

Professional Concerns Committee

Minutes for October 16, 2025

Hybrid Meeting (SU 109 and Zoom Conferencing Software), 3:15 pm

Members in Attendance: Deborah Amend, Ali Balapour, Eric Barker, Robert Brice, Ada Cencki, Whittney Darnell, Jaesook Gilbert, Allyson Graf, Shelli Janning, Erin Kelley, Jang-Chul Kim, Julie Mader-Meersman, Dee Mornah, Jered Moses, Makoto Nakamura, Joe Nolan, Michael Providenti, Tamara O’Callaghan, Kathleen Quinn, Holly Riffe (Chair), Kurt Sander, Catie Shelton, Jessica Taylor, Maggie Whitson, Matt Zacate

Guests in Attendance: Provost Diana McGill, Janel Bloch, Faculty Senate President Jacqueline Emerine, Amy Gellen, Grace Hiles, Sukhee Kim, Danielle McDonald, Steve Slone

Members Not in Attendance: Gina Fieler, Ihab Saad, David Tataw

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1. Call to Order, Adoption of the Agenda
 - The meeting was called to order at 3:15pm.
 - The agenda was adopted as distributed.
 2. Adoption of the minutes from the October 2 meeting.
 - The minutes for the 10/2/2025 meeting were adopted as distributed.
 3. Chair’s Report and Announcements
 - The chair acknowledged the loss of 3 recently deceased faculty members and the RIF (Reduction in Force) that impacted 18 staff members. There was a reflection on the bonds between faculty and staff and how we can care for one another.
 4. Guest VP of Human Resources (Amy Gellen)
 - Reduction in Force (RIF) Conversation
 - HR has not and will not provide a list of names. That is a privacy concern. A list was compiled outside HR and there was an error on that list.
 - The conversations with those impacted were held in their departments because it was deemed inappropriate to make those who were impacted walk across campus. Also, it was thought it would be better to allow someone to be close to their belongings if they decided to leave. Some meeting locations were changed if necessary to maintain privacy. People were given many options as to how they would prefer to collect belongings.
 - There was recognition that this was difficult for those who were impacted and those who are still here.
 - The RIFs happened at the beginning of the month to give those impacted more time to process since their benefits run through the end of the month and it is easier to seek employment before the holidays.

- Employees were offered severance. Tuition waivers were extended to spring and summer.
- Vacancies were cut before the RIFs. Other funds (e.g., instructional equipment, faculty reserves) were also cut first.
- Discussion:
 - People in other departments need to be aware of positions that have been cut so that we are not referring students to people or positions (e.g., advisors) that have been cut. A: we will need to work together to ensure continuous service.
 - Was this round one of multiple RIFs? A: No, there are no plans at this moment for additional RIFs.
 - What is the expectation for any announcement on 3/31/25 for Clinical, Teaching, and Professors of Practice (CTP)? A: The RIFs were to address the FY26 budget. The FY27 budget process has not started yet. Cannot speak to any expectation about 3/31/25 notice (which is a date specified by the Faculty Handbook).
 - There were concerns about those in KERS. A: Access to KERS is a function of age and years of service. Unsure what other agencies use KERS.
 - The university's RIF policy has not been updated in years. A: This policy is a placeholder. Additional policies will be coming to faculty for review in November.
 - Is there support for those who have been RIFed? (e.g., letters of recommendation, networking). A: When positions open, those impacted by RIFs will be invited to apply. Those RIFed have a document that indicates the positions were eliminated due to budget and not performance issues.
 - Can those RIFed use Handshake? A: That will be explored. It looks as if an NKU email account is not necessary. There is also a job search group through Kenton County Public Library (<https://www.kentonlibrary.org/nkyag/>).
 - With an abrupt termination of email, there is the risk of loss of professional relationships and networks. Could email access be retained for those whose positions were cut for budget rather than performance reasons? A: The email cut off is a discussion with managers. IT has backups and could provide contact lists for those who have their email ended.
 - How was law enforcement involved in the RIFs? A: This was a rumor. There was no law enforcement involvement. One staff member who was RIFed knew an officer personally and asked for their support.
 - Typically, RIFs should not be announced ahead of time as it leads to increased fear, stress, and anxiety.
- Policies Conversations

- Comments are being collected through 10/31/25. There have been recommendations for word choice in the dress code policy.
- There was request that the section in the dress code policy regarding what cannot be worn be removed for two reasons. The comment is quoted as follows:

"The clothing apparel listed may be problematic right now, but fashion changes very quickly. The banned clothing items listed in the proposed policy will quickly become dated. For example, if we were writing such a list in the 1980s, the wearing of denim overalls with no shirt underneath would probably be prohibited. Why would it be on such a list? Back then, many of us wanted to be in the 1982 music video for "Come on, Eileen," by Dexy's Midnight Runners, but nobody does now. So, part of this is a dating issue, fashion changes. But our bigger concern is the prohibited clothing listed in the proposed policy, primarily, if not exclusively, focuses on women and the way women dress. It is a well-known fact that dress code rules disproportionately prohibit feminine clothing items, such as spaghetti straps, mid-rift bearing tops, and short skirts, placing an unequal burden on women to cover up. This is often justified by the claim that such clothing is distracting to males. The prohibited clothing list in the proposed policy is such an example. Yet NKU is not proposing a complimentary policy, restricting the male gaze in relation to women's bodies. The current language of the proposed policy suggests that there will be:

- a) A disproportionate enforcement against women. For example, will a man wearing a top with spaghetti straps, be disciplined?*
- b) A promotion of harmful underlying assumptions about women's bodies, and a female shame, for example, women's clothing, and by extension, their bodies are 'blamed for male reactions,' and see a disproportionate impact on women of color, as evidenced by multiple national studies of banned clothing in dress code policies (we can provide those studies).*

Please do not perpetuate stereotypes associated with clothing, especially in relation to women. NKU should do better than this. We don't mind having what they should wear, but we don't want to list what they shouldn't wear."

- Some faculty report being told to fill out Flexible Work Arrangement forms. A: The policy and forms do not apply to faculty. The situation with advisors should have been resolved. The Provost will think about how this affects librarians since it would be problem if all librarians decided to work from home. If the workload specifies duties that require librarians to be present on campus, they would need to be present for those duties. An additional comment was that under the Handbook, policies should be applied equally to faculty.

- Benefits Discussion

- How does NKU get an insurance broker? A: The broker works to find appropriate plans (medical, dental, vision) and ancillary coverage (short-term disability, etc.) for us. The broker works to negotiate rates. There has not been a benefit broker RFP (Request for proposals) since 2018. Generally, employees outside HR do not interact with the broker. The broker's contract provides for quarterly financial reports, but we are trying to get monthly reports. Our broker has not been providing the concierge service addressing customer service questions or claim issues. Other brokers do this. Generally, when claims are denied, it is because the coding is wrong. When this happens, the broker should ask the provider to resubmit the correct code. While NKU HR can step in if the broker is not addressing claim issues between provider and carrier, many employees do not want HR to have that specific medical information. Our broker has indicated that this service is not in their contract. NKU is self-insured. UMR processes the claims, disburses the funds, and then reports the claims cost to NKU for reimbursement. The broker should make sure claims are coming from NKU employees and that if an NKU employees' information is incorrect, the broker should correct that. However, doing this is not in the contract with our current broker.
- Another issue, prior authorization with Humana did not always carry over to UMR and needed to be addressed.
- The medical, dental, and vision plans go out for a bid every 3 years. The broker did not provide a disruption analysis of the old plan versus the new plans. This was also not in their contract.
- There is a committee that put together an RFP for a new benefits broker. There is representation from Staff Congress and Faculty Senate. There were 8 proposals submitted. The plan is to have a new contract in January 2026.
- Working on a first-year, three-year, and five-year plan for benefits.
- NKU will see a 12% increase in medical premiums. This is consistent with a national increase of 15-20% in premiums on medical plans.
- Tri-Health dropped UMR effective 1/1/26. UMR is the largest carrier in the US. This is not only an NKU issue. Tri-Health is renegotiating with UMR (and other carriers) and has asked for a \$190M increase over 3 years. UMR says they expect to reach an agreement with Tri-Health.
 - There was a comment that this would be a 70% increase but it is not out of alignment with the rates of other providers.
 - If Tri-Health and UMR do not reach an agreement, employees have 3 options: use your benefits as out-of-network benefits; change to an in-network provider; or, there will be a form to apply for 90-day continuation of care after which employees will need to go out-of-network or change providers.
 - Suggestion for a "lunch and learn" to share this information more widely.

- A lot of people are dropping dental benefits because they can get a better deal through their provider. How will that drop in the number of people insured affect negotiation for a future dental benefit plan? A: A potential carrier looks at the last 3 years, the total eligible, and total enrolled.
- There were concerns about UMR denying claims. Also concerns about claims being randomly denied forcing people to call and verify aspects of their coverage.

5. Old Business

- None at this time.

6. New Business

- None at this time.

7. Adjournment (4:40pm)

PCC Policy Charge as stated in the FS Constitution:

NKU Faculty Senate Constitution

The following duties shall be the specific responsibility of the Professional Concerns Committee:

- 1) It shall provide a forum for the faculty to propose policy and to discuss all matters relating to the wellbeing of the University.
- 2) It shall review, evaluate, and make recommendations concerning policies relating to the general academic and professional concerns of the faculty, both full and part-time.
- 3) It shall review, evaluate, and make recommendations regarding all policies procedures and practices related to governance of the university.

Submitted,

M. Providenti, Secretary