NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty Senate Leadership Committee (FSLC) Meeting

MINUTES

Facilitator and Chair: Oladayo Bello
Date: 24 September 2026
Time: 4:00-5:00pm
Location: ROOM: Breland Hall Room 333
ZOOM: https://nmsu.zoom.us/j/86577180548
Attendance: Senators (Abdelkefi, Bello, Burkardt, Campbell, Cook, Erickson, Garay, Holguin, Kemp, Lopez Gallagher, Manis, Mason, Murga, Obregon, Pimentel, Sandstrom, Sievert, Anaya, Palacios, Figueroa, Kemp, Hanson, Murga, Tian). Guests (Dean Kevin Comerford) and Recording Sec. Cisneros

Call to Order

- At 4:01pm, the meeting was called to order, and VC Bello welcomed all attendees.

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1. Welcome and agenda approval

- The agenda was presented for approval, there were no additions or changes, a motion to approve the agenda was moved, seconded and the agenda was approved.

2. Approval of minutes of 08/27 meeting

- The minutes of the previous meeting were presented. There were no additions or changes, a motion to approve the minutes was moved, seconded and the minutes were approved.

3. Guest introduction and presentation

Dean Kevin Comerford visited the committee to provide update on NMSU ADA compliance process. His talking points were as follows:

- **Overview and Compliance Timeline**

Dean Comerford provided an update on NMSU's digital accessibility compliance initiative and reviewed recommendations from the taskforce's report submitted to the provost. The initiative responds to the U.S. Department of Justice ruling issued in April, which requires public universities and other covered entities to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 standards by April 24, 2027. He acknowledged that achieving 100% compliance by the deadline may not be feasible. The immediate goal is to establish the necessary infrastructure, demonstrate measurable progress, and make a good faith effort toward compliance. The initiative is expected to gain momentum over the coming months, with full compliance anticipated as a longer term goal.

- **Scope of the Accessibility Initiative**

NMSU's digital accessibility efforts are proceeding in two primary areas:

  - Website accessibility: Marketing and Communications has already established an accessibility infrastructure in response to a 2023 Office for Civil Rights complaint against the university. This effort focuses on ensuring that university websites meet accessibility standards.
  - Course materials and administrative documents: A separate initiative will address course materials, Canvas content, and administrative documents produced by units such as finance and administration and human resources. This includes publicly accessible documents, student facing forms, and materials distributed through offices such as financial aid. The website initiative does not encompass all course materials, canvas content, or administrative documents, except for certain student facing materials on marketing and communications websites.

- **Steering Committee and Communication Plan**

A steering committee has been established to coordinate the course materials and administrative document accessibility initiative. The committee meets twice monthly. Representatives have been identified for participating units, although additional representatives are still needed from the College of Arts and

Sciences. Dr. Stefan Zollner is currently representing the college, and Dean Enrico Pontelli has committed to identifying additional volunteers. A digital accessibility website is expected to launch soon and will provide guidance on inventorying, prioritizing, and updating digital content. A campuswide email announcement will follow the website launch to introduce the initiative, outline its goals, and direct faculty and staff to available resources. Additional staffing and technical support are also being considered to assist departments with processing and updating digital content.

- **Accessibility Software and Technical Support**

Dean Comerford reported that the provost approved the acquisition of an enterprise accessibility software application after it was reviewed by the FACT committee. The application will integrate with Canvas and also support users who do not use Canvas. The software is expected to support large scale accessibility remediation and conversion of: Digital video files, including closed captions and audio descriptions, PDF files, Microsoft Office documents, Canvas course materials, LaTeX files and other complex instructional materials. The software is currently in procurement, and Academic Technology has volunteered to host the application. Implementation is anticipated in the early spring semester. Until the application becomes available, departments will need to use existing accessibility tools. The university also plans to provide templates, training, and instructions to help faculty and staff create accessible digital content. He offered to distribute a two page handout containing a link to a live demonstration of the software, along with the taskforce report and presentation talking points.

- **Departmental Responsibilities and Implementation Process**

Content creators and departments responsible for producing student accessible materials will be expected to update their own content to meet ADA accessibility standards, with support from the course materials initiative. Colleges and departments will also assist in estimating and reporting progress toward compliance. The proposed workflow process for each unit includes the following steps:

1. Inventory digital content: Conducting a high level inventory of digital materials produced or maintained by the unit.
2. Identify obsolete content: Removing inactive or outdated materials that are no longer needed for instruction or administrative activities by archiving them offline, thus eliminating public/student access.
3. Prioritize active content: Ranking the remaining materials according to their use and importance in teaching and administrative operations.
4. Update current materials: Using existing tools, including Adobe Acrobat accessibility features, Microsoft Office Accessibility Checker, YouTube captioning tools, and other university licensed resources, to remediate current course materials.
5. Address secondary materials: Addressing secondary materials as time permits, once current instructional materials have been updated.
6. Process complex materials: Where appropriate, deferring complex videos, LaTeX documents, mathematics content, and STEM instructional materials until the new enterprise software becomes available in the spring.

The university recognizes that departments will have different accessibility needs and that some materials will require more specialized technical assistance.

Questions/Comments	Dean K. Comerford response/s
Sen. Burkardt raised concerns about the challenges of making Physics Department materials accessible, particularly equations, graphics, figures, and other specialized instructional content. She noted that available technology has not adequately addressed these conversion needs and questioned how instructors could reasonably be expected to remediate all materials themselves.	Dean Comerford acknowledged the challenge and explained that the planned software is expected to support LaTeX conversion. He also indicated that technical specialists may be needed and that the university hopes to secure funding for student assistance in departments requiring intensive remediation.

Sen. Sandstrom asked for who would be responsible for verifying the accessibility of third party content used by student facing organizations, including library databases.	Dean Comerford explained that the current interpretation of the Department of Justice ruling does not require the university to ensure compliance of contracted third party content providers. The university plans to collect Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) reports from vendors, identify which products currently meet accessibility standards, and determine the compliance status and anticipated timelines for those that do not.

4. Vice Chair report

- Moved to last item (see Announcement and Remarks)

5. Committee reports and feedback

- Research and Creative Activity Chair, Sen. Holguin reported that the Research and Creative Activities (RCA) Committee met on September 15. To ensure a quorum, the meeting was moved up by one hour and began at approximately 3:06 p.m. A quorum was established, and the committee conducted official business. The committee reviewed Proposition 02-26/27, Open Access Publication Fund Allocation, Committee Award Rules Amendments. After the review, the committee voted to pass the proposition as originally submitted. During the discussion, committee members considered the dissemination of other faculty products, including video products and other creative works. However, the committee determined that the Open Access Publication Fund was specifically intended to support article processing charges. Therefore, the committee did not pursue further amendments to expand the scope of the proposition.
- Access, Opportunity, and Outreach Chair, Sen. Lopez-Gallagher reported that the Access, Opportunity, and Outreach Committee met on September 16. A quorum was established, and all committee members were present. The committee welcomed two guests: Dr. Linda Scholz, Vice President for the Office of Land-grant Excellence, Access and Partnership, and Sen. K.T. Manis, Chair of the University Planning Committee. The committee conducted official business and considered Proposition 03-26/27, a bill to amend Proposition 05-23/24 to establish a voting Faculty Senate seat on the NMSU Global Faculty Advisory Council. Following a briefing on the legislation by Sen.Manis, the committee voted unanimously to recommend due pass as submitted. No amendments were proposed. The committee also discussed the elevator speech document presented by Chair Finlator. Due to time constraints, members agreed to review the document and continue working on it at the next committee meeting in October.
- Budget and Resources Chair, Sen. Erickson reported that the Budget and Resources Committee met on September 8 for its first meeting of the academic year. Committee members introduced themselves, and Kim Rumford from the Budget Office joined the meeting. The committee conducted official business and considered Resolution 04-26/27, a resolution about establishing a task force on dual-career recruitment and retention. Sen. Erickson explained that dual-career recruitment and retention refer to situations in which partners are considering relocating to New Mexico, and the university seeks to recruit one partner while identifying employment opportunities for the other to facilitate successful recruitment. The resolution was originally sponsored by Sen. Holguin. The committee voted to recommend due pass as amended. The amendments were modest and focused primarily on reducing the proposed task force membership requirements to establish a more manageable committee size. No substantive changes were made to the resolution beyond the membership revisions.
- University Planning Chair, Sen. Manis reported that the University Planning Committee met on September 9 at 4:30 p.m. A quorum of most committee members was present. The committee considered Proposition 05-26/27: Establishing a Task Force for Innovation and Entrepreneurship achievements in Promotion and Tenure and Faculty Evaluation. Sen. Holguin attended as a guest and presented the proposition. Committee members asked several questions, and some members joined as sponsors or co-sponsors of the legislation. During the discussion, Sen. Holguin proposed an amendment to Charge 1, revising the language from developing and administering an institutional survey to coordinating and building upon relevant institutional survey efforts, where available, and conducting any additional assessments necessary. The amendment was proposed because a survey was already scheduled for distribution, and the task force should analyze the results rather than

develop a new survey instrument. Sen. Holguin provided a redlined copy reflecting the proposed changes. The committee unanimously approved a motion to recommend due pass for the proposition as amended. The committee also reviewed its overall charge to clarify the responsibilities of the University Planning Committee for both returning and new members. Members discussed several Faculty Center leadership priority topics to help determine areas of focus for upcoming meetings. These topics included Proposition 11-25/26, Generative AI and Faculty Annual Performance Evaluations; internal awards; the multidisciplinary building; Higher Learning Commission (HLC) reporting; and pathways to tenure.

- Student Success Chair, Sen. Campbell reported that the Student Success Committee met on September 17 and discussed two primary agenda items. The first was establishing the committee's priorities for the academic year, which prompted extensive discussion among members. The second agenda item was a proposed modification to ARP 4.62. Associate Vice Provost Cecilia Hernandez attended the meeting to address questions and receive feedback from committee members. No vote was taken because the proposal is still under revision and was not presented in final form. The questions, comments, and feedback gathered during the discussion will be forwarded to the Policy Steering Committee for consideration and revision.
- Curriculum and Planning Chair, Sen. Sandstrom reported that the committee met at its regularly scheduled time and established a quorum. The committee's primary business was the review of ARP 4.65, although the proposition number was provided from memory and may require confirmation. Sen. Manis attended the meeting, and members discussed the proposed item. The committee agreed to move the item forward with a recommendation of due pass. Sen. Sandstrom noted that the committee report had already been submitted for the following week's meeting.

6. New Business and New Assignments

- None

7. Other Business: Discussion, Concern and Questions

- **Discussion of NMSU Forward Strategic Vision and Proposed Faculty Senate Legislation**
  - Sen. Sievert presented an update regarding President Ferme's strategic vision, NMSU Forward, which was discussed during the August 12 FSLC/Admin meeting. President Ferme had invited faculty to provide feedback on the strategic direction, which outlines four overarching goals intended to encompass student success, faculty success, staff success, and organizational success. Sen. Sievert submitted a letter to President Ferme on September 15 expressing concerns about the absence of substantive research and creative activity goals and measurable performance indicators in the strategic vision. He noted that the document emphasized student success but did not provide a comparable vision for NMSU's research mission or its continued pursuit of Carnegie R1 status, which had been a primary goal of the previous strategic plan, LEADS 2025. Sen. Sievert outlined questions raised by faculty regarding how research productivity, publications, citations, graduate education, and other scholarly contributions would be measured. He also expressed concern that the document's language regarding enrollment revenue and fiscal sustainability could be interpreted as limiting salary and staffing decisions to enrollment revenue, without accounting for research grants, donor contributions, and other university revenue sources. Sen. Sievert reported receiving a response from President Ferme on September 22. The president reaffirmed NMSU's commitment to strengthening its R1 status and clarified that increasing undergraduate enrollment was not intended to come at the expense of research and creative activity. President Ferme acknowledged that research related goals and metrics should be made more explicit in the strategic vision and agreed that enrollment revenue should not be the sole consideration in salary and staffing decisions. He also identified ongoing investments in grant support personnel, graduate assistant tuition remission and compensation, and campus improvements as evidence of the university's continued commitment to research. The President indicated that he would further communicate this commitment to the campus community in an upcoming campus dispatch. Sen. Sievert then presented proposed emergency legislation drafted in collaboration with Chair Finlator and Sen. Burkardt. The legislation is

intended for consideration by the full Faculty Senate at its October 1 meeting. The proposal requests amendments to NMSU Forward to include specific goals and measurable indicators related to research, creative activity, and graduate education, including graduate student degree completion and career preparedness. A redlined document was prepared to illustrate suggested revisions, with recommendations for developing key performance indicators in consultation with faculty. Sen. Sievert emphasized that the proposed additions would recognize the full range of scholarly and creative activity across all disciplines and that the legislation was intended to offer constructive recommendations to university leadership.

- **Concerns and questions**
  - Sen. Erickson questioned why the legislation was designated as emergency legislation, noting that such legislation should generally address matters that are either uncontroversial or require urgent action. Sen. Sievert explained that an executive retreat involving the President, Provost, and other university leaders was scheduled for early November, and the legislation needed to be considered before decisions regarding the strategic vision became established. The accelerated timeline was intended to allow faculty input to be incorporated before that process advanced further.
  - Sen. Holguin asked whether Sen. Sievert had identified who was involved in developing NMSU Forward. Sen. Sievert indicated that he had not specifically asked the President about the document's authorship but observed that the omission of research related goals suggested that important perspectives may not have been represented. He also noted that the President had indicated the incoming Vice President for Research (VPR) would need to be involved in developing additional details.
  - Sen. Erickson and Holguin raised concerns that outreach also appeared to be absent from the strategic vision. After checking the document, Sen. Holguin confirmed that the term did not appear. Sen. Erickson offered to draft an additional whereas clause addressing outreach so that it could be incorporated into the proposed legislation. The participants agreed that research, creative activity, graduate education, and outreach should be considered in the broader effort to ensure that the strategic vision reflects the university's full mission.
  - Senator Campbell expressed concern about the suggestion that the incoming VPR would help establish the university's research priorities, emphasizing that university leadership should provide direction while working collaboratively with faculty. Senator Sievert acknowledged the concern and clarified that he was uncertain how broadly to interpret the president's statement.
  - Further discussion addressed the role and structure of the incoming research leadership position. Senators Abdelkefi, Holguin, and Burkardt discussed uncertainty regarding the position's responsibilities, including whether it would primarily focus on research leadership or financial matters related to grants and contracts. Participants noted that available position descriptions and communications had contributed to confusion about the role. One senator reported having been invited to serve on the search committee but did not yet know its chair or full membership. The senator agreed to seek clarification about the search process and the information that could be shared with the Faculty Senate.

8. Announcement and Remarks

- **Vice Chair report:** Sen. Bello reported on Faculty Senate representations, voting on changes to Faculty Sensate Constitution and Bylaws, external committee appointments, university initiatives, and upcoming leadership searches.
  - *Faculty voting on proposed changes to the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws*: voting opened on September 16 and would remain open through September 30. Senators were encouraged to share the information with their constituents and promote participation to ensure that faculty voices were represented in the vote.
  - *Open Senate seats:* Regarding senate and external committee representation, Sen. Bello announced that Prof. Michael Webb had been appointed to fill the open seat representing the Grants campus.

The vacant seat for the HEST is filled by Prof. Finno-Velasquez. Sen. Tian had agreed to join Sen. Abdelkefi on the Graduate Faculty Council to represent the Faculty Senate. The Senate also seeks a representative on the Faculty Senate Library Advisory Council, with Sen. DeBlieck coordinating efforts to fill the position. An election would be held if multiple candidates expressed interest.

- *Update on the Integrated Campus Development Plan Core Working Group:.* Following a request from the Vice President of Finance for a Faculty Senate representative, Sen. Pimentel and Mikkelson volunteered. Sen. Mikkelson subsequently withdrew to allow Sen. Pimentel to serve as the Faculty Senate's representative.
- *Vice President for Global search:* virtual interviews had been conducted with ten candidates the previous week. Four candidates had been selected for campus visits scheduled over the following two weeks. Faculty senators were encouraged to attend the candidate sessions and participate in the process. Additional details regarding the visits were available through the communications distributed by Ms. Brianna Garza in Human Resources.
- *Work of the Academic Program Sustainability Ad Hoc Committee:* Associate Vice Provost Cecilia Hernandez had presented a report to the Board of Regents and the Student Success Committee regarding the committee's findings. At its final meeting, the committee reviewed the status of programs identified as low-yielding or at risk and requested that those programs develop action plans within specified time frames. Sen. Bello clarified that the process was intended to provide recommendations to the Board of Regents regarding how these programs could improve their performance and sustainability, rather than to initiate automatic program closures.

Questions/Comments	Sen. Bello's response/s
Vice President for Global Candidate Visits: Senator Lopez-Gallagher asked whether a virtual attendance option would be available for the upcoming Vice President for Global candidate visits, noting that the invitation did not include a Zoom option.	She indicated that the visits were expected to be conducted in person but agreed to request a remote participation option for Faculty Senate members who could not attend on the main campus.

Discussions
Importance of equitable participation in leadership searches for faculty across the NMSU system, particularly those based at community college campuses: Senate members noted that previous candidate visits had generally lacked virtual participation options and suggested that future events should be planned to accommodate faculty regardless of location. A telephone connection using a speakerphone was mentioned as a possible alternative if virtual participation could not be arranged. The discussion emphasized the importance of ensuring that faculty across the system have meaningful opportunities to engage with leadership candidates.
Faculty Senate Social Gathering: Senator Holguin proposed organizing an informal, off-site social gathering to provide senators with an opportunity to connect outside formal Senate meetings. The event would be planned to accommodate senators from the main campus and other NMSU locations. Sen. Holguin suggested the Rio Grande Winery as a possible venue because of its indoor and outdoor gathering spaces. Senators expressed support for exploring the idea, including the possibility of using Senate resources to assist with expenses. The Recording Secretary agreed to help coordinate the planning process and gather information about suitable arrangements.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm by Chair Bello thanking everyone for a productive afternoon. The next meeting is scheduled for 10/29, 4-5pm.

Action Items

Action Item	Responsible Member/s	Target Timeline
Review of elevator speech document presented by Chair Finlator.	AOO	October
Questions, comments, and feedback gathered on the proposed modification to ARP 4.62 to be forwarded to the Policy Steering Committee for consideration and revision.	SS	November
Forward proposed legislation on NMSU Forward amendment to Faculty Senate vice chair and the Research and Creative Activities Committee, with the intention of bringing it before the full Senate on October 1.	Sen. Sievert	Before October 1
Additional language addressing outreach in NMSU forward to be incorporated into the legislation.	Sen. Erickson	End of the week
The coordination and planning process of the social gathering includes information about suitable venues and arrangements.	Recording Secretary	TBD