

**NECHE Accreditation Self Study Report 2022**  
**Appraisal, Analysis and Recommendations**  
**Tufts University Faculty Senate**

**Introduction**

The Standing Committees of the Tufts University Faculty Senate have examined in detail the 9 [Standards](#) (and 182 benchmarks) associated with the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) accreditation process with regard to the upcoming re-accreditation of Tufts University.

Overall, the Senate is of the view that Tufts University meets or exceeds the threshold required for accreditation in each of NECHE's identified areas. Moreover, the Senate is confident that the University's excellence in those respects will be expressed clearly and forcefully throughout the Steering Committee's engagement with key University stakeholders. Taking that as its premise, the Senate decided to focus this report exclusively on those areas where the University has room for improvement and an opportunity to strengthen its standing. The Senate emphasizes that its very existence is itself an example of how the NECHE evaluation and accreditation process can stimulate meaningful institutional progress. In contemplating the significance of that step, the Senate notes that NECHE's [response](#) to the University's 2018 Fifth-Year Interim Report stipulates that Tufts' 2023 self-study should assess *"the effectiveness of the new university wide faculty senate in providing a voice for faculty in shared governance of the institution."* (pp. 2, 5). Informed by its work identifying and acting upon priority faculty interests relating to the governance and management of the University, the Senate's Standing Committees have chosen to focus on 20 benchmarks across 6 of the 9 NECHE Standards. Each committee's comments are limited to those benchmarks for which improvements could be made and the respective committee members had some basis for evaluation. The Committee on Faculty Affairs (FAC) focused its evaluation on standards 2,3,4, 6 and 7. The Committee on Educational Affairs (EAP) focused its evaluation on Standards 1, 3 and 4. The Diversity, Inclusiveness, Equity and Justice Committee (DEIJ) and the Budget Committee focused their evaluations on Standard 1 and Standard 7, respectively. The individual reports were compiled by the Senate's Executive Committee and the final document reviewed and approved by the full senate on May 20, 2022. This report is organized according to those benchmarks. Each section begins with the respective committee's appraisal of the key areas for improvement, followed by a more detailed analysis.

**Standard 1: Mission and Purposes**

Within this Standard, the EAP committee has implicated benchmark 1.5

*1.5. The institution periodically evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, ensuring they are current and provide overall direction in planning, evaluation, and resource allocation.*

Appraisal and Analysis: The Senate supports addressing climate change as a visible part of Tufts' mission for research, teaching, and public citizenship. Through a commission by the Provost on energy and the environment, a new university sustainability council, and a reorganization of the Tufts Institute of the Environment (TIE), Tufts has been identifying and discussing university-level principles to guide this emphasis. The EAP Committee also endorses a proposed Statement of Environmental Principles and the effort to make Tufts a global leader in this field.

The DEIJ committee has reviewed and applauds the commitment and the effort of the University to have an effective anti-racist strategy. While recognizing that the strategy is not static and is expected to change in recognition of experience, new ideas and advice, the DEIJ committee recommends that the assessment of the strategy be strengthened. For instance, there is a lack of short-term or medium goals or benchmarks. Additionally, the current strategy mandates that the senior administrators of the strategy be responsible for its assessment. This plan eliminates a role for faculty, students and other trainees, and staff in the assessment process, and also lacks an independent assessment of the strategy.

### **Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation**

Within this Standard, the recent work by FAC has implicated benchmark 2.4.

*2.4. The institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities.*

Appraisal: Greater transparency in decision-making and the articulation of clear substantive and procedural safeguards are needed for the protection of faculty rights and interests in contexts of financial contingency.

Analysis: In 2020/21, the FAC drafted two resolutions, each of which was approved by the full Senate.

The [first resolution](#) (of October 23, 2020) responded to the University's August 25, 2020 announcement of a combination of layoffs, furloughs, reduction in hours or salaries, retirements, and other departures from the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (TUSDM) due to financial exigencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution raised concerns about the procedures pursuant to which those decisions were taken, the prospective, concurrent, and retrospective transparency of that decision-making, and the need to clarify these issues with a view to better performance in future situations of financial exigency.

The [second resolution](#) (of September 7, 2021) focused on principles relating to faculty employment. It grew out of FACs work on the meaning of tenure, which began in 2018, following changes at

the Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) in how tenured faculty are supported and compensated. In particular, the School of Medicine has adopted a plan allowing TUSM leadership to change full-time tenured professors to part-time status (with associated loss of benefits), to reduce the salary of full-time tenured professors significantly on the basis of a failure to generate a certain level of grant funding (previously not a condition of employment or pay), and to close laboratories and redistribute laboratory assets (with profound implications for the viability of grant funding going forward). In response to those events, the Committee began to study the meaning of tenure. However, in light of concerns expressed by faculty from schools where tenure is rare or non-existent and the aforementioned layoffs, furloughs, reduction in hours or salaries, retirements, and other departures from the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, FAC decided to develop principles relating to the conditions of employment for all faculty, not only those within the tenure stream. The resulting resolution has a broad scope, however, operative paragraph 5 articulates a specific framework for changes to faculty employment arising from financial emergencies.

Each resolution speaks to the fundamental concerns of the faculty regarding the University's recent response to financial contingencies and to the need to establish clear procedural and substantive safeguards for the protection of faculty rights and interests in such contexts.

### **Standard 3: Organization and Governance**

Within this Standard, the Senate's recent work has implicated benchmarks 3.2 and 3.13. Additionally, the Senate encourages the Steering Committee to explore possible concerns relating to benchmark 3.15. The Senate emphasizes that NECHE's [response](#) to the University's 2018 Fifth-Year Interim Report stipulates that Tufts' 2023 self-study should assess "*the effectiveness of the new university wide faculty senate in providing a voice for faculty in shared governance of the institution.*" (pp. 2, 5). That imperative informs the analysis below.

*3.2. The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them.*

*3.13. In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- The communication between the faculty’s primary representative body and the University administration (benchmark 3.2).
- The meaningfulness of administrators’ consultation of faculty before actions implicating faculty concerns are undertaken (benchmark 3.13).
- The responsiveness of administrators to faculty concerns, needs and initiatives (benchmark 3.13).
- The meaningfulness of faculty participation in University governance (benchmarks 3.2 and 3.13).

Analysis: On the issue of administrators’ communication and ex ante consultation with the Senate (and the underlying issue of the meaningfulness of the Senate’s participation in University governance), the Committee would like to draw attention to the specific TUDSM situation in the summer of 2020. As the Senate noted in [paragraph 5](#) of the associated resolution:

[T]he University Faculty Senate was not alerted to the severity of the TUDSM’s situation or of the drastic remedies being considered, or given any opportunity to weigh in on how the faculty could or should be consulted or involved. On July 22nd, Executive Vice President Mike Howard and Vice President for Finance & Treasurer Jim Hurley gave the University Faculty Senate a largely sanguine report on the budget and longer-term finances of the University. Notwithstanding the possibility of school-specific cuts, no member of the Senate left that meeting with any indication that major layoffs, furloughs and reductions in hours were even potentially on the horizon. On the contrary, the minutes of that July meeting state that “the next tier of budget cuts, *if necessary*, would likely include reductions in retirement contributions and health insurance, as well as furloughs and layoffs,” [emphasis added], and specify that “the Senate will have an opportunity to provide input should the next tier of budget cuts become necessary.”

On the issue of administrators’ responsiveness to faculty concerns, needs, and initiatives (and the underlying issue of the meaningfulness of the Senate’s participation in University governance), the Committee has been disappointed by the lack of engagement by the University administration in response to the two resolutions noted previously, particularly because those resolutions implicated issues of vital concern to faculty across the University.

The first resolution generated a response on October 13, 2020 from Provost and Senior Vice President Nadine Aubry and Executive Vice President Mike Howard. However, that response was dismissive of the Senate’s authority to weigh in on the matter due to its “school-specific” character. Notably, the response did not engage meaningfully with the Senate’s detailed and explicit grounding of its authority in multiple provisions of its Bylaws (see [paragraph 7](#) of the resolution). Many of the substantive questions posed in the resolution remain unaddressed.

With respect to the second resolution, the Committee pursued a different approach. The Committee co-chairs were able to consult briefly with the deans of the University's various schools for feedback in advance of the final drafting of the second resolution. However, despite the resolution's articulation of a detailed initiative on an issue of existential concern to the faculty, the administration has met the resolution's promulgation with silence.

Third, the Senate's nominating committee was not consulted by the Board of Trustees (BOT) for faculty representation on the presidential search committee despite the University Faculty Senate's obligation "*to nominate faculty representatives to those University-wide committees, task forces and Trustee committees that have faculty representation, and, in accordance with prevailing University By-laws, Trustee committees*" (Faculty Senate Bylaws Article 3.9). Specifically, the senate's standing Nominations Committee is directed to *recommend faculty for appointment to search committees for the hiring of the University President, Provost, Executive Vice President and School Deans*" (Faculty Senate Bylaws Article 3.4). In this regard the Senate recognizes its own failure to follow bylaws on this occasion, as much as it was an oversight of the BOT. Nonetheless, both parties must in future be more diligent in adhering to university bylaws. The Senate will work with the university administration to develop a representative and transparent process for how to nominate faculty to key university-wide search committees.

Finally, greater transparency and accountability is required related to the allocation and distribution of funds to implement the University's anti-racist strategy

*3.15. The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise.*

Appraisal and Analysis: University College, a new facility at Tufts, is to be partially supervised by the Senate (although the full details have not yet been worked out). While EAP supports the new programs developed by University College, and recognizes the additional income it generates for individual schools, there is concern regarding the growth of non-degree and proposed degree programs overseen by University College. These programs have increased the workload of faculty who must supervise them, or must hire adjunct instructors.

#### **Standard 4: The Academic Program**

Within this Standard, the EAP committee encourages the Steering Committee to explore possible concerns relating to benchmark 4.6.

*4.6. The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies*

*with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters.*

Appraisal and Analysis: Tufts' existing intellectual property policy protects both faculty and the university. The university is updating the policy to address new technologies and communication tools, including video production and on-line teaching. The EAP supports the revised policy being extended explicitly to on-line courses, and in particular to digital materials, such as videos, whether created in house or created in partnership with external providers.

The Senate notes the work of the EAP Committee on issues implicating online education and emphasizes that the development, approval, administration, and review of online educational programs must continue to involve a substantive faculty voice, as is the case for traditional curricular developments.

### **Standard 6: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship**

Although, Standard 6 is relevant in its entirety to the FAC's work, the Committee wishes to draw particular attention to benchmarks 6.2, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, and 6.12

*6.2. There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes. Responsibilities include instruction, accessibility to students, and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include, e.g., student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance.*

Appraisal: University principles and policies on financial contingency must guard against the risk that faculty and staff reductions implemented in response to short-term exigencies will cause long-term shortages that are difficult to remedy. Additionally, the University should evaluate the risk that "adjunctification" will undermine the University's long-term research and teaching objectives.

Analysis: The Senate notes that following the actions taken at the TUDSM in August 2020 ([paragraph 1](#) of the resolution), the School has found itself chronically short-staffed and unable to hire at the requisite level since the re-opening of its clinics. In this sense, the questions of preparation for financial exigency (benchmarks 2.4 and 7.4) and adequate staffing are intimately related. Administrative staffing shortages have also been reported at multiple other schools across the University. Of broader long-term concern, the Senate has begun to consider the general difficulty of what is sometimes termed "adjunctification"—the systematic replacement of tenure-

stream positions with temporary lecturers, adjunct professors, and other instructors without the protections or resources necessary to engage in the research that is the keystone of University success and the underpinning of high-quality teaching.

*6.6. Salaries and benefits are set at levels that ensure the institution's continued ability to attract and retain appropriately qualified faculty and academic staff whose profiles are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. Faculty and academic staff are provided with substantial opportunities for continued professional development throughout their careers.*

*6.7. Faculty assignments are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities, and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution. Faculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change.*

*6.8. In a handbook or in other written documents that are current and readily available, the institution defines the responsibilities of faculty and other members of the instructional team; the criteria for their recruitment, appointment, retention, evaluation, promotion, and, if applicable, tenure; and policies for resolving grievances.*

Appraisal: The FAC identifies the need for:

- Clearer principles and safeguards to ensure the consistency of faculty assignments with the University's mission and purpose, the equitable nature of those assignments, and their compatibility with faculty rights and responsibilities in the areas of research, teaching, and service (benchmarks 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8).
- Greater attention in reviewing workloads, including an evaluation and remediation of any disparate burdens borne by faculty with caregiving responsibilities as part of the pandemic related changes (benchmark. 6.7)
- Action on the development of a University ombudsperson to supplement school-specific grievance procedures (benchmark 6.8).
- A review of whether the existing University Policy on Academic Freedom, Tenure and Retirement is sufficiently clear on the meaning of tenure at Tufts (benchmark 6.8).

Analysis: The Senate's [resolution](#) of September 7, 2021 specified principles designed to safeguard the continued opportunity for professional development and to protect faculty against employment modifications that are inequitable, that contravene faculty rights and responsibilities, or that are inconsistent with the mission and purposes of the institution. Existing policies on these issues

ought to be reviewed for transparency, clarity, and substance. At the very least, the University administration ought to respond to the Senate's initiative on these issues and either endorse them or propose its own vision. This implicates each of the above benchmarks.

The FAC has also received reports of faculty across the University feeling overworked and overloaded after COVID-19 changes. It is unclear what, if any, measures were taken to address the disparate burden borne by faculty with caregiving responsibilities during the first year of the pandemic, when many of the ordinary support structures were unavailable.

In addition to its work on faculty employment generally, the FAC is currently examining the University's understanding of tenure to ensure that it adequately reflects the principles articulated in benchmarks 6.6-6.8, among others. This will include an examination of the University Policy on Academic Freedom, Tenure and Retirement, as adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2014. As noted above (Standard 2), this has been part of the FAC's workstream since the School of Medicine changed the conditions of employment for tenured faculty.

*6.12. The institution protects and fosters academic freedom for all faculty regardless of rank or term of appointment.*

Appraisal and Analysis: Safeguards are needed to protect against the risk that substantial modifications to faculty employment (of the kind referenced in the Senate's 2021 [resolution](#) on the topic) will imperil academic freedom in ways that may not be as immediately visible as more obvious attacks on the principle.

### **Standard 7: Institutional Resources**

Within this Standard, the Budget Committee has implicated benchmark 7.1-7.3.

*7.1. The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission. It addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its personnel and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals. (See also 9.5).*

*7.2. Human resources policies are readily available, consistently applied, and periodically reviewed. Policies provide for the fair redress of grievances.*

*7.3. Terms of employment are clear, and compensation is adequate to ensure that the institution can attract and retain qualified administrators, faculty, and staff. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of all personnel. The institution ensures sufficient opportunities for professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- Grants management staff support and distribution across campuses



- Human resource officer allocation across all campuses
- Faculty diversity
- Transparency in faculty evaluation, remuneration and merit increases
- Competitiveness of compensation for some categories of faculty (e.g., clinical)
- Uniform, transparent, and documented accountability from deans of schools to the university administration for meeting the NECHE benchmarks.

Analysis: The Budget Committee identified a need for grant support at every level and a need to remunerate grant support and administrative staff at competitive levels to retain highly skilled grants management teams. Additionally, the grant management staff should be allocated in an equitable way (according to need to attain the same opportunity for success) across all campuses and schools.

Resource constraints in the Office of the Vice Provost for Research have resulted in late identification of grant opportunities and a cumbersome process for limited submission applications. This reduces the time available for investigators to write competitive grants in response to limited submission requests for applications, which places the university at a competitive disadvantage relative to peer institutions.

Faculty recruitment has not kept up with demands of new programs. This has resulted in insufficient numbers of faculty for current teaching responsibilities and associated reductions in their scholarly work productivity. Employment of part-time, adjunct faculty or lecturers has been used to fill the gap. This has led to fragmentation (or a lack of cohesion) of the university faculty into those whose career is dedicated to the university and those for whom teaching at Tufts University is a secondary position. Importantly, we recognize the value of expanding teaching programs to markets in need of Tufts' academic content, and that these new revenue sources can help meet some of the financial goals of the university. Nonetheless, there are concerns about the quality of student advising and drift from the university's mission for scholarly driven activities.

Tufts University policies exempt Human Resources (HR) from participation in faculty hiring processes. Consequently, this burden is shifted to departments who have insufficient resources to meet the responsibility. HR support for faculty hires should be reconsidered as a means to improve the timely recruitment of new faculty and increase candidate diversity. Alternatively, departments should be provided sufficient resources to do the job themselves.

Overall, the Budget Committee is of the opinion that the University has the required human resource systems in place to meet benchmarks 7.2 and 7.3 for the university staff, though the resources may not be equitably distributed across schools. The University has not, however, created policies or allocated the required resources to achieve the same standard for faculty delineated in Benchmarks 7.1-7.3.

Diversity in faculty remains a critical challenge. Clinical faculty salaries in some schools are not competitive, resulting in poor recruitment and worse retention. Access to start-up funds for new faculty are unevenly distributed across the schools. In terms of equity, there is no mechanism to determine if faculty pay inequities exist or if they do exist, to ensure equity in remuneration. Unlike the employment conditions of university staff, which is overseen by Tufts Human Resources, faculty salaries are determined through opaque and largely undocumented mechanisms; annual reviews are inconsistently applied and communicated, and reviews have no apparent bearing on merit increases. In short, the university policies for faculty performance evaluation, remuneration and merit increases are at best opaque or at worst non-existent. Due to the decentralized management structure of the university, deans of schools are not held accountable for these benchmarks by the University administration and the administration cannot document the existence, or not, of inequities within schools. At some schools, there is currently no satisfactory policy for the fair redress of faculty grievances. However, in the spring 2022 the Provost's Office has agreed to move forward with creating a University Ombuds Office and a search to staff the office is scheduled to begin this summer 2022.

In academic departments, faculty have experienced a reduction in numbers of administrative staff and an associated diminution of competitive salaries that fail to attract high productivity employees (quality & quantity). Administrative duties are therefore redirected to faculty, impinging on their ability to complete other essential day-to-day academic, research and service activities, effectively undermining their scholarly productivity.

*7.4. The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.*

Appraisal and Analysis: As discussed in the comment to benchmark 2.4, the University policies on resource management and emergency planning implicate both of the resolutions drafted by the FAC, and passed by the Senate, in 2020-21. The Committee's response to benchmark 2.4 is equally appropriate in response to benchmark 7.4.

*7.8. The board retains appropriate autonomy in all budget and finance matters; this includes institutions that depend on financial support from a sponsoring entity (state, church, or other private or public entity).*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- Independence of the university from donor preferences/directives

Analysis: While the board may retain autonomy in budget and finance matters, donor-identified gifting preferences (restricted gifts) can deviate substantially from university priorities. New facilities that are initially paid for by donors may result in long-term maintenance costs that are borne by the university. For example, over the past two decades, the medical school has undergone repeated donor-related remodeling at great expense and disruption, while the stated priority for the school is reducing the high cost of medical tuition, financial aid, and the closing of the school's structural deficit. The board should limit undue donor influence with clear and uniformly applied guidelines for all donors.

*7.10. The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution's financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution's mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- Financial aid and tuition costs

Analysis: While financial aid and accessibility are deemed high priority themes for the university, the resource allocation does not appear to reflect this prioritization, as noted above.

*7.13. The institution establishes and implements its budget after appropriate consultation with relevant constituencies in accord with realistic overall planning that provides for the appropriate integration of academic, student service, fiscal, development, information, technology, and physical resource priorities to advance its educational objectives.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- Consultation with relevant constituencies

Analysis: The university at the level of the central and school administrations should improve consultation with relevant stakeholders in making major financial decisions. The central administration appears to grant wide latitude to deans of schools, who make school-based financial decisions with minimal consultation within or without the school. There appear to be no university-wide policies or guidelines within which deans must act when making these decisions. This creates policy and financial incoherence across the University, effectively separating the schools into independent constituencies. To create greater institutional coherence in budget and resource allocation to stated institutional priorities, the University central administration should develop university-wide policies and guidelines and hold the deans accountable for acting within those policies and guidelines. Clear budgeting and financial management guidelines can assist deans in making financial decisions at the school level that minimize negative impact across the institution. Consultation with respective faculty leaders at the university and school levels is also needed.

Moreover, school-level faculty leadership should be cultivated and provided with administrative support necessary to ensure mechanisms for effective faculty input.

*7.14. The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- financial planning across the schools.

Analysis: Deans of individual schools need to be held accountable for financial planning that is consistent with institutional priorities and principles.

*7.16. Institutional and board leadership ensure the institution's ethical oversight of its financial resources and practices.*

Appraisal: Improvements are needed in:

- The university's ethical oversight, which should consider the views of relevant constituencies.

Analysis: The ethical analysis of the disposition of the University's resources has been a source of disagreement between the board and the relevant constituencies. For example, investments in fossil fuels have been a point of contention between the students, faculty and the board. Both students and faculty repeatedly called for divestment in fossil fuels. It is only recently that the board has addressed this concern. It is possible that a source of disagreement stems from a relative lack of representation on the board of student and faculty views, including a lack of input from the Universities' own topic experts. As social and political issues arise, the University should ensure that diverse constituencies are heard. The University cannot promote civic engagement and dialogue if it is unwilling to participate in the same at its highest levels.