

Dean's Advisory Board

October 4, 2024 | 9 a.m.

Attending: In Person: Shari Veil, Tony Sattler, Emily Doskow, Haley Hamel, Ronald Ng, Tia Newcomer. Online: Kristen Fasbender, LaSharah Bunting, Ericka Galbraith, Jenna Johnson, Juan Perez, Colette Stallbaumer

Shari Veil opened the meeting and asked members in attendance to introduce themselves.

Veil announced that Dionne Searcey and Ben Lupo are rotating off the board. Four new members are confirmed to join the board, Paula Lavigne, Kristin Fasbender, Matt Hansen and Teri Haro. Veil is meeting with another possible board member, Dakarai Aarons, next week.

Veil gave an update on the college's enrollment numbers, noting that undergraduate students are up and graduate students are down significantly. The fall 2024 incoming freshmen class is up 18.8%, producing our largest class in history. Sports is our top recruiting program, but students move majors within the college once they enroll.

Lasharah Bunting asked if the decline in journalism majors a trend is we are seeing. Veil noted that journalism typically attracts around 120 students, some years a bit higher and some years a bit lower. This year is a bit bigger dip than normal.

Veil noted that the College of Business also had their largest freshman class ever, which is important for us because we get about 100 transfer students from business annually.

Veil reported that our retention and graduation rates are also very high, but the college is monitoring sports major retention closely. These students enroll because they are interested in sports but may not be interested in communications and withdraw when they have to take writing courses.

Veil reviewed the college budget situation, noting there has been a budget cut every year since she has been dean, and we are expecting additional budget cuts over the next three years. Currently our planned expenses exceed our budget by about \$600k and we are being supported by temporary cash funding from the Executive Vice Chancellor.

She noted that the upcoming budget cuts will be based on instructional efficiency, where we do well, and research productivity. Although we have improved our research productivity significantly in the past three years, we will be compared to AAU institutions, where faculty have much higher research apportionments.

Angel Jennings asked if a reduction in state tax income was the cause of the budget cuts. Veil stated the main drivers of the cuts are declines in net tuition revenue, inflation,

unfunded mandates from central administration, and the former Interim President's dissolution of a funding agreement between the campus and UNL Athletics.

Veil reviewed some recent comprehensive campaign wins. The college has secured several outright gifts and five year pledges to support scholarships, student programs and student workers.

Veil also reviewed some of the college's fundraising priorities including a renovation of KRNU, sports media scholarships and funding to support faculty and staff professional development.

Veil reported on new academic programs. The college launched an accelerated master's program last spring, that will allow undergraduates to complete a bachelor's and master's in five years, an undergraduate esports certificate was fully approved this summer, and we expect a graduate certificate in sports promotion to be approved this year.

Veil gave an update on the college's work on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. She reported that the week before classes started, the chancellor announced the closure of the university Office of Diversity and Inclusion in an email to faculty and staff.

Veil noted that many of the services that support DEI initiatives on campus were already housed outside the ODI office or were moved outside the office during the last round of budget cuts. She also noted that the closure does not impact the college's DEI activities.

Students were not notified and found out through media sources. They hosted a town hall to discuss the closure with the Chancellor, but he was unable to attend due to other commitments.

Veil noted that all the colleges have their own diversity plans and activities.

Tia Newcomer asked what the impact the closure may have on faculty and student retention and if campus experts, like those in the college, were consulted.

Veil noted that she learned of the closure in a meeting with the Chancellor that occurred at the same time the email announcing the closure was sent.

Jennings noted that while the communication looks haphazard, the timing of the announcement seems intentional, and there should have been more instruction on how to manage this situation.

Jennings asked what was going on at higher levels. Veil noted that two regents voted against the university budget in June because it included funding for DEI. The budget still passed. Also, the Governor claimed credit for the closure of the office, so there may be more happening politically than what has been discussed opening.

Emily Duskow asked if there is capacity to advance DEI within the college.

Veil shared that closing ODI changed nothing about what we are doing within the college.

Ronald Ng asked if this is a trend happening. Veil noted this is happening across higher education. Ohio and Kentucky announced the closure of their DEI offices the same day Nebraska did. Duskow noted it is a trend across corporate America as well.

Veil reviewed some of the college's initiatives. Veil noted that having and following a DEI plan is part of our accreditation requirements.

Newcomer asked Veil if these various pressures are going to impact her retention. Veil noted that while the situation here has challenges, many universities have it worse. For example, Penn State is facing a \$100 million budget deficit. Newcomer asked if there are implications from other university leaders. Veil reported that the chancellor is taking steps to improve communication with the deans.

Bunting asked how this is going to impact enrollment and giving and if these issues have been discussed at higher levels. Veil noted that the college had a donor who wanted to pull their funds because of the closure, and she worked with the donor to ensure his funds went to issues he is passionate about by designating it for students engaged in DEI activities. Veil reported that other colleges have faced similar challenges.

Ng pointed out the college has seen an 18% drop in African American enrollment and a 2% drop in international enrollment. He asked if this trend will continue.

Veil noted that international enrollment tanked during COVID and has been slow to recover. There are efforts to build relationships with pipeline countries including India and Vietnam.

Juan Perez asked what Veil's sense of the pressure to remove DEI in the college is since it's clear the work is now decentralized and there are obvious signs some university leaders aren't interested in it continuing.

Veil stated she plans to continue our work until she is told she can't.

Jennings noted that DEI has become a very easy term for attack and asked if reframing some of this work might be beneficial. She noted there has been a move in newsrooms toward inclusion and belonging and away from programs that target specific groups.

Sattler says his organization has made similar moves, focusing on welcoming all employees as opposed to initiatives labeled as DEI.

Jenna Johnson suggested focusing on the need to reach out, reflect on, and understand individuals who are different from you, which is fundamental to a liberal arts education and the role of journalism. She also noted that it's required for accreditation and suggested pointing to that as a very real consequence of a loss in support for DEI.

Johnson asked how students and faculty of color feel about what is going on. Veil noted that we have a climate survey for faculty and staff and launched a student survey last spring, so this year we will have comparison data. She also noted in her individual meetings with faculty and staff they indicate they feel supported in the college. She also noted that we launched a multicultural students in media club last year.

Perez asked if Veil thinks this will lead to faculty departures. Veil noted she did not think that would happen in our college, but it has already happened across campus.

Veil asked what the board is seeing in their industries. Doskow noted DEI is still very much a focus in hiring and most ad agencies still have a Chief Diversity Officer with goals in place. There is more discussion, but it hasn't changed anything in hiring practices or clients asking for diverse teams on their business.

Tony Sattler noted that all RFPs are asking about diversity numbers across the agency, and we need to bring in diverse students to meet the client's demand.

Jennings noted that we need to stress DEI as part of the accreditation process.

Tia Newcomer noted she has seen a shift in framing, and her organization focuses on inclusion and belonging, which allows them to ladder up the conversation beyond just visible differences between people. She also noted there is a lack of individuals who can have difficult conversations and there needs to be more focus on those skills.

Veil shared the college's Empowered Conversations curriculum which aims to provide every freshman an introduction to civil discourse and difficult conversations. Sattler noted that skill is vital and the college should lean into that idea and maybe rebrand our efforts to be diversity of thought.

Juan Perez noted that he likes the idea of civic participation and representation being the basis for what the college is doing. He noted that these ideas are fundamental to democracy and transcend politics and seems like a positive way to navigate this. It's about free expression and the free exchange of ideas and lean into that.

Veil moved on to a review of our graduate program, noting we have seen a significant decline in enrollment, and asked for the board's feedback to help advance the programs that she can take back to the faculty.

Veil noted that a few challenges we've faced is our the length of the program, which is 36 credit hours compared to most which are 30-33, the IMC capstone requires a theory based paper but we don't require a theory course and the professional journalism capstone is a six credit hour professional project requiring a committee which puts pressure on our teaching faculty.

Veil also noted that we have a graduate certificate in PR & social media, which may be outdated. She also noted that we are launching a certificate in sports promotion hopefully next fall. She noted there might be opportunities in other areas where we have partnerships like covering the courts, risk and crisis communication, military and defense and health communication.

Sattler noted there is a push in advertising against going to grad school and toward upskilling programs like Google certifications. He noted that positioning grad programs to employers will be important.

Veil asked about potential partnerships with businesses to offer exclusive programs. Sattler noted that the curriculum would have to be in areas of growth like performance media, AR/VR, 3D, AI, project management, data science and coding languages. The curriculum the college has is expanding on undergraduate but not upskilling employees. Veil noted that certificates could meet this need, but the approval process is lengthy and up to two years.

Newcomer asked Veil what the benefits of graduate school are. Veil noted that most of the folks she talks to want to get into teaching, where a graduate degree is required, but our master's degrees are geared toward professionals, not potential faculty. The college was moving in that direction with a proposal for a fully online Ph.D., but it was dependent on a different budget model to support it, which is not moving toward.

Newcomer asked what happens if we do not get our graduate numbers up. Veil stated that if they fall so low we are not meeting CCPE requirements, we will have to close the programs, but we are not at that point yet.

Jennings noted there might be opportunities in niche programs where professionals are looking to upskill, like investigative journalism. Veil noted there may be an opportunity for niche programming in covering the courts. In this area there would be a good tie with the law school where we already have a partnership and shared alumni.

Sattler noted that upskilling certificates in niche areas could be feeders for a more comprehensive master's program. Newcomer noted this could feed into a media management master's program.

Sattler noted that combining upskilling certificates in high demand areas that could be stacked into a larger graduate degree would be appealing. There are one off programs for skills, but they can level them up.

Veil noted one reason skills programs are popular is because the entry process is easy while applying for graduate school is labor intensive. She also noted that the names of the programs may be outdated. For example, IMC was big in the early 2000s. Doskow noted that ad people like their buzzwords but this needs to be timeless so make the names reflect the core skills directly.

Bunting noted that people in the profession who are seeking graduate degrees are looking for better positions, so the upskilling piece is key.

Doskow asked if we should be looking outside the traditional employers and more into corporate communications or nonprofits. Sattler noted that many people who pursue certifications want to be consultants.

Johnson noted that she sees opportunities in niche areas like partnering with the law school. She also noted an area that lacks educational opportunities is in newsroom management or leadership, an MBA light-type program.

Sattler noted a lot of what is needed is in the curriculum but needs repackaging to fit with the professional environment. He noted the hook is upskilling in a certain discipline but then you sell the master's as a well-rounded experience to upscale your career.

Newcomer agreed but noted that the biggest missing piece is management. Veil noted we cannot have a management program because the College of Business owns that. Newcomer suggested calling it leadership.

Perez suggested being very explicit with students about how the skills build to the degree and then builds to the job students want. He also noted that he is interested in some of these niche spaces like defense communication.

Fasbender noted that she is not sure where the world of sports fits into all of this but there are lots of partnership potentials. She noted that she considered getting a master's earlier in her career, but it would have been an MBA.

Veil noted that the sports promotion certificate was launched due to student and industry demand. We had a lot of sports broadcasters coming in but that is not where the jobs are.

Doskow suggested shopper marketing and influencer marketing as other opportunities. The program definitely needs to have a focus on performance indicators and how to grow audiences.

Veil concluded the meeting by asking the board to complete the graduate curriculum survey.