

NINTH SENATE REVIEW COMMISSION
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025
4045 WYMER HALL
MINUTES

Present: Chair Nolan Miller, Jenny Amos, Nizam Arain, Hunter Farnham, Michael Grossman (Zoom), Eric Kurt, Beth Meschewski, Kirsten Pullen, Jenny Roether, Carol Symes, Joyce Tolliver

Absent: Jess Williams

Guest: Prasanta Kalita (Chair, Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees)

1. CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9) was called to order at 12:00 pm with Chair Miller presiding.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No requests received.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 4, 2025 meeting were approved as distributed.

4. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Without objection, SR9 voted to allow remote participation by Grossman.

Chair Miller will assign various duties to individuals and working groups, so that work can begin and draft text will be available for review when the committee meets in early January 2026.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a) Establish the Process for Collecting Feedback

SR9 agreed that the email to committee chairs for feedback should be sent out early next week with a reminder sent out in early January 2026.

b) SR.26.01, Review of the Honorary Degree Award Process

Prasanta Kalita, Chair, Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD), provided the following overview of the honorary degree awards process:

The selection process typically identifies two to three candidates each year. Nominees are evaluated based on scholarship, professional contributions, and public service to the nation, the world, or the community. Franci Miller, Committee Support Staff, HD, conducts a very thorough review of all candidates. Nominees must have extraordinary

achievements over the course of their careers and cannot be current faculty or students. Additionally, a nomination must be supported and hosted by an academic unit.

Nominations are submitted by the unit, with deans and department heads contacted to ensure formal support. Each nomination requires four distinguished letters of recommendation. Throughout the process, F. Miller communicates with the nominators, while the nominee remains unaware of the nomination.

The review process generally takes three to four weeks, during which all documentation is evaluated and references are contacted. HD carefully considers the letters and determines whether the candidate is worthy of distinction. Kalita noted that HD is known for its meticulous approach. Once HD approves the candidate, the nomination then goes through a preapproval process and is sent to the Office of the Chancellor, then the Office of the President, and lastly the Board of Trustees.

Recipients are required to attend commencement in person. Kalita suggested modifying the process to remove this requirement.

Tolliver asked how confidentiality is maintained once HD begins discussing a nominee. Kalita responded that F. Miller distributes materials via Box and that no documents are permitted to be removed after meetings. He also noted that confidentiality is maintained throughout the process, with information becoming public only after the process is complete.

Amos asked who is responsible for presenting a candidate to the Senate and whether that role should fall to the sponsor or the chair of HD. Kalita explained that the presentation is typically made by the chair of HD and that the nominator is also asked to attend to provide support.

Pullen asked about the rationale for maintaining confidentiality, including why confidentiality extends to the nominee themselves, who is not informed until after confirmation that they will receive the award. Kalita indicated that he was not entirely certain of the reasoning. Chair Miller noted that some members of SR9 believe the candidates should have the opportunity to opt out of consideration. If that approach was adopted, the question becomes at what point a candidate should be notified. Kalita suggested that notification could occur once it is determined that a candidate is worthy of consideration.

Pullen noted that it can be difficult to obtain meaningful letters of support. She referenced the Distinguished Scholar Award process, which considers candidates at multiple stages of their careers, from junior to mid-level scholars, and suggested that the nomination process might be opened more broadly to allow additional voices to weigh in before a formal nomination is advanced.

Kalita responded that by the time a nomination is submitted, the packet already includes the required letters. Symes suggested that there may be value in broadening combined support of a nomination at an earlier stage. Rather than relying on a single unit, she proposed that the nominating unit reach out to other units across campus to build a shared sense within the community that the nomination of a candidate should be pursued.

Chair Miller noted that the names of the nominees are not brought to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) prior to consideration by the Senate. Kalita responded that he believes this should be changed. Roether suggested that, if honorary degree awards are intended to reflect faculty values, candidates could be discussed at the college level before reaching the Senate. This would ensure that nominees have the support of their colleagues and provide a stronger faculty voice, rather than the nomination appearing to come solely from the administration.

Kalita suggested the SEC could vote on nominations, given its broad representation. He noted that increased faculty support earlier in the process would strengthen nominations before they reach HD. Symes added that earlier discussion could surface potential concerns sooner rather than on the Senate floor, and that colleagues within a particular field may be better positioned to assess the qualifications of the candidate, provide insight into how the nomination may be received, and understand the nuances of the background of the candidate.

Pullen noted that involving an entire college in discussion could raise confidentiality concerns and asked whether such conversations would occur at the formal nomination stage. She emphasized the distinction between a unit indicating that it is considering a nomination and advancing an official nomination. Pullen suggested that building nominee cultivation into college or unit processes could make the process more effective. In that model, nominators would be responsible for clearly articulating why a candidate is worthy, rather than committees having to seek out additional information, signaling that the candidate has already been vetted.

Chair Miller added that soliciting feedback prior to formally nominating a candidate is a distinct step and presents opportunities to gather early input, which could help avoid advancing nominations that are unlikely to succeed.

Grossman suggested allowing units or colleges to develop nomination materials and select candidates to propose for honorary degree awards. Under this approach, colleges would prepare the background materials, make the case for their nominees, and have the nominations vetted up through the Board of Trustees. All college nominees would then be submitted to HD, which would select the final candidates and propose them to the Senate on its behalf.

Chair Miller agreed that this approach would result in more thorough vetting before nominations reach HD and, certainly, before they are considered by the Senate. He suggested SR9 should consider ways in which this can be done. For example, names could be submitted through a portal prior to formal review by HD, allowing for early feedback before HD begins its evaluation.

Tolliver expressed support for increased vetting prior to submission to HD but noted that additional vetting could increase confidentiality risks. She noted concern that the Senate might be bypassed in the proposed structure of the college executive committees who are elected by their peers. She believes HD should still receive the nominee directly. Tolliver also questioned whether, under a process in which the college provides a robust defense of the candidate, external letters would still be necessary, suggesting that this responsibility might fall to the unit.

Grossman drew a parallel to the search committee model, in which the Senate elects committee members, and the duty of the Senate ends once the committee is elected. He suggested considering a similar approach for honorary degree award nominations.

The report to the SEC is due by the end of January. Chair Miller encouraged SR9 to begin drafting or at least outlining their ideas. A shell document has been provided in Box, and contributions can be submitted via email to Chair Miller. He invited volunteers to contribute in their areas of interest. Chair Miller will collect submissions and assign topics to ensure all tasks are addressed before the next meeting on January 8, 2026.

Roether suggested the possibility of awarding recognition at the unit level and recommended gathering more information at the college or unit level to strengthen nominations. One alternative raised was to eliminate honorary degree awards entirely. Symes proposed drafting a defense of the honorary degree awards, while Roether recommended that the awards be separated from earned degrees in the *Statutes*.

Two suggestions emerged that are independent of the process path but should be considered:

- Separate honorary degree awards from earned degrees.
- Solicit broader and earlier feedback before nominations to make the process more robust.

SR9 discussed the potential for a non-Senate body to conduct earlier vetting, such as a college executive committee or a more robust joint advisory committee. In this model, the Office of the Provost could assist colleges in assembling nomination materials. The nominations would then be brought to a full joint committee, which would include both Senate members and administrative representatives in the same meeting. Each college would establish its own process for collecting and evaluating potential nominees and submit nominations to the Office of the Provost by a designated deadline. Senators could be elected or appoint a committee, similar to the search committee model, with representation from the Office of the Provost so sequential approvals would not be necessary. Colleges would be responsible for cultivating nominations, ensuring a broad base of support before submission. Concerns were expressed about potential silos, where one college might not advance a nomination due to opposition from another.

Roether noted that on the Shell Report Outline, under V. Possible Solution Paths, B and C could be combined when thinking about the structure of this additional body. It was also recommended to review the processes at UIC and UIS to provide context, not to replicate them but to learn from their approaches. Meschewski will gather this information, and Pullen will draft a defense of specific issues related to the process.

c) SR.26.02, Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9)

No new discussion.

6. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Corazon Johnson
Committee Support Staff