guide is rooted in the work of the Mental Health Intervention (MHI) Department, which was created in Fall 2022 in response to a tragic semester that saw seven student deaths, sparking a campus-wide mental health reckoning.

The MHI team conducted a formal literature review of peer institutions and engaged in student focus groups to identify needs and trends. Through this research, two key themes emerged:

- Many students manage long-term personal mental health challenges, not always formally diagnosed.
- Students experience significant mental health stress from academic pressures, and their primary university interaction is often through professors—highlighting faculty as critical intervention points.

The Best Practices Guide was thus created to fill a common gap: faculty awareness of how to respond when a student seems distressed. Professors, while not mental health professionals, often feel unsure how to help students without overstepping boundaries. The guide includes:

- Email templates for various scenarios—from expressing mild concern to formally notifying a student of a CARES report.
- Student testimonials describing how small faculty gestures made a major impact on their wellbeing.

- Embedded links to the Counseling Center's Faculty Toolkit, providing further administrative and mental health resources.

Bakshi emphasized that the guide is a flexible resource, not a mandate—professors are encouraged to use what fits their teaching context. Physical copies are forthcoming, and a digital version will be distributed more broadly. One faculty member praised the guide as "the best resource I've seen," and discussions are underway to distribute it campus-wide electronically at the beginning of the fall semester.

Taquan Dewberry highlighted recent transitions and initiatives within Student Government as they enter their 100th session. Key updates included the swearing-in of newly elected student leaders:

- Isaac Io – Student Body President (3rd year, Political Science and Social Work)
- Anil Gordon – Vice President (1st-year Master's student in Public Administration)
- Lance Williams – Treasurer (2nd year, Agricultural Science), who plans to increase financial support for student organizations and advocate for a fee increase.
- Nyla Dean – Student Senate President (3rd year, Microbiology), formerly chair of the Diversity, Inclusion, and Outreach Committee.

The new leadership is focused on empowering students, building bridges, and enhancing student experiences. Several leaders will serve in influential university governance roles, including University Council, Tuition Review Advisory Committee, and Board of Trustees.

Additionally, the outgoing session passed the "NC State Forward Together Act," a resolution affirming the value of shared governance and calling for equal respect among students, faculty, and staff. The resolution also took a firm stance in support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and free speech, in response to ongoing changes to campus policy. Copies of the resolution were distributed to both the Faculty and Staff Senate chairs.

9. **Adjourn**

Chair McGowan adjourned the meeting at 5:11 PM.