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## Faculty Senate President Martonia Gaskill focused on changing landscape

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*Martonia Gaskill is the first female racial minority to serve as UNK Faculty Senate president. Her priorities for the upcoming academic year include safely and effectively navigating the coronavirus outbreak and promoting diversity and equality within the University of Nebraska system. (Photo by Corbey R. Dorsey, UNK Communications)*

**“We’re going to be flexible in our teaching, but we’re not going to be flexible as far as our goal, which is providing the best education available.”**

By TYLER ELLYSON  
UNK Communications

KEARNEY – Extraordinary times require extraordinary measures.

This sentence summarizes Martonia Gaskill’s plan of action for the upcoming academic year.

As the new [Faculty Senate](#) president, she’s prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the University of Nebraska at Kearney continues to thrive during this unprecedented period.

“We’re seeing things we’ve never seen before,” Gaskill said. “It can be difficult, but I think our leadership is strong and I believe the right decisions are being made.”

An associate professor in [UNK’s Department of Teacher Education](#) and director of the [instructional technology graduate program](#), Gaskill has served on Faculty Senate since 2013. She started her one-year term as president on April 30, just six weeks after the coronavirus pandemic

forced UNK to finish the spring semester through remote learning.

"The academic landscape has changed," she said. "Four months ago, we had no idea how higher education would be shaken by the challenges imposed by COVID-19 and the complex layers that come with it."

Unsurprisingly, safely and effectively navigating the virus outbreak is Gaskill's top priority as a new semester nears.

"We want to make sure faculty and students can be successful in the fall," she said.

UNK intends to hold in-person classes during the fall semester, which begins Aug. 24, by following safety protocols outlined in a reopening plan developed over the past several weeks.

Gaskill said faculty and administration are working together to address any instructional challenges and create a safe environment for everyone on campus. The university is also focused on supporting students by providing online and blended learning opportunities, in addition to standard in-person classes.

"We're going to be flexible in our teaching, but we're not going to be flexible as far as our goal, which is providing the best education available," said Gaskill, a UNK faculty member since fall 2012.


## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION


Promoting diversity and equality within the University of Nebraska system is another focal point for Gaskill, a native of Brazil and the first female racial minority to serve as UNK Faculty Senate president.


"We have to be committed to educating ourselves and each other about how to end racism and promote equity, diversity and inclusion," she said. "We need to be more intentional, and we need to use the right language. There is no need to soften the language. We need to mention racism, and we need to mention diversity and equity in a strong way so the message is actually heard."

Under Gaskill's leadership, UNK Faculty Senate is taking this initiative to the next level by partnering with their colleagues from NU's four other campuses to propose a diversity and inclusion plan that includes specific actions that can be implemented and, down the line, evaluated to determine their success.

"We can't just say we're inclusive and we believe in diversity," she said. "We need to have metrics. We need to know how well we're doing and where we can improve."

 Faculty Senate presidents will ask NU leadership, alumni and supporters to join this effort.

 We have to work together," Gaskill said. "UNK cannot do this alone."

 UNK Faculty Senate also plans to conduct an inclusive climate survey on campus, and Gaskill would like to see topics such as race and inequality addressed in classroom curriculum so more students are exposed to these difficult conversations.

Additionally, she'll work with UNK Staff Senate and Student Government to draft an anti-bullying policy that protects students, staff and faculty – a process initiated by previous Faculty Senate leadership.

"We need to make sure everyone feels comfortable at UNK," said Gaskill, who holds a master's degree in instructional technology from UNK and a doctorate in educational studies from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Although there are challenges ahead – including an additional \$2 million in budget cuts related to the COVID-19 pandemic – Gaskill believes UNK is well-positioned thanks to some outside-the-box thinking.

- NU recently announced [Nebraska Promise](#), a new program that covers tuition for in-state, undergraduate students from low- and middle-income families;
- Tuition rates across the NU system [will remain unchanged](#) for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years;
- NU is moving to a [single, reduced in-state tuition rate](#) for most online undergraduate courses beginning this fall;
- [O.N.E. Loper \(Online Networking Experience\)](#) gives incoming UNK freshmen the option of completing the fall 2020 semester remotely;
- And all new and returning Lopers have [access to single residence hall rooms](#), without a roommate, to promote social distancing this fall.

"We're going to get through this," Gaskill said, "and when we do, we're going to be glad we made the decisions we did."



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