Welcome to the March meeting of the University Senate
23 March 2015

We have a packed agenda, but there are several very important matters that must be addressed first. I’d like to start by saying that although the President and the Treasurer are not able to be with us today, I sent them my remarks in advance, as has been my custom all year, and we discussed them by email.

In late February, we saw a remarkable series of events. When the unveiling of a new leaves policy caused consternation, the chair of the Leaves Committee and the very top Human Resources people, who had just finished laboring for over a year and a half in private, were willing to stand up publicly in the PMU and explain it to 750 people who were very unhappy. They took criticism for over two hours. Through all of this, they have been tireless advocates for us as they have labored to carry out administrative directives in the best possible way.

That meeting was very powerful as we saw 500 staff members from all around campus, many of whom stood up and said their names to talk about how the policy affected them. But I was also happy to see several hundred faculty people there, including many of you.

We were there to reaffirm our long-revered values that the staff members are fundamental to our academic mission. People—both faculty and staff—don’t just work for Purdue; we are Purdue. Without all of us, the university does not exist.

If we don’t convey that loudly and clearly, what are we teaching our students?

Pushing the pause button to reconsider the leaves policy for rollout in 2016 was a good stopgap solution, but where do we go next?

We believe that all major budgetary and academic decisions should be done by inclusive and transparent procedures. This is a pivotal time in the life of Purdue, and everything needs to be out in the open. We need to make sure the entire budget is open so that the Budget Interpretation Evaluation and Review Committee (BIER), can examine it and see the evidence that we are financially sound and that the decisions we make today are good for the university of tomorrow.

Former senate chairs, Joan Fulton, Howard Zelaznik, Morry Levy, Ray Decarlo, David Williams, and others worked hard and made great strides toward building a practice of dialogue and transparency, and this is what we think should continue.

We in the senate leadership do not believe that simply reconvening the leaves committee and repeating the previous procedures—even with the addition of several staff and faculty members—is likely to yield good results. We are looking for
transparent and collaborative decision-making. Appointing one person from APSAC, one from CSSAC and one from the faculty to represent the complex work situations of everyone in the entire university to a committee that is otherwise made up of top administrators, where the plan was designed by a small subcommittee and where virtually all of the meetings were considered confidential, did not suffice, and was a clear departure from previously-respected procedures. Doubling or tripling the staff and faculty representation would still not recreate the process that has been respected in the past.

We recommend that the committee should operate openly, take minutes and post them on a website, and invite testimony. The committee should hold open forums at which all the proposed changes are known and can be discussed. That way, the process would be available for scrutiny in the Compensation and Benefits Committee, the University Resources Policy Committee, the Budget Interpretation Evaluation and Review Committee (BIER), and the entire joint Councils of the Administrative, Professional, Clerical, and Service Staffs. Questions can be put to the president and the treasurer at senate meetings along the way. Because the previous plan was announced in February for a July 1 roll-out, we think that this process could continue into next fall without creating any undue burden.

When the University Reduced retirement contribution by 29%, Rebalanced salaries with a one-time bump, and Required employee retirement contributions, the process was public. When they switched from TIAA-CREF to Fidelity, and when medical benefits were changed, a philosophy of transparency and dialogue was pursued, and that is what we would like for the Leaves Committee 2.0.

We need to know the motivations and goals for this change. The administration has told us that the new plan does not save money, and instead actually costs the university money, which puzzles us. For example, streamlining should theoretically lead to greater efficiency and long-term savings. But there is also the question of unfunded liability that needs to be discussed frankly and openly. This is the only way to rebuild trust. The current theme from the administration is two-fold: student affordability and cost-cutting. It doesn’t make sense to us that the administration would introduce a new policy that would cost, rather than save money, but if that is so, then we would like to understand how and why. We think a public discussion will be healthy.

No one would deny the basic premise that an institution must live within its resources, but the way we spend shows our institutional values.

The next item that I would like to bring up is of considerable importance to our ability to carry out our academic business, and should closely involve the University Resources Policy Committee and the Senate.
We have all read recently in *Purdue Today* that the management of academic space is scheduled to be moved out from under the Provost’s aegis to the Treasurer’s office. The Senate leadership requests that before this move occurs, the reasons for the change be discussed openly with the URPC and the whole Senate, and that the goals and procedures be transparent. From our vantage point, we think that the Provost, working in harmony with the deans, is best positioned to make smart use of the space we need in order to go about our basic business.

Because both the Treasurer and the President are in their first position in higher education and are not teachers, we remind them that they need to involve the academic side of campus in major decisions that affect teaching and learning. Ensuring a good match between course objectives and the physical classroom environment is critical to successful learning outcomes—and to meeting the Gallup metrics that bear our name. The physical classroom DOES make a difference for student learning.

We must have an open discussion of the reasons for this major shift. People have asked if this has to do with a desire to raise enrollments, or if there is a plan to commercialize some spaces, as was done when the Amazon store was opened in the Krach Leadership Center. We caution the administration that classroom occupancy is not like airline seats, where you overbook.

The initial public statements by the President and Treasurer do not demonstrate an understanding of the need of each unit to have flexibility. We need to be able to do a wide variety of things that are inconsistent with having every seat in every classroom filled at all times. All of us know that we need to be able to locate places to hold faculty and section meetings, job candidate presentations and teaching demonstrations, visiting speakers, workshops, grad conferences, and a wide variety of other things. We are concerned that those who are new to the academy may not fully understand the specific needs for certain kinds of spaces, and may not place the data collected into the correct context. What is more, a number of you have told me that not only are you not wasting space; some of your existing spaces are inadequate because they need substantial renovation and rehabilitation that will only become more and more expensive the longer it is put off. Collecting data about what spaces need renovation is an excellent idea. We think it is essential that some spaces continue to be managed within units. The fact that those spaces are not always filled to the limit is not evidence of waste and inefficiency, but rather of the bare minimum of flexibility that we need in order to operate as a top university. The Provost and Deans are best-positioned to take data generated and put them into context. Therefore we think that the transfer of space to the treasurer’s office should be postponed until these important questions can be answered openly and transparently so that the faculty can be a key part of such a major initiative in a collaborative and public way.

Finally, I would like to speak to you once more about raises and salaries. As we said in February, the 2012 COACHE Faculty Satisfaction Survey listed salary as the top faculty
concern, and the upcoming COACHE survey will be able to show us whether this concern has gone up or down.

The Senate leaders encourage a vigorous, data-driven conversation on all aspects of this important subject. The January Presidential Briefing stated, “overall, our faculties’ median salary is higher than our comparison group.” Many of you have written me to say that this statement does not tell the whole story, and that you believe that this matter deserves a more nuanced discussion. You tell us that the data provided by central administration over the past several years as a basis for guiding equity adjustments have tended to show that our average faculty salaries lag behind those of our peers. The OIR report of several years ago showed us at 11th place in comparison to our 14 peers, and we have seen data that seem to show us very low in the Big Ten.

We have seen what we believe to be reliable metrics that indicate that salary increases have not kept pace with inflation, and we would like a chance to compare figures. Reliable studies of programs all around campus demonstrate lagging salaries. The out-of-pocket expenses for healthcare have been increasing here at Purdue. This certainly has the effect of reducing spending power and in essence is a reduction in salary. We are told over and over that, because the cost of living is low in our area, our salaries are competitive. This overlooks several facts. One is the reality that the percentage amount contributed to retirement is in actual dollars. People who work at lower salaries have less real money saved for retirement (and they might not want to live in Lafayette when they retire). Another is that the “low cost of living” is already being used as an argument to offset the fact that Purdue is not located in an urban area where partner hires are more readily available, particularly in faculty positions. What’s more, with no ocean, no mountains, and no big-city excitement, we have to try harder to convince prospective hires. Since the contribution at Purdue toward retirement was decreased by 27-29% in 2008, we have also lost the argument that our salaries were much larger than they looked. We think this is a good time to ask if salaries have really kept pace with the promise to stay up with the market after that one-time bump.

The Senate reiterates that we ask the Provost’s office to assemble reliable data to paint a more nuanced picture of Purdue’s salaries in all parts of campus relative to our peers. It would also be relevant to look at is what longitudinal data tell us about whether the salary gap between Purdue and peers is growing or shrinking, by discipline. All of these data should be easy to find in one place, and should be updated regularly. Please refer to the handout on Faculty Salary Increases at the Big 10 Public Institutions for the past 5 years. It is pretty hard to argue with these numbers. We need faculty raises to be competitive. At this moment, we are only ahead of Wisconsin, and I doubt there is a single person here today who sees the Badgers’ current situation as ideal. We will need a 4-5% raise pool for each of the next two years to begin to climb back to the middle of the pack.
The staff need raises too. It is not possible to maintain excellence without recognizing the value of the human beings who work here.

There are other pressing budgetary items that time does not permit me to address. The graduate stipends are extremely low, and our needs and merit-based scholarships for underrepresented minorities fall far vastly below those of our peers. Lecturers are undercompensated and overburdened, with limited decision-making powers—but those are topics for another day.

Now I’d like to ask the Provost to take a few minutes to respond.

Provost Dutta?

Memorial Resolution March 23, 2015

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