

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY FACULTY SENATE

Regular Meeting, 10 February 2026, 4:00 p.m.

Via Zoom and Union Capitol Rooms

A C T I O N M I N U T E S

SENATORS PRESENT IN PERSON: E. Asare, P. Cole, R. Di Carmine, H. Elbe, N. Gillotti, D. Gravitt, E. Hamner, H. Mason, D. McArthur, A. Melkumian, J. Robinett, R. Sharma, S. Turkelli, L. Wipperling, E. Woell

SENATORS PRESENT VIA ZOOM: D. Allwardt, S. Chakravorti, J. McKenzie

SENATORS ABSENT: A. Frederick, M. Hoge, R. Kelly, F. Tasdan, J. Walker

EX-OFFICIO: William Gblerkpor, Parliamentarian; Lori Baker-Sperry, Associate Provost; Jessica Lin, Associate Provost

GUESTS: Maureen Bezold, Tom Blackford, Matt Blankenship, Keith Boeckelman, Amy Carr, Merrill Cole, Katrina Daytner, Dennis DeVolder, Patty Eathington, Tara Feld, Rick Kurasz, Dan Malachuk, Kyle Mayborn, Heather McIlvane-Newsad, Chris Merrett, Kat Myers, Rafael Obregon, Lorette Oden, Jennifer Plos, Renee Polubinsky, Eric Sheffield, Emily Shupe, Sebastian Szyjka, Riley Zanger

Chair Robinett expressed his appreciation to the faculty who participated in the Title IV verifications. He said the university had a reporting rate of 77 percent, which is significantly higher than the last several spring semesters. He also expressed thanks to those in the Division of Student Success who reached out to students who were reported as “did not begin” in order to provide them with assistance and guidance in what they needed to do. He added that, as an institution focusing on retention, these efforts really help.

I. Consideration of Minutes

A. January 27, 2025

MINUTES APPROVED AS DISTRIBUTED

II. Announcements

A. Provost's Report

Associate Provost Lori Baker-Sperry informed senators that Provost Mossman sent out an email this afternoon letting everyone know that he is in OSF Hospital in Peoria after having caught an illness. She does not have any information right now about when he will be discharged but hopes it will not be long. She stated that in the meantime, she, Associate Provost Jessica Lin, and Assistant Provost Kishor Kapale are trying to work together, and anyone with questions can send them to one of them or to Charlene Greuel or Amy Hodges in the Provost’s Office.

Associate Provost Baker-Sperry announced that fall to spring retention of the freshmen class rose from 78.1 percent to 78.8 percent, which halts a six-year decline. She said the fall to spring REACH student retention rose from 63 percent to 68 percent. She added that the university has also seen significant fall-to-spring retention growth for Latinx students and Black first-year students. Associate Provost Baker-Sperry related that the Fall 2025 GPA average for WIU student-athletes was 3.31, led by the women’s basketball team with 3.77. She said these are really positive things and acknowledged that everyone worked hard to make them happen.

Associate Provost Lin said there are some good things to talk about regarding the Rebuild; a lot of progress is occurring, and a lot of wonderful conversations are happening. She was part of two of those conversations today with directors and faculty. She said the College of Business, Health, and Community Programs (CBHCP) has been making excellent headway on school-level conversations and trying to solidify where they are in terms of how people want to be combined into academic units. Associate Provost Lin related that she and Interim Dean Kyle Mayborn have been meeting with the different directors of the College of Humanities, Arts, Sciences, and Education (CHASE) and in open meetings with faculty in the proposed schools to hear what kinds of questions they have and address some of their concerns. She noted that the pivotal step that she and others are working toward is getting the schools defined. She pointed out that this is a crucial step for many reasons, including determining issues of representation moving forward so that everyone can then do a lot of important work.

Associate Provost Lin observed that the ideal deadline is quickly approaching next week for submission to the Rebuild Constituency Committee and the Senate Executive Committee regarding any changes to the academic units that were previously approved. She would like to see those units that wish to change complete their rationale and internal votes so that any potential next steps can begin. She added that the conversations that she has been a part of so far have been very productive.

Associate Provost Lin is frequently asked where the search for the CHASE Dean stands. She announced that a conversation has occurred with the CHASE search committee leaders, and that search will be closed at this time. She explained that efforts will now be focused on searches for associate deans and directors, then will circle back to a potential relaunch of the CHASE Dean search toward the end of the semester. She said the idea is that perhaps for that college, it will be helpful to see what their schools end up looking like, which might change how people want to approach that search. She summarized that the plan right now is to pivot, focus on what the associate dean duties will be and what the school director positions will look like, get some of those dominoes lined up, then relaunch a search for the CHASE Dean later in the semester. Associate Provost Lin noted that, in the meantime, Interim Dean Mayborn has been an excellent resource in helping to spearhead and guide these conversations to help the Rebuild process stay on track. She said he has met regularly with herself, Dean Tara Feld, and Provost Mossman on various kinds of operational concerns and a lot of the details that need to be well thought out before next year.

Senator Gravitt related that the School of Engineering and Technology met with Dean Feld and Interim Associate Dean Dennis DeVolder on Friday, February 6. She said their school is unable to vote because they were originally proposed to join with the School of Computer Sciences, but Computer Sciences has not met with their faculty to decide what they plan to do, so there is no possible way the School of Engineering and Technology can meet the deadline date. Associate Provost Lin reiterated that what has been discussed is an *ideal* deadline. She is also aware that those conversations did occur yesterday, so those dominoes are lining up quickly. She thinks that Interim Dean Mayborn and Dean Feld have been incredibly efficient and have given up huge amounts of their schedules to these types of conversations. She believes things will continue to move, adding that if the exact deadline is not met, it is not the end of the world, but it would be good get these in place as soon as possible.

Chair Robinett explained that one of the reasons these deadlines were proposed is to ensure that there are sufficient months left for the very important work that has to come from this. He said one thing that has to be considered is making sure there is enough time for the school-level committees to be selected. He noted that taking care of junior faculty is something the institution needs to be focused on, and when they return in the fall their portfolios are due incredibly early at the start of the semester. He said this means that departmental personnel committees (DPCs) for the schools need to be formed by the time faculty leave in May so that when everyone returns in the fall they will be able to do the things they need to do. Chair Robinett noted that, from a Faculty Senate perspective, having the schools in place allows for a better understanding of what faculty governance will look like for councils, committees, and the Senate body. He observed that the ad hoc Committee on Faculty Governance did a great job of looking at and proposing a representation methodology that is really dependent on those schools, so there is a lot of work that needs to be done. He informed

Senator Gravitt that the asterisk on this is that those working with this planning built in room in case there are those who have not yet had the opportunity to have the conversations they need to have. He remarked that if the majority can get their paperwork through early so that work can start being done in those areas, there is still some time to work with those others who may need a different timeline. He added that the timelines are set so that the things that need to be done can be, but also with a little bit of leeway in case there is the need for additional resources, and any time he talks about “resources” nowadays it seems like time is the one he is referring to.

Associate Provost Lin observed that, from a priority point of view, getting people in the right rooms is the critical step. She thinks that once it is determined who will be in this school or that school, a lot of school-by-school conversations will happen. She said one of her highest priorities is making sure there is a clear understanding of the personnel committees and what to expect for anyone going into the PY process in the fall; one of the reasons she is pushing hard is because she would like for this to keep moving. Associate Provost Lin has seen some tremendous work being done based on the conversations she has been a part of; lots of new ideas are being shared, and people who might have been a little apprehensive a couple of months ago are coming around to thinking that the Rebuild could result in some cool things happening. She stated that while some documentation has come in already, others will need a little more time, and she has the utmost faith that things will get done.

Chair Robinett remarked that one thing the Faculty Senate has repeatedly made clear is a desire for the process to follow the creation of new schools guidelines, and the administration is bringing all of this documentation forward. He said that while the Rebuild Constituency Committee will be given an opportunity to discuss them, they will come to the Faculty Senate in order for senators to have a conversation and open discussion about them. Chair Robinett greatly appreciated that a group of faculty invited him to attend some recent conversations; the more of these conversations that can happen, the better so that everyone can at least be informed.

Associate Provost Lin encouraged those with questions to reach out to Dean Feld and to Interim Dean Mayborn. She added that Amy Hodges schedule her calendar for anyone to have a conversation with her as well. Chair Robinett said that Faculty Senate has greatly appreciated the opportunity for faculty to play a pivotal role in the selection of the university leadership. He hopes that whatever is done with the CHASE Dean would also include the opportunity for faculty to participate in that selection process. Associate Provost Lin replied that the administration is absolutely still committed to that; they just think it is time to pivot and focus on something else because maybe what is needed is to know what the structure of CHASE schools will look like first. She added that while she has not been a part of this search committee, she knows there has been a decision to close that search and focus on other work that needs to be done.

Senator Cole asked if the closing of the search means no more applications. Associate Provost Lin replied that at this time her understanding is that Interview Exchange will be completely shut down, and a new launch will be held later in the semester. She said there will be a new call for applications and potentially a new search, although it would be difficult for her to comment on the exact mechanics of that since it will involve the Provost and a new search committee.

Senator Wipperling asked if past applicants will be considered for that new search. Associate Provost Lin replied that anyone is always welcome to apply for a search and would be encouraged to do so, but she thinks the next search will have a fresh look once it is known what CHASE is starting to look like. She suspects that things might change for the next search because the current one required writing an ad without knowing what schools there will be in the college or even what disciplines would be included.

Senator Hamner asked if those individuals chosen as associate deans would be eligible to then also apply for the position above them. Associate Provost Lin replied that she would encourage people to apply for any job they are interested in applying for; then, if a new position becomes available down the line and the individual wishes to apply for that one, the previous position can always be opened up for a second search. She thinks if someone accepts an associate dean or director position and then

later on decides they would like to apply for a dean position, that should not hold them up for applying for the position they are interested in.

B. Student Government Association (SGA)
(Ripley Zanger, SGA Director of Academic Affairs)

Ms. Zanger reported that SGA has met twice this semester, and their committees will hopefully begin meeting next week. She said so far everyone has just been settling back into the semester, but hopefully with the committees beginning to meet some things will begin to be done.

Ms. Zanger related that there was some discussion at SGA's last meeting about the change to the Union Food Court with Chick-Fil-A's contract ending. She does not know if this has been announced to the faculty, but it is something that is very important to the students. She said an email was sent out to students to vote for Popeye's, Sonic, or Panera, but she does not know if faculty get to vote on this. Several senators remarked this is the first they had heard of this.

Ms. Zanger reported that the SGA Constitution is being reviewed. She said this started a little bit last semester, but since she does not serve on the Constitution Review Committee she will not know more until they submit their report. She thinks a lot of the proposed revisions have to do with restructuring SGA Cabinet positions to make them more beneficial to the current student body.

Ms. Zanger said the election process for 2026-27 for SGA has begun; nominations were accepted beginning February 9, petitioning begins on February 16, campaigning on February 23, and voting from March 4-11. She anticipates talking about this a bit more at the next Faculty Senate meeting because that is when campaigning will be happening. Ms. Zanger explained that the positions of SGA President and Board of Trustees Representative are chosen by a university-wide election, while the other positions are either school-wide elections or, in the case of the Cabinet, are chosen by the President. She asked senators to encourage students to submit their nominations if they have any interest in serving on SGA.

Chair Robinett and Senator Hamner thanked Ms. Zanger for being prepared and giving senators so much detail about SGA. Chair Robinett pointed out that Vice President for Student Success Justin Schuch will be speaking to Faculty Senate on February 24 and could tell senators what the process is to choose which restaurant will go into the Food Court next.

D. Faculty Senate Chair's Report

1. Timeline for Spring 2026

Chair Robinett stressed that the tentative timeline is meant to be a guide, not to limit progress, and there may need to be adjustments made to it. He is thankful to Ms. Hamm for going through the nuances with him of what needs to be done and when with the Constitution and Bylaws. He also expressed thanks to the administration for their understanding when he has said that more time is needed for some of these activities; he asked a great many questions when formulating this timeline.

Chair Robinett noted the most significant deviation from normal practice is the timing of the Senate elections. He said these were moved back from the first meeting in April in order to provide more time to make sure that the new Senate is fully seated. He said the drawback to moving them to April 28 is that potentially the new Senate officers will miss the last Executive Committee meeting of the year, to which the new Executive Committee is normally invited, but he feels confident that they can get caught up.

Chair Robinett expressed many thanks to the Senate Committee on Provost and Presidential Performance. He pointed out that their evaluation surveys of the President and Provost will be distributed via Qualtrics on February 13 and will be due February 27. He said that the

committee has been given a slightly longer time in order to prepare the executive summary, which will come to the Faculty Senate on March 31.

Chair Robinett said the Senate Nominating Committee's Interest Survey will be distributed on February 20 and due back on March 6. He said one of the most significant changes to the survey this year is that faculty will be asked to indicate which councils and committees they are interested in serving on without knowing how many vacancies there will be for each college.

Chair Robinett reminded senators that the University Committee on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (UCOSOGIE) asked for help coordinating a campus climate survey, which they have been trying to do for a few years. He said this will be distributed to all instructional faculty on February 20 and will be due on March 6.

Chair Robinett stated that, depending on how the Faculty Senate adjudicates it, the changes to the Senate Constitution would be sent out to the faculty at-large on March 2, and voting would close on March 13. He said that after this, Faculty Senate can move into the phase of making the Senate Bylaws match what the Constitution will be. He added that the Constitution requires a vote of the faculty at-large while the Bylaws are something that senators vote on internally. He noted that two-thirds of the Senate will be needed to approve both the Constitution and the Bylaws; he will send emails to strongly encourage everyone to try to attend those meetings where a higher voting threshold is needed.

Chair Robinett pointed out that the timeline includes the dates of visitors to Faculty Senate meetings. In addition to Vice President Schuch at the next meeting, President Mindrup and Vice President Roselieb will be present together on March 31.

Chair Robinett appreciated the SGA representative talking about what they are doing in governance and informed senators that the Graduate Council is reviewing their governance structure as well. He thanked Graduate Council Chair Jim McQuillan for sharing that a subcommittee reviewed their operating papers and presented a list of changes to be considered. Chair Robinett said some changes were made to that initial list, and the Graduate Council will discuss it further at their March meeting. He said the plan is for the Graduate Council to confirm at that meeting what they want presented to the faculty, after which it will be sent to those with full graduate faculty status for a vote. He added that there will be a lot to consider in March regarding governance of the institution.

Chair Robinett asked senators to mark April 16 on their calendars and consider traveling to Springfield that day, as they are able, in support of the equitable funding bill. Chair Robinett remarked the more he learns about the financial realities of state and regional institutions – and not just WIU – the more convinced he has become that increased funding is vital for those institutions' success. He noted that while universities still have to steward what they receive appropriately, the truth is that none will thrive if all are just struggling to survive. He believes that inequitable funding hurts not only students but also communities and the entire state. He told senators that funding will be a key part of the conversation at the Council for Illinois University Senates spring meeting next week. His understanding is that UPI will continue to share information with the Senate about the April 16 event.

Chair Robinett related that a faculty member asked him this past week if he can require senators to share information. He clarified that it is not a requirement that senators share information, but it would be greatly appreciated in light of some of the things Faculty Senate talks about if senators could be extra intentional in reaching out to those groups that they represent and discussing with them the things brought up at Faculty Senate.

Chair Robinett observed that as the Senate is talking about a review of General Education, reviewing its own operating processes, and discussing the Rebuild, there have been several rumors flourishing around the university, one of which he wishes to quickly address. He

stressed that Faculty Senate does not control who the leadership of the proposed new schools will be; that is a function of the administration and UPI who engage in collective bargaining in order to determine that. He said there still seems to be, however, a prevalent belief that as part of this process, there will be a forced rotation of leadership among departments or programs every three years that would result in faculty sometimes having to serve even if they did not want to. He stressed that this is not an accurate representation of what has been proposed. Chair Robinett recalled that when a three-year rotation was originally proposed, it was made clear that people could choose if they wanted to serve in these types of positions. He said while the rotation would occur more frequently, no one would be forced to step into a leadership role that they did not want to assume, and he just wanted to make sure this was clear. Chair Robinett encouraged senators as things are discussed at Faculty Senate to share them with their groups and those around them so that the Senate operates in a more transparent way to communicate and make people aware of what is being discussed in meetings. He noted that while Senate minutes are always posted, they may not always be read by everyone, so extra communication is appreciated.

E. Other Announcements

1. Amy Carr, WIU Representative to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Faculty Advisory Council (FAC)

Dr. Carr reported that the January 16 meeting was held at Elgin Community College; the minutes of that meeting will probably be approved at the IBHE FAC meeting of February 20, which will be held via zoom. Just prior to the meeting, she had lunch with one of her former students, John Long, who is now the Associate Vice President for Student Services at that college. He shared with Dr. Carr that Elgin is the only community college to see a drop in enrollment this past year, and it is thought that was because ICE took a student into custody in a parking lot outside a building on the main campus since 96 percent of their enrollment drop was from Latinx students. She said Elgin is now trying to reassure students that their campus is a safe space.

Dr. Carr found it interesting that 63 percent of the revenue for Elgin Community College comes from local real estate tax. She explained that, theoretically, community colleges receive one-third of their funding from property taxes, one-third from tuition, and one-third from the state, although it does not always work that way. She said 76 percent of the students at Elgin Community College are enrolled part-time.

Dr. Carr related that Elgin Community College had about 10,000 students in Spring 2025; this spring their enrollment is 9,573. She said last spring the college saw their highest total number of students graduating and achieving certificates at 1,347; they have many students but not many in any given year getting certificates and degrees.

Dr. Carr noted that Elgin has a student-led food pantry that includes fresh produce – veggies, greens, and mangos. She said they are very thoughtful as to how they put that together.

Dr. Carr related that one of the presentations at the meeting was led by a mix of faculty and students representing the Center for Undergraduate Research, Innovation, and Creativity. She was impressed that there were efforts to support undergraduate research even at the community college level. She said Elgin has 23 Fellows this academic year who receive \$1,000 per semester; it is six credit hours per semester. Dr. Carr said one of the presentations was led by a high school dual credit student on the topic of queer depictions in World War II literature; he will present his undergraduate research at a conference at Johns Hopkins. She added that if students complete their research project, they have this designated on their transcripts.

Dr. Carr noted that state UPI President John Miller presented as well, similar to his presentation to WIU faculty the following week. She pointed out that there was a \$1 billion

transit funding shortfall in the greater Chicago area, but in the fall session the state legislature managed to come together to avoid cuts in services, increased costs, or layoffs. She said Dr. Miller is arguing that the legislature should also find a way to fund the higher education equity formula and is trying to make a case for that; he is urging the IBHE to communicate what is needed and not what seems doable. Dr. Carr related that Dr. Miller cited that Massachusetts has a 4 percent millionaires' tax that was created as a result of a constitutional change, which was one of his ideas for funding. She said he pointed out that the return on investment for *regional* public universities is over \$2.50 for every \$1 spent, and yet the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign is the most funded public university. She added that he is trying to tie this to the equity formula.

Dr. Carr at the January meeting spoke with Lakeland Community College representative Matt Lundra. After her last visit, Dr. Carr had reported to Faculty Senate that Lakeland had funded an initiative to help faculty in the Humanities become better known. She recalled that as part of that initiative they had "fatheads" in their hallways with quotes that they would rotate in and out. She was told that the marketing team at Lakeland forced the "fatheads" to be taken down from the hallways because it did not fit with their marketing approach; faculty can now only put them outside their doors. She noted that there is some tension there because of having an initiative funded and then not being allowed to follow through with what they wanted to pursue.

Dr. Carr listened to some of the IBHE Board meeting on January 21. She thinks, if she recalls rightly, John Miller had thought the IBHE proposal would be for a 2 percent funding increase, but the IBHE Board proposed 3 percent. She related there were testimonies from many schools and students about the importance of the funding formula, but the Board just very quickly voted in the proposed budget. Dr. Carr noted some statistics stood out to her in the presentations she was able to hear: 1) public university affordability has increased, with 44 percent of Illinois residents and 78 percent of low-income students paying no tuition fees; 2) the Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) covers 45 percent of public university weighted tuition and fees, and 3) there was a \$365,000 increase for the Illinois Math and Science Academy (IMSA).

Dr. Carr related that at the December meeting the IBHE FAC had a conversation with IBHE Chair Pranav Kothari; they posed questions to him ahead of time as well as raising some there. She said the diversity language remains in the IBHE's materials and its missions; however, since November the Diversifying Faculty Initiative (DFI) has no racial-specific requirements for eligibility, only Pell eligibility, and those who participate in DFI can now only serve in public universities.

Dr. Carr asked Chair Kothari about deferred maintenance funding because when the IBHE FAC meets in different institutions she has noticed that the community colleges are shinier and more sparkly than the public universities, which often have such issues as rough parking lots. She said this is not only because the community colleges are newer but also because they are funded by local property taxes to a good extent. She told senators that Chair Kothari had been noticing the same thing and that there would be more in the budget about deferred maintenance, although she did not follow up to see to what extent that was the case.

Dr. Carr also asked Chair Kothari who the conversation partners might be to really think through the effects of increases in dual credit in early college on higher education as a whole since it can have a lot of effect on what general education can be at the two- or four-year higher ed institutions – especially given the pressure to have everything conform to the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), at least as one option, at every public university. She said Chair Kothari candidly responded that he does not know who the conversation partners are who are thinking through what higher education means as a whole and that much of the drive for dual credit seems to be driven by the desire of parents to find cheaper paths to degrees for their children. Dr. Carr related that Patricia Saleeby, who is in Social Work at Bradley, remarked that parents in a social group she is in (as a parent of teenagers) talk a lot

about how they can “knock out the Gen Ed” and get their children to medical school as quickly as possible. Dr. Carr thinks that the term “knock out the Gen Ed” clearly indicates that it is not considered as valuable.

Dr. Carr related the IBHE FAC spoke with Brian Durham, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Board, about a bill on common course numbering, proposed by Senator Cristina Castro who will be speaking with the IBHE FAC at their next meeting. She said this would force all courses across the state to have the same course numbering, which sounds very expensive and unnecessary since IAI already has this kind of principle. Dr. Carr said the push seems to be coming from community college presidents. She asked if any senators have initial thoughts about it.

Senator Gravitt observed that Kentucky is going to a system whereby all of their institutions would offer courses with the same numbers and prefix; SPA 100 would be the same prefix and number at any college in the state. Ms. Zanger said she has heard from a few students that they would be receptive to this. Ms. Zanger did not attend community college or have any dual credits, but she knows students who did and have had difficulty getting those credits to transfer. She said although she does not know this about WIU specifically, sometimes students have so many issues that they have to retake the course at their new institution, which is a real hassle, so she thinks having common course numbering, from the student perspective, is very beneficial, at least for 100- and 200-level Gen Eds. Dr. Carr asked if these students are from Illinois; Ms. Zanger replied that they are. Dr. Carr remarked that Gen Ed courses should transfer within the state, so it would be interesting to know why they did not. Ms. Zanger clarified that one student from her high school went on to an out-of-state institution, so that may be a different kind of situation, but she stated that there was something brought up in SGA about this, or something similar. Dr. Carr requested that Ms. Zanger provide more information that she can share with others, if possible.

Chair Robinett noted that people often think about these kinds of changes as being somewhat simple, but it would require an enormous amount of programming, reprinting, and time for institutions that are already understaffed in their frontline offices and programming spaces. He wonders if this would be a funded mandate or if this is something that legislators are proposing for their convenience without recognizing the questionable amounts. Dr. Carr related there is a general feeling of strong opposition to the bill by everyone on the IBHE FAC, and it is not really clear if it will go anywhere because it would be so expensive. Chair Robinett reiterated it would be expensive in both time and money. Dr. Carr remarked there is also talk about how much uniqueness each institution can have.

Dr. Carr related that there is not only talk of community colleges offering four-year degrees, which has become an ongoing theme, but also offering three-year bachelor's degrees in high-demand applied fields for place-bound non-traditional students. She asked what senators' initial thoughts are about that. Senator Gravitt replied her initial gut feeling is that bachelor's degrees do not belong in community colleges. She also thinks that universities are, in effect, already offering three-year degrees by accepting all of the dual credit courses coming from high schools. She noted that some students bring in so much dual credit that they are only, effectively, at a university for three years already in some instances. Dr. Carr pointed out that this is happening in regard to number of years but not in regard to number of credits. Senator Gravitt agreed but thinks it still amounts to a three-year degree at a university. She thinks that associate's degrees belong to community colleges and bachelor's degrees to universities.

Senator Wippering remarked it seems like Senator Gravitt and Dr. Carr are saying different things. She thinks Dr. Carr is saying three years of credit hours for a bachelor's degree, which is a different level of credit hours than a four-year bachelor's degree. Dr. Carr remarked that one almost has to always put three-years, four-years, or two-years in quotes because how long it takes can always be variable. Dr. Gravitt pointed out that even if it takes ten years to fulfill all the requirements, it is still a bachelor's degree, and it is the title that is

important; she thinks that if a community college calls their degree a bachelor's degree, it is still apples to apples, regardless of how many credits they are saying it is going to take to complete the degree at their institution. Senator Gravitt thinks it should be called something different if the community college will not require what is needed for a bachelor's degree.

Senator Cole remarked that the effect is that there is less learning taking place because students will take fewer classes, so it is, basically, a race to the bottom. He suspects that others will also want to do this to, hypothetically, attract more students, so that sort of drives down bachelor's degrees. He noted that a lot of countries do offer three-year undergraduate degrees, but in the United States we do four-year degrees, so it would be a radical change. He does not think this change would result in students getting a better education; in fact, he would think the opposite.

Senator Hamner agrees that students would not get a better education with three-year bachelor's degrees, specifically, in part, because community colleges have very different requirements for their faculty, and that changes what is possible for students. Senator Cole pointed out that a lot of faculty at community colleges nowadays have PhDs because there are few jobs for academics. Dr. Carr noted that many of the community college faculty on the IBHE FAC do have PhDs; not all of them do, but it is not uncommon, particularly for those in English.

Chair Robinett expressed his thanks to Dr. Carr for the time she takes representing WIU on the IBHE FAC and the information that she brings back.

III. Reports of Committees and Councils

A. Council on Admission, Graduation, and Academic Standards (CAGAS) (Dan Malachuk, Chair)

1. Proposed Change to Policy on Grade Appeals

Dr. Malachuk related that CAGAS was asked to address the challenges related to faculty being absent to resolve student appeals, particularly related to summer breaks but winter breaks as well. He pointed out that CAGAS proposes that language be added to the Policy on Grade Appeals under Section 1., Informal Resolutions, that "Faculty members and students are encouraged to resolve grade appeals informally." He said other proposed language would make it a little bit easier to bring in others to serve in that role if the faculty member was not available to attend the appeal. Under C.1., Procedures for All Committees, language was changed in the statement, "In the event that the faculty member is **off contract**, on medical leave, **on** sabbatical leave, retired, ~~or is~~ no longer employed by WIU, ~~and is~~ **or otherwise** unable to participate in the hearing, the faculty member's perspective may be represented by **the department chair or another administrator or** another faculty member assigned by the department chair."

NO OBJECTIONS

2. Proposed Changes to CAGAS Instructions for Grade Appeals

The second change does not require Faculty Senate approval and was presented as an informational item regarding a revision to the CAGAS website. Dr. Malachuk said this adds language to the section of the website dealing with CAGAS Appeal Instructions, clarifying that "**Students should seek the assistance of the Office of Equal Opportunity and Access when documenting circumstances related to Title IX or the Student Development and Success Center when documenting circumstances related to personal, medical, or emotional health concerns.**" This replaces previous language stating that "If you are not comfortable providing documentation of your extenuating circumstances to CAGAS, you may work with any or all of the following: Office of Equal Opportunity and Access (for

Title IX concerns); Student Development and Success Center (for medical or personal concerns); or University Counseling Center (for mental health concerns).”

Chair Robinett thanked CAGAS for the work that they have done, reminding senators that the council was given a hefty charge at the second meeting of Faculty Senate in the fall. He said they have been diligent in meeting with and talking to various individuals and collecting information in order to propose the changes brought forward today. He noted that both of these changes are seen as positive contributions to university retention because students will be able to have their appeals adjudicated more quickly than in the past, which has sometimes led to some students choosing not to remain at WIU while their situations are adjudicated. He said the other contribution to retention involves being extra respectful when students are navigating certain situations and should not have to relive those experiences if they do not need to. He thanked senators for being student focused as they considered these proposals.

- B. Senate Nominating Committee (SNC)
(Denise Gravitt, Chair)

SENATE COUNCILS AND COMMITTEES

Council on Admission, Graduation, and Academic Standards (CAGAS)

Samit Chakravorti, Acct/Bus replacing Anjum Razzaque Spr 26 only B&T

Council on General Education (CGE)

Seyfi Turkelli, Math/Phil replacing Clifton Ealy 2028 MATH/NATL SCI

Chair Robinett reminded senators that last semester they approved a change to the Senate Bylaws to facilitate opportunities for service which allows senators, upon the request of the Senate Nominating Committee and approval of Faculty Senate, to serve on Senate councils, which had not be previously allowed and which explains how Senator Chakravorti and Turkelli might serve on CAGAS and CGE.

NO OBJECTIONS

- IV. Old Business – None

- V. New Business

- A. Resolution on Faculty Senate General Education Review and Charge

Whereas, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate is charged with advancing the work of the Senate between meetings and with bringing forward matters requiring Senate action; and

Whereas, Western Illinois University has experienced substantial changes in enrollment patterns, instructional modalities, faculty capacity, and fiscal context that have implications for the structure and effectiveness of General Education; and

Whereas, the Executive Committee, in collaboration with the Council on General Education and Provost Office, has developed a proposed charge requesting that the Council on General Education develop and undertake a comprehensive review of the University’s General Education curriculum, structure, and processes; and

Whereas, the Council on General Education is the appropriate faculty governance body to conduct such a review and to bring forward findings and recommendations to the Faculty Senate for deliberation;

Be it resolved, that the Faculty Senate affirms and authorizes the Executive Committee's request to issue the proposed charge to the Council on General Education; and

Be it further resolved, that acceptance of this resolution does not constitute approval of any future changes to General Education, which shall remain subject to full Faculty Senate review and action in accordance with established governance procedures.

Chair Robinett said the resolution was already moved and seconded by the Executive Committee, so senators can just move into discussion. He pointed out that a charge can originate from the Executive Committee, who can then bring that charge forward in order to explain to the Senate what is being asked of the council or committee. He explained that, given its importance – since General Education is something that permeates through all areas of the university – as well as the amount of work involved in this charge, the Executive Committee wanted to make sure that the full Senate had a chance to review and vote on it. He read the full resolution aloud.

Chair Robinett asked senators to note that any proposed changes or additions to General Education during the period of the Gen Ed review will only be reviewed by the council with the approval of CGE and the Provost's Office. He explained that this means senators are being asked to consider a moratorium on General Education courses from the Spring 2026 through Fall 2027 semesters unless approved by CGE and the Provost's Office. He pointed out that CGE would bring back to the Senate this semester what the process of the review will be – how they will go about collecting the information that they have been asked them. He added that CGE has been informed of this and discussed it within their council. Chair Robinett observed that there is a lot included in this charge; part of the reason for that is that there is a lot of conversation that takes place without evidence, so this charge ensures that senators will understand the structure, the modalities, and the processes that are going into General Education.

Senator Gravitt remarked the resolution seems a little vague to her, but that is probably because she has not been previously involved in these discussions. She asked when the report will be due in light of the process being delineated this semester. Chair Robinett responded that a preliminary report summarizing progress, emerging themes, and initial observations will be provided by the end of the Fall 2026 semester, at which time a realistic timeline by which the review and recommendations can be completed will be provided to Faculty Senate. He said the revisions should be implemented by Fall 2028. He said the idea is that CGE will tell Faculty Senate what they are going to do this semester and will work on it next fall and spring. He added that if there are changes to go into place, that would occur by Fall 2028. Chair Robinett recalled that one of the questions that came up a lot during the last discussion about General Education and the changes that were made was that there were differing perspectives about how long such a review had been ongoing, so ExCo in its charge has tried to scope this out a bit more tightly. He added that the timeline should not restrict, but it should provide that information because there have been times in the past when other Senate councils and committees have come back to tell the Senate that they needed longer to complete their work. He said CGE would certainly have the possibility of doing this, also, if this is too aggressive of a timeline.

Senator Gravitt understands that this review will involve how many categories and credits should be required for General Education, but she wonders if it will also include First-Year Experience (FYE) or if that will be a totally separate review. Associate Provost Baker-Sperry responded that it is similar to a Venn diagram, and there is certainly some crossover. Chair Robinett explained that what the institution is going to do with FYE is something that Associate Provost Baker-Sperry and Senator McArthur are going to be working on. He anticipates there will be some listening groups scheduled so that an informed understanding can be developed of what faculty would like to see regarding FYE. Chair Robinett's opinion is that if an initiative is not going to be funded, then there is no reason to discuss it, so he thinks there will be an effort to make sure the university understands what it might mean for FYE to be successful. He added that while there is some overlap, FYE and General Education are distinct categories, and the governance processes for them are different.

Senator Gravitt asked if the charge means that for at least two years no one will have to worry about changing their General Education programs again; Chair Robinett confirmed that is correct. Senator Hamner asked if Chair Robinett could speak about the language “should be meaningfully integrated,” which is used in a couple of places. He said it catches his eye when discussing the role of written and other communication skills or of critical thinking skills and asking whether these competencies should be meaningfully integrated. Chair Robinett responded that this emerged from conversations among faculty and the administration in regard to what core competencies of General Education should be. He pointed out that WIU’s Philosophy and Goals of General Education document has not been updated for awhile, so these are starting points, not finishing points, of that discussion, and CGE members would be the ones that would expand what these should be.

Senator Gravitt asked if the review will include consideration of AI components because that is pretty much an endemic thing that everyone needs to think about now. Chair Robinett responded that is included in the charge. He said that what ExCo tried to do with this resolution and charge is to give CGE a grounding to where they would be able to consider what some of the big issues are in order to bring back to Faculty Senate what they believe the proposal and timeline should look like. He is grateful that CGE Chair Josh Averbeck and the council have already been having conversations with Associate Provost Baker-Sperry about these things, including an understanding of where Gen Ed has been, combined with the reality that 2026 is very different than 2019 and other historic times.

RESOLUTION APPROVED 17 (14 in-person, 3 zoom) – 0 NO – 0 ABSTENTIONS

B. Resolution to Amend the Faculty Senate Constitution

Whereas, the Faculty Senate Constitution establishes the process for constitutional amendments in Article VI, and

Whereas, at its September 10, 2025 meeting, the Faculty Senate established an Ad Hoc Faculty Senate Governance Committee and charged it with reviewing and proposing revisions to the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws in consultation with Senate councils, committees, and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and

Whereas, the Ad Hoc Committee conducted a comprehensive review of the Constitution, consulted broadly with faculty and Senate leadership, and regularly reported its progress to the Executive Committee and the Faculty Senate, and

Whereas, the proposed amendments are intended to clarify faculty governance roles, align Senate representation and procedures with university organizational structures, and improve transparency and functionality,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Faculty Senate approves the proposed amendments to the Constitution of the Western Illinois University Faculty Senate, as distributed, including revisions to the Preamble and Articles I, II, III, IV, V, VII, and VIII, with Articles VI and IX included for informational and transparency purposes, and

Be it further resolved, that for purposes of parliamentary procedure, each article proposed for amendment shall be considered a separate and divisible part of this resolution, and that separate votes may be taken on each article upon request, consistent with the Faculty Senate’s parliamentary authority, and

Be it further resolved, that upon approval by a two-thirds vote of the total membership of the Faculty Senate, the approved amendments shall be submitted by the Executive Committee to the eligible faculty for ratification in accordance with Article VI of the Faculty Senate Constitution, and

Be it finally resolved, that upon approval by a majority of the faculty voting and subsequent approval by the President of the University, the adopted amendments shall take effect as provided in the Constitution.

Chair Robinett pointed out that this ensures that everyone understands that there are articles included that are purely informational with no changes recommended for them. He pointed out that this is also a divisible resolution, so in two weeks if any senator would like to have the changes to the Constitution voted on as separate articles, the Senate is certainly able to do so.

C. Proposed Changes to the Faculty Senate Constitution

1. First Reading

Chair Robinett observed that the ad hoc Faculty Senate Governance Committee did a tremendous amount of work, and the logic that they put into what they have brought forward to senators is greatly appreciated. He asked senators to talk to their colleagues about these changes because Faculty Senate is the primary way that faculty participate in the shared governance procedures of the institution.

Chair Robinett stated that when the Faculty Senate meets on February 24 to vote on the proposed changes to the Constitution, he will highlight what the Senate would look like in future based upon where faculty members would be located in the schools at that time so that everyone can see where that would parse out.

Senator Gravitt asked if the Faculty Governance Committee will need to meet again to come up with proposed Bylaws changes as well. Chair Robinett responded that he and Ms. Hamm have gone through the Bylaws after looking at the recommendations that have been coming forward from Senate councils and committees. He will work with Ms. Hamm to draft changes to the Bylaws which will then be taken to the ad hoc Faculty Governance Committee for review, after which it will come to the Faculty Senate. He added that it would be greatly appreciated if the ad hoc committee would convene one more time. Senator Gravitt asked if the committee would have that information sometime in March. Chair Robinett responded that once there is a better idea of the schools and senators have voted on the changes to the Constitution, it can go forward to the ad hoc committee because these need to be in place before the committee can act. He added that it would not make sense to bring the Bylaws forward to Faculty Senate before changes to the Constitution are ratified by the faculty.

D. For the Good of the Body

Chair Robinett said that UPI President Merrill Cole emailed that he does not think he can make an informed decision as to whether he wants to be in the School of Humanities without knowing who will be staffing the Dean's office, and Chair Robinett thinks this discussion fits under For the Good of the Body. Chair Robinett explained that, for clarification purposes, he does not typically read the Zoom chat while the meeting is in session; this chat is only to be used for senators communicating quickly, if needed, with those attending remotely. Dr. Cole said he did not know of the procedure, so he sent the email in order to be unobtrusive; he did not want to cut in on senators, but he did want the remark, which is directed to Associate Provost Lin, to be raised. Dr. Cole is concerned that those in the Humanities and Social Sciences will not know who will lead their schools; he is uncomfortable with the dean search being cancelled and being asked so soon to vote on what school he wants to be in. He is not sure that he is the only person who feels this way. Associate Provost Lin acknowledged that she hears what Dr. Cole is saying and understands where a lot of the anxiety and angst in all of this process comes from. She apologized for being about 15 minutes to a meeting of CHASE faculty today and thinks some people, including perhaps Dr. Cole, had left before she got there. She said Interim Dean Mayborn has confirmed that any Humanities faculty who missed today's CHASE meeting can attend

the Social Sciences meeting tomorrow; she thinks that is probably the best avenue to talk this through rather than at Faculty Senate. Associate Provost Lin stated there will never be perfect certainty in any of this, and she would encourage everyone to have as many of these conversations as possible in order to alleviate what concerns they can. She stressed there will be opportunities to determine the leadership of the schools, but the only way to get there is to get people into a room together to talk. She hopes Dr. Cole's schedule will allow for him to join the meeting tomorrow, but if there is need for additional meetings and conversations, that can be arranged.

Senator Gravitt asked if the Provost's Office could appoint an Interim Dean for CHASE so that the process can move forward. Associate Provost Lin responded that Kyle Mayborn has agreed to serve as Interim Dean until August, at which point he plans to move back into faculty. She has some optimism that as some of the other dominos line up and some other issues begin to feel more comfortable, the dean search can be revisited later in the semester and maybe it will go differently. She added that without being a part of this particular search, it is difficult for her to comment on it, but maybe for CHASE it will help to first get a better sense of the schools. Associate Provost Lin thinks she might have been able to have a really good conversation with more of the Humanities faculty today, but she was triple booked and could not make the meeting on time.

Chair Robinett thinks it is worth noting that the Rebuild is a three-phase process; while it has been established what would occur in Year 1 and Year 2 with the goal to have all those things in place during 2026-27, it has not been articulated that it is the expectation that nothing will change from there. He pointed out that when looking at higher education overall, the reality is that depending on what the state does, WIU may have to accommodate and do all kinds of new things in the next three to five years. He wishes we were not living at a time when higher education is culturally as unstable as it is, but that is where we find ourselves. He thinks it is important to recognize the incredible amount of emotional labor people are doing in regard to the uncertainty of what school they are in, who their leaders are, and what may happen at the state level. He thinks the number of worries and uncertainties faculty are being asked to navigate is terrifying. He recognizes that everyone is trying to navigate them together and thinks those opportunities for people to talk to one another are important.

Chair Robinett thanked Dr. Cole for staying to the end of the meeting to share his concern so that those conversations can be put on the table so that people can walk away and have that in their heads as an issue that they need to be sensitive to.

Motion: To adjourn (Gravitt)

The Faculty Senate adjourned at 5:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Annette Hamm
Faculty Senate Office Manager and Recording Secretary