

NINTH SENATE REVIEW COMMISSION
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2025
4045 WYMER HALL
MINUTES

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

Absent: Jenny Roether

Guest: Franci Miller (Committee Support Staff, Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees, Office of the Senate)

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 October 30, 2025 meeting were approved as revised.

4. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Chair Miller shared that at the November 10, 2025 Senate meeting a candidate was nominated by the Senate Committee on Committees (CC), and then a floor nomination was made for another candidate. With two names presented and no additional information provided, senators had little basis for making an informed decision. Chair Miller wondered if there is a better process for floor nominations.

Chair Miller wants to focus on getting more organized for broader work, thinking about best ways to gather feedback, and making preparations for a survey.

Franci Miller, Committee Support Staff, Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD), Office of the Senate, will provide more information on the current process for awarding honorary degree award. Chair Miller does not believe that the honorary degree award process is written down anywhere. HD approved forming an ad hoc committee that will complete an internal review of the honorary degree award process. The work of that ad hoc committee will run parallel to the review that SR9 will conduct.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a) Establish the Process for Collecting Feedback

Chair Miller requested feedback on the draft email that will be sent to committee chairs. SR9 discussed and made changes to the document. Meschewski and Kurt will work to finalize the email.

Suggestions and questions for gathering feedback:

- Frame the questions as open-ended.
- What responsibilities does the committee have that are also specified in other places (e.g. *Statutes*)?
- What does student involvement look like on the committee?
- Is there an active level of engagement by students?
- Members may contribute differently other than discussions at meetings.
- How often is the committee participating in shared governance?
- Does the Senate have training for committee chairs?
- How active is the committee in sending documents to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) or the Senate? If not, would the committee be more useful somewhere else?
- Is there meaningful collaboration with other committees?
- Are there people the committee is not talking to but should be talking to?
- How efficient is the process of communication with other committees and stakeholders? Is it really about communication or is it about the hierarchy?
- What is the process for doing things?
- What changes should be made to increase efficiency?
- Is it a struggle to meet quorum?
- How often is it a struggle to meet quorum?
- Add "please elaborate and provide details."
- What should be changed regarding the size and composition of the committee?
- Get attendance information from the Office of the Senate.
- The opportunity for anonymous feedback should be available.
- Would it be useful for each committee to set up subcommittees?
- What is the process of what they do and who was involved?
- How much homework does the committee have?
- What is the nature of the information that is distributed to the Senate?
- Should feedback be collected more generally, and if so, how?
- Construct a survey that has supplementary questions that can be tailored to committee members.
- Send an email that committees can discuss at their meetings.
- Create a link that anyone can access and not have to go through the committee chair.

b) Information Exchange with Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Peers

No new discussion.

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

One of the main points under discussion is how to protect the privacy of the candidate while still allowing the Senate to engage in open debate. The *Statutes* state that each Senate shall recommend candidates for honorary degrees. SR9 considered whether the current wording of the *Statutes* requires a vote by the full Senate or if it would be consistent with the Senate creating some other process to recommend candidates. Campus counsel will be consulted regarding the proper interpretation of the *Statutes*. Chair Miller noted that changing the *Statutes* could be challenging and lengthy.

F. Miller provided an overview of current practices for HD. Each nomination that is submitted is reviewed and requires a minimum of five references. If a nominee has passed away, HD does not consider the nomination. HD reviews the nominations, typically over two or three meetings. Most nominees are not widely known outside their fields, so independent background research is conducted. Some nominations are not advanced. In those cases, units may be encouraged to consider recognizing the individual at the unit level.

If HD decides to move forward with a nomination, F. Miller prepares materials that will go to the Senate. A summary document and selected excerpts from the letters are provided to strengthen the nomination.

Several years ago, the Board of Trustees (BOT) rejected a nomination that was approved by the Senate. Following this situation, a decision was made that prior to a nomination reaching the Senate, it will first go through a preapproval process. The nomination is now sent to the Office of the Chancellor, then to the Office of the President, and then to the Board of Trustees for review and preapproval. After the preapproval process, the nomination is then submitted for inclusion on the next Senate agenda. Since this revised process has been put in place, no nominee has been denied at that level.

Nominees are not notified throughout the process and are not contacted before BOT approval. The Chancellor makes official contact after BOT approval.

Honorary degree awards are only awarded if the recipient is willing to accept and attend commencement. There have been instances where conferral of the award is postponed until the following year. The latest possible Senate approval is generally the February meeting, though this does make the timeline tight. Timing depends on both the

nominee's schedule and the ability to secure references. HD seeks references from a broad group and avoids using multiple reference letters from current University sources. HD adheres closely to the established criteria and focuses on the merits of the nominee. Preparing summaries requires extensive research, often far more than is provided in the information provided by the nominator, to present the most informative proposal to senators.

F. Miller recommends talking with former HD members and Laura Wilhelm-Barr, former Senior Director of Special Events, who previously handled much of the process. She also suggests reviewing the processes used at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) to determine if their approaches might offer useful alternatives.

F. Miller also emphasized the importance of nominators preparing faculty senators in the relevant unit to speak in support of the nomination on the Senate floor. Deans are sometimes reluctant to discuss nominations because they believe the process must remain confidential. However, by the time a nomination reaches the Senate, the unit should already be informed.

SR9 discussed whether the process should remain in the Senate or if alternative structures might better balance openness and confidentiality. The Joint Advisory Committee on Investment, Licensing, and Naming Rights was used as an example of an alternative committee structure. Suggested composition of the committee could include the chair of HD and a representative from the Office of the Provost.

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

See Chair's Remarks for more information.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a) Spring Semester Schedule

No discussion.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Corazon Johnson
Committee Support Staff