As Chair of the UNLV Faculty Senate, I will honor an old tradition and provide the campus with a summary of each Board of Regents meeting. The Board met at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno on June 9 and 10, 2016.

For those of you who have never been, a Board meeting covers two days, with committee meetings scattered around the general business meeting. The Board’s committees include Academic, Research, and Student Affairs; Business, Finance, and Facilities; Athletics; and Cultural Diversity and Title IX Compliance.

Much of what happens at the meeting is discussed in committee, such as the creation of new degree programs, and then approved without comment by the entire Board voting to accept the committee’s report.

The real Board meeting begins with public comment, followed by reports from the Chair of the Board, Chancellor, Chair of the Senate Chairs group, Chair of the Student Body presidents group, each of the regents, and each of the presidents, with extra time devoted to the campus where the meeting is being held.

There were 46 agenda items and multiple other meetings. Below is my report on the important things only, in the order that I learned them.

1. Board officers – The Board re-elected Rick Trachok as chair and Michael Wixom as vice chair.

2. Chair of Senate Chair’s report – The Senate chairs expressed our desire to have a nationwide search for a new chancellor who is an academic and who understands research and teaching. The last time the Board did a search for a chancellor was in the 1990s. All recent chancellors have been appointed without a real search by the Board, typically without much input from faculty. Chair Trachok has said there will be a search and he is in the process of listening to all the constituencies and will pick a committee soon. We emphasized the need for faculty representation on the committee.

3. Student Governments – the student leadership said that they have established combating sexual violence as their number one priority for the year.
4. The Rebel Soccer Foundation was given official status, and the Regents accepted a gift for the new baseball clubhouse.

5. The Cheyenne Campus of CSN is going to be renamed the North Las Vegas campus, if the city will pay the costs of new signage. There will be a study of adopting a multicampus district model for CSN, sort of a mini-NSHE within NSHE.

6. Western Nevada College made a presentation about its programs. Most interestingly they have a program by which high school students can graduate with an Associates degree simultaneous with high school graduation. Since we have to take any student with an Associates degree from a Nevada college, these students can graduate from UNLV two years after graduating high school. The other colleges are working on adopting similar programs, but with the caveat that the big school districts don’t want these programs interfering with their AP programs.

7. The Board approved 2017-2019 fees for the med school, dental school (2% increase), and law school (no increase).

8. The Board approved a one year delay till October 2017 in implementing the new Workday system. NSHE is in a decade long process of replacing its administrative computing systems. It started with the “iNtegrate” project, which resulted in MyUNLV. While the Regents take pride in pointing out that this system came in within budget and on time, it did not give us the dramatic improvements promised, in large part because a true business process analysis was not done. We can see this in the weak user interface, and in simple things such as the fact that it does not integrate with WebCampus, and the two systems do not alphabetize the same way, so a spreadsheet of students downloaded from one will not be in the same order as one downloaded from the other.

The current project, called “iNtegrate 2,” is about new financial and human resource systems. It has done a much better job at focusing on common business practices across the state, but doing that has highlighted the past lack of consistency. Data fields in the old system are not based on a common dictionary, so that it is impossible to simply combine the data from the several old systems into the one new system. And, simply put, the business areas on campus are so severely understaffed that it is a strain on them to do their jobs while assisting with the software conversion at the same time.

The vendors are making adjustments to their contracts and have promised that the one year delay will not add cost to the project. There was considerable skepticism to that promise in the room.

I should note as part of this that standardization and shared services are a theme for this Board of Regents. TMCC and UNR have combined their police forces. Some of the northern campuses share marketing and recruiting functions. TMCC and WNC have consolidated library functions. Everybody is looking to save money by working together.

9. The governor enrolled the state in something called Complete College America, which set goals for UNLV to graduate 5,000 undergraduate students per year by 2020. We are currently at about 4,000. This seems to be driving a whole set of NSHE initiatives.

https://www.nevada.edu/ir/CCA_Goals.php
http://completecollege.org/

10. The Board approved UNLV going forward with the transfer of nine acres near UMC from Clark County to house the med school, and the creation of affiliation agreements between UMC and the med school. While there is much work to do, the med school seems to be on track.

Part of this was a discussion about what to name the UNR med school, which is currently named the “University of Nevada” school of medicine. UNR says that there is no entity called UNR, but in the end, had to settle for University of Nevada, Reno, School of Medicine. They have spent a lot of money on a consultant to help them with their brand.

UNLV went out to bid to hire a consultant itself, but did not do so because the bids were excessive. I reminded the powers that be that our faculty have significant expertise in this area, and would gladly have done the work for them for free, or engaged a class, or otherwise helped out. We always seem to ignore the fact that we have
lots of smart people who have extensive real world backgrounds and hire consultants for a lot of money who cut and paste reports they did for Alabama without any real understanding of our campus or our community.

11. The Board discussed the budget that is about to go to the governor. The basic situation is simple: state revenues have not grown much, but there are more kids in school and more folks in need of services such as Medicaid. The result is the governor has asked the NSHE to develop plans for a possible five percent budget cut. We will not know whether this cut will happen until January at the earliest. If it does happen, we will expect considerable faculty input into how the cuts are handled.

In 2008, UNLV’s state general fund appropriation was $192 million. This year, it’s $150 million. Next year it might be $142 million. For more than 30 years, the Legislature gave the NSHE roughly 19.5 percent of the state general fund, and we rode up and down with the fund. Over the past eight years, they have pushed us down to about 12 percent of the general fund, and there is no indication we’ll ever get back to our old funding level.

The med school is an off-budget item, but it might be cut rather than increased even as it goes live. We also have more students enrolled across campus, and we are entitled for an allocation for them. It is possible that they will lower the per student allocation, but fund our growth, balancing the budget so we don’t have major cuts, just more stretching.

If you are not aware, the funding formula for the NSHE was changed, with the idea that we are now paid for “outputs” instead of “inputs.” We get paid by the state when a student completes a course, not when they enroll. When students drop classes, we get no money from the state for that student. And, they took 20% of our budget and made us “earn” it by points from various metrics, especially graduating students and bringing in external grants. This is “performance” budgeting, which is the national trend for higher ed.

Also, over the past 35 years, the Regents have given UNR more money to build new buildings than they have given UNLV, with the result that UNR has roughly the same space per student as UCLA, while UNLV has the space of a Cal State campus. Despite the difference in space per student, the “priority 1” requests for capital improvements in the system have UNR with $41 million for a new engineering complex, and UNLV with $1.4 million to finish the new Hotel building. UNR, despite the UCLAness of their existing campus, according to the NSHE is short 300,000 square feet and UNLV is short 450,000 square feet, in total. In other words, the system office does not tell the Regents that UNLV and UNR should have equal space per student, but rather that UNR is entitled to twice the square footage per student.

According to the Chancellor’s Office, UNR currently has 390,000 square feet of research space, and they need 500,000 by 2025. UNLV currently has 213,000 square feet, but that is MORE than we need, according to the system office. By 2025, we will only need 195,000 square feet, so you will be pleased to know that we have 17,000 extra square feet of research space on our campus.

The final part of this is compensation. We are simply asking that whatever the state gives the other state workers for COLA and merit, they give to us as well. If the budget is as it is, we are unlikely, in my view, to get either. The Chancellor convened a compensation committee last year which recommended (a) that all impediments to alternative compensation models be removed, and (b) that awards outside of merit be limited to five people per campus, which seems somewhat contradictory to me.

The Senate chairs have been having an argument (or rather 7 of them have been arguing with me). The argument goes this way: They say “We can’t develop ways to reward faculty outside of merit pay because the legislature will use that as an excuse to not fund merit pay.” I say, “And, if the legislature doesn’t fund merit pay anyway, we have voluntarily screwed over all the faculty across the state.” We are going to continue this argument in the UNLV senate this year, and I expect the senate chairs and chancellor’s office will continue it as well.


12. One of the biggest issues in the system this year will be the role of community colleges. There are bills headed for the legislature to give them more autonomy. (We should note that each college now has its own Institutional Advisory Committee, which reports to the Regents). The interesting part of this, to me, is that all of our “community colleges” offer four year degrees, and three of them have taken the word “community” out of their name. By the time the legislative votes to empower the community colleges, we might not have any.

Great Basin College at this meeting asked to be upgraded to a state college. They gave various reasons, but the reality is, if approved, this would cut their teaching load from 5 to 4 courses per semester, raise their faculty pay scale, and entitle them to offer more degrees, including limited graduate degrees. The Regents were generally negative and the idea was tabled.

The colleges do have separate pay scales and workloads now for folks teaching four year programs compared to faculty teaching four year programs, and we can expect more movement by them to teach upper division students and grant degrees. The Senate chairs are unanimous that the Regents need to have a major discussion about the roles of the various campuses in the system.

13. If you saw the meeting on video, you might have noted that there are eight presidents, all white males. TMCC just hired a new president who will start soon. She will be the only woman president in the system. NSC’s provost, Erica Beck, was just hired away to become the president of Cal State Channel Islands.

14. The primary governing document of the NSHE is “The Code.” This is our employment contract, and defines much of what goes on in the system. It takes two meetings to change anything in the Code. We had the first reading of a Code change this time that would require the chair of the Board of Regents to have input when we hire a vice president. Currently, only the chancellor has to be consulted. The senate chairs were able to change the language so that only provosts would be affected, but we were unable to stop the change entirely. The Board says it is necessary because provosts often become presidents, at least in the short term.

15. At the same time, the Board had a first reading of a proposal to allow presidents to hire athletic directors and coaches without Board approval. They also went through the EADA reports of the campuses, which consider gender and ethnicity fairness in athletics. Ours is here: http://system.nevada.edu/tasks/sites/Nshe/assets/File/BoardOfRegents/Agendas/2016/jun-mtgs/athl-refs/COA-7c.pdf

16. You’ve already been Provost Alerted that new programs were approved, so I won’t duplicate that here.

17. The most important note of that, though, I will repeat, which is the Hotel College was approved to re-institute departments, though, as I understand it, their chairs will not be fully responsible as is typical around campus, some of the business of departments will remain in the dean’s office (such as course scheduling). Someone reported to the media that moving three department chairs back to full time teachers for five years saved the campus millions of dollars. I would like to see how that calculation was arrived at.

And, that is it. The next formal meeting won’t be until September, but there will likely be a workshop or other event between now and then. I will keep you posted.

Bill Robinson
2016-17 Faculty Senate Chair