Last year’s Faculty Senate had many notable accomplishments, but none was more important than updating the Faculty Handbook. Like most worthwhile Senate activities, it was a joint endeavor with the administration. The Handbook is a particularly significant document. It includes many important policies and procedures, such as those for tenure and promotion, merit reviews, salary raises, search committees for academic administrators, faculty rights with respect to teaching and research, and dismissal of faculty members.

The previous version of the Handbook was woefully out of date. The Handbook effort during the last academic year did not seek to make substantive changes to policies and procedures, but instead sought to incorporate all relevant policies and procedures approved since the publication of the 2000 edition into an updated Handbook. Given the significance of the Handbook and thus the process to revise it, I want to provide a brief chronology of some of the events that culminated in the 2011 edition of the Handbook.

During the spring of 2010, the Senate Agenda Committee (SAC) staffed a special ad
hoc committee and charged it with the task of working with the Provost’s Office for the purpose of updating the Handbook. In late October, the Provost informed the Senate about a memo from Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees (BOTs) in which the Committee directed the Provost to assume leadership of the effort to revise the Handbook. This Committee also requested that any proposed substantive revisions of the Handbook be presented to the BOTs sequentially in a section-by-section process that reflects the major parts of the Handbook. At the December 15, 2010 meeting, the Senate unanimously approved a resolution to develop a “modular and web-based Faculty Handbook [to] be maintained by the Faculty Senate on its website.” A few days later, the Provost approved the resolution.
At the end of March, the Provost’s Office in collaboration with Senate’s Handbook committee developed a web-based draft of the updated Handbook. Shortly thereafter, SAC found what it considered to be some significant omissions. The Provost’s Office informed the SAC that most of these resolutions could not be included in the updated Handbook because they did not contain specific language indicating that they should be in the Handbook and the Board had not approved them as Handbook resolutions. Nonetheless, the Provost’s Office assured the SAC that the policies and procedures contained in these resolutions remained in effect.

At the last Senate meeting in April, the SAC presented the draft Handbook to the Senate for approval. SAC also asked the Senate to pass a set of resolutions that requested that the BOTs vote on including five omitted resolutions in the updated Handbook. At that Senate meeting and immediately prior to the vote, the Provost verbalized his support for the inclusion of the five omitted resolutions in the Handbook. The Senate also again voted for the handbook to reside on the Senate’s website. The Senate unanimously passed these Handbook resolutions.

In June, SAC learned that the BOTs approved the new Handbook, but declined to take any action on the five resolutions. The Academic Affairs Committee of the BOTs reiterated that it wanted any proposed changes to the Handbook in a section-by-section format. However, it is important to note that the five resolutions did not contain any new policies and procedures. Both the Senate and the administration had previously approved all these policies and procedures. The secretary of the BOTs had stated that three of the resolutions did not need BOT approval. One resolution even had the approval of the Senate, the President and BOTs, but did not explicitly indicate that it should be included in the Handbook. The policies and procedures associated with these resolutions have been in effect for multiple years. Their inclusion was intended to make the 2011 Handbook a truly updated and complete version of the 2000 Handbook.

What are these five omitted resolutions? One resolution contains the updated merit procedures. Two other resolutions recognized the establishment of two standing Senate
committees: the Library Policies and Procedures Committee and the Research Policy Oversight Committee. A fourth resolution focused on faculty workload. A fifth omitted resolution concerned compensation for full-time, tenure-track and tenured faculty, who teach one or more courses during the summer beyond what is required in their base contracts. This current policy states that “the amount of compensation …will be determined by the individual colleges at rates appropriate to the college’s circumstances.” However, the 2011 Handbook now contains the outdated policy that states these faculty “will receive payment at the rate of 1/6 of their base salary for each standard four credit hour semester course.” This is a confusing state of affairs.

Despite the Senate’s unanimous votes to include the new Handbook on the Senate’s website and the Provost’s approval of the December 15th resolution, the BOTs broke with a longstanding tradition, and voted to give custodianship of the Handbook to the Provost’s Office. Therefore, Handbook now resides on a website maintained by the Provost’s Office.

I relate this series of events not for the purpose of affixing blame, but in the hope that by sharing my understanding of the facts we can avoid similar scenarios in the future. The Handbook is much too important a document to be subjected to such a wide gap in expectations. It feels very odd to discuss a problem of this significance when the University by almost any other measure is doing so well. Nonetheless, when great organizations stumble or even fall, it is not always because of unforeseen external obstacles or threats. Indeed, organizations can also be crippled by a failure to accurately diagnose and collaboratively solve their internal difficulties.

As a result of the Handbook and related events, the 2011-2012 SAC contacted the President and Provost. The President set in motion a series of promising meetings between SAC and members of the senior leadership team to address the broad issue of shared governance and sources of tension between the faculty and the administration, including the Handbook process. The initial meetings with the senior leadership team are encouraging. My hope is that our shared purpose of doing what is right for the
University will prevail, and we will find many more areas of agreement than disagreement on governance issues. If there is one lesson we have learned during the last 20 years it is this: When faculty and administration move in tandem there is very little that this great University cannot accomplish.

Thus, one of SAC’s proposed priorities for this year will be strengthening shared governance. In conjunction with the administration, SAC proposes to develop problem-solving mechanisms for the purpose of improving collaboration and mutual respect, and preventing conflict between administration and the faculty. Not only must we repair the current situation, but we must also use it as an opportunity to prevent the recurrence of problems between the faculty and administration. It is similarly important to clarify the Senate’s, the college faculties’ and the colleges’ roles and responsibilities in shared governance.

We also want to work toward ensuring that the SAC or the relevant Senate committee has appropriate representation in the formative, early discussions of major academic initiatives and policies. Faculty members often have expertise and experiences that are relevant to initial shaping of ideas that will advance the overall aims of the university. Also, there is no better way to increase acceptance to change than to involve the Faculty Senate in the initial big decisions.

SAC is committed to improving communication between the Senate and faculty as well as between the SAC and the Senate, and increasing faculty and senators’ participation in the Senate and Senate committees. We need your help to stay on course. It is all too easy for leaders to insulate themselves from things they do not want to hear. The Japanese adage, “All of us are smarter than any one of us”, succinctly captures the importance of making effective use of our collective intelligence. Faculty involvement is the single best determinant of an effective Senate.

Promoting diversity is a core value of the University and one of the “Keys to Success” in the University’s Academic Plan. We will ask one of the Senate’s committees to assess
the University’s efforts to recruit, retain and advance faculty of diverse backgrounds, and reaffirm the importance of diversity as a core value of the University. Recruitment is important, but by itself insufficient to promote diversity. We also must have an infrastructure that facilitates the retention and advancement of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The SAC applauds the Provost’s Office’s support of the implementation of policies and procedures that help faculty achieve an appropriate balance between work and home life. This year we need to build upon the work done by the Provost's Office and last year’s joint committee on Work-Life Balance Committee.

Given that several concerns have been raised about current status of non-tenure track faculty, we propose to examine the status, roles, rights, and responsibilities of non-tenure track faculty at Northeastern, including, but not limited to professional development and participation and representation in faculty governance.

We want to collaborate with the administration for the purpose of evaluating the implementation and initial outcomes of the hybrid budget system and in doing so, put into action the recommendations of last year’s Financial Affairs Committee, including its suggestion to maximize transparency in the administration of the new budget system.

The SAC will continue to emphasize strategies for enhancing the freshmen students’ educational experience. Although all of a student’s years at Northeastern are important, freshman year is particularly important because it marks a major transition in the student’s life and can have a important impact on his / her subsequent years at the University. Pivotal to faculty’s efforts to continuously improve instruction is having access to good data about the impact of instruction on students. Therefore, we will be examining ways to improve the implementation and response rate of TRACE. However, we cannot afford to rely solely on TRACE as a measure of the effectiveness of our instruction and curriculum. Thus, the Senate will be collaborating with the Provost's Office for purpose of identifying additional measures of student outcomes, including
direct measures of what our students are learning from our core undergraduate curriculum. The Student Government Association has contacted the SAC about two other important issues: updating our academic honesty policy for students and the affordability of textbooks. We look forward to collaborating with the students on these issues.

Because so many of my remarks were related to shared governance, it is seems only fitting to close my talk on that theme. In particular, I want to recommend to you a seminal but brief document entitled the “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities.” Three prominent organizations, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), collaborated on the development of this document. Northeastern University belongs to both American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The document does not describe specific practices, but instead focuses on fundamental governance principles that most esteemed universities, including Northeastern University, have subscribed to for many decades. These principles have stood the test of time. The statement on governance can be found at this link:


Thank you.