Presentation to Purdue University Board of Trustees

Good morning and welcome to IUPUI!

I am delighted that you are meeting on our campus and I much appreciate the opportunity to tell you a little bit about the IUPUI faculty and faculty governance at IUPUI.

Let me begin by briefly introducing myself: I am a professor of history in the IU School of Liberal Arts. I joined the faculty in 1991 and my areas of research interest and specialization are the North Atlantic world, 1500-1800, and scholarly editing. I am particularly interested in issues of migration, ethnicity, and identity and my current project explores digital ways of interactively tracing historic migration paths in time and space.

By this time you will have learned that IUPUI is a campus with a complex structure; that it is urban serving; that it is shaped by its focus and impact on healthcare education, life sciences, and urban research; and that, in addition to its commitment to excellence in research, it is very serious about excellence in teaching and student success as stated in our mission statement and strategic plan. What may be less obvious but which emerges as outstanding in surveys of the faculty are two other characteristics that define the IUPUI faculty: collaboration and entrepreneurship. Let me briefly comment on each of these.
Faculty work has changed considerably over the past decade or so and it is going to change even more in the future as the nature of higher education continues to develop rapidly in ways that are very different from the traditions and expectations typical for the time when I became a professor. It does not come as surprise to you that research in medicine, the natural, physical, and social sciences as well as in the various specialties of engineering and computing are necessarily collaborative based on their goals and also reflecting the prevailing funding model. In comparison, in my discipline and others in the humanities and the arts the solitary pursuit of advancing knowledge through the publication of books and other traditional modes of dissemination remains the stereotype. Yet in this digital age research in the humanities and creative activities are also exploring new ways to reach audiences, change lives, and improve communities, all of which lead to new and often innovative ways of collaboration. What makes collaboration on the IUPUI campus extraordinary is the cooperation not just within the same specialty or related fields but also among faculty in different disciplines across all academic units, even "across Michigan Street," which is shorthand for projects that are initiated by or include faculty in the School of Medicine, located north of Michigan Street that runs through the campus.

Let me only mention three examples here to give you some idea how IUPUI faculty are working together: in efforts to find ways to effectively address obesity and diabetes among Americans colleagues in the School of Medicine and in the School of Liberal Arts’ Department of Geography have designed inquiries, using GPS, now a standard component in cell phones, to measure the effects of sidewalks and green spaces, and also access to stores the sell fresh fruits and vegetables on Hoosiers’ ability to make life-style changes for improved health outcomes. A second example centers on the collaborations of faculty in music and the visual arts with those in psychology, education, and medicine to help children with cancer and veterans with PTSD to face difficult, even devastating circumstances, find hope, and imagine new ways for coping. And, thirdly, there is the success of bringing faculty together whose expertise and interests in developing innovative techniques of and applications for digital imaging has proven transformative with respect to spawning new research and making path-breaking impact in many fields of study and care and, hence, on many people.
The excitement and energy that successful, divers, and wide-ranging collaborations among faculty generate are reflections of the excellence in research that characterizes the faculty whom IUPUI can attract and retain. They are also expressions of the spirit of entrepreneurship that distinguishes this campus. Being entrepreneurial at IUPUI is in part an upshot of being is new (1969) but bringing together units with much longer histories such as the schools of nursing and dentistry; in part a consequence of being in the state’s capital; and in part the result of the need of the campus to find its own ways, different from the traditions well established at PU West Lafayette and IU Bloomington. Entrepreneurship in academia, however, is a different kind of risk-taking than in business. It means that innovation and the return on the investment in ideas comes in two ways: contributions by faculty that build the reputation of the institution and increased recognition by peers that augment networks among leading scholars who design promising future research endeavors. Entrepreneurial IUPUI faculty determine new directions in many areas but excel in making significant difference through civic engagement which finds expression in their collaborations and partnerships with communities, some as far away as Eldoret in Kenya others as close as the near east side of Indianapolis.

I am proud of the work that my colleagues do, individually and in collaboration with each other, and I am committed to represent them well and advocate for them effectively—to you as well as to the IU Board of Trustees. As part of that role I take the responsibility of preserving faculty governance most seriously because I am convinced that as the universities’ dual enterprises of research and teaching are changing rapidly and significantly those developments are more likely to benefit students and the state, even the world, when faculty are engaged in the transformation of higher education and academic research already under way.

Thank you for your attention and with best wishes for success with the tasks that you are undertaking in your role as PU’s trustees.