An Update from the University Senate

Dear colleagues,

At the start of the new year, the leadership of the University Senate would like to send you warm greetings. We think there is no better time to reflect on where we’ve been and where we are going. The president’s open letter strikes us an ideal invitation to partner in public discussions about our institution. The senate leadership is committed to ongoing and open dialogue.

Faculty and Institutional Achievements
2014 was a year of many great achievements on different fronts. You read about them in the President’s yearly letter, but they bear repeating: the highest research funding on record, dazzling awards and prizes for outstanding faculty; a bumper crop of publications and scholarly products of all types. A record number of patents, licenses, and start-ups round out the picture.

All of these successes are directly attributable to who we are: a Research One Land Grant University. We have the coveted classification of “very high research activity.” Our record of external funding is directly tied to our well-deserved reputation. It is why top scholars, scientists, and innovators want to come here, and why industry and government want to partner with us over other institutions. Our exhilarating achievements allow us to attract exciting faculty. When speak in public about our institution, we can honestly say we are a thriving university with breathtaking achievements on every side.

A Special Triumph
The first senate meeting of the Spring Semester of 2015 brought a joyful moment, when the University Senate passed a resolution of support for increased coverage for autism therapies in the Purdue health insurance. The president responded by immediately announcing that the new coverage would be included. This will transform some lives.

Our Partnership with the People of Indiana
The year began with good news—the confirmation that there would be no budget reversion to the state. The faculty thanks the President’s intervention on our behalf, as we know that having to give back 2% would have been very painful. We continue to look everywhere we can to root out waste and inefficiencies, and we believe the citizens of the state can rest assured that we are good stewards of the resources that are entrusted to us.
As we strive to fulfill our obligation to the people of Indiana, however, a time comes to remind them that they must also fulfill their obligation to higher education and to Purdue. We cannot continue forever with stagnant contributions from the legislature, and low faculty raises if we plan to remain competitive.

Purdue contributes to the wellbeing of the state and the country through our discovery with delivery, innovation, entrepreneurship, and thoughtful scholarship.

Part of doing this requires training the 8,000+ graduate students who will be the scientists, thinkers, and professors of tomorrow. All of this activity enriches our undergraduate education, and does not compete with it. Without it, a Purdue undergraduate degree would not mean what it does today. A student who picks Purdue over a small college opts to be part of this breathtaking endeavor.

Right now, an international student pays three times as much as an Indiana resident, and an out-of-state student almost as much—each one effectively giving full-tuition scholarships to two Hoosiers. If we Indiana citizens want to serve more of our children, we must all chip in. Tuition freezes and economizing help keep costs in line, but eventually, a greater contribution from the Indiana citizens will be necessary.

Affordability and Student debt:

Here are the most up-to-date figures on Purdue student debt:

- 48% of graduating students have no debt
- 7% have between $1 and $9,999
- 16% have between $10,000 and $24,999
- 24% have between $25,000 and $49,999
- 5% have $50,000 or more
- Of the 52% of undergraduate graduating students who borrow money the average debt is $28,343
- Among residents that is 63.2% of students with an average debt of $26,621
- Among nonresidents that is 34.5% of students with an average debt of $33,360

Students and their parents are making a significant investment in their Purdue educations. How glad we are to be able to say that this investment pays off many times over in the course of our graduates’ lifetimes!

The Purdue Gallup Index has gone further, and shown us that students not only earn more; they also have greater workplace engagement and job satisfaction. A Purdue degree genuinely leads to a happier and more prosperous life.
That being said, we simply must do a better job of getting students to graduate on time. Spending an extra one, two, or three semesters on campus adds greatly to college costs for our students and their parents. Many of our peers do significantly better, and faculty must take some responsibility for improving this picture.

The provost’s **Transfer Up** program seeks to make transferring into Purdue and across colleges, and succeeding much easier. Everyone on campus has a stake in making this work.

**Core Curriculum**
A faculty effort that has a strong potential to make it easier for students transfer between majors and to find the classes needed is the new Core Curriculum. More than half of our students change majors, and we must make it possible for them to do so smoothly and without wasting time and money. We must be able to welcome students who transfer in. The new Core brings us into alignment and compliance with mandates from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

This Core is the result of a lot of thoughtful work by faculty and other stakeholders around campus through the Undergraduate Curriculum Council, which was endorsed by the University Senate. It is more than a collection of courses; it is deep reflection by representatives from all colleges on what it means to be educated. As the new Core rolls out, we will be able to judge its success and fine-tune it. The Provost is collecting data to see what courses students will actually take. Since not many have graduated yet on this new core, it will take a few years to track trends, but we are optimistic about our efforts so far. We Purdue faculty feel keenly our duty to be the architects and guardians of academics at our fine institution. We are charged with this solemn responsibility, and we take it seriously. The buck stops with the faculty.

**What kind of university?**
Purdue is a Land Grant Institution, which means we are part of a glorious tradition of educating the country and providing greater access. There are many different sorts of Land Grant institutions around the country, and they are not all the same. The mission of Purdue West Lafayette is different from that of other Indiana institutions, and together, we form a comprehensive unit. Each campus in the Purdue system provides its special contribution. West Lafayette is the Research One leader in the system.
We must be thoughtful about new directions, and continue an open conversation between administration, faculty, and other stakeholders. Because our president comes to us from outside the academy, it could not be more important to share our mutual expertise.

**Diversity**
If we decide on a gradual increase in enrollments, this could provide a perfect opportunity to increase diversity. This is a chance to make the Purdue student-body look more like the future of our proud country.

No one thinks this will be easy, but we have a president right now who has done some seemingly impossible tasks. We would like to challenge him to double underrepresented minority enrollment in the next five years.

This cannot be accomplished without more needs-based scholarships.

**Graduate and Research Mission**
When we speak about what Purdue does, it is important to remember that, as a Research One Institution, education is not only about undergraduates, important as they are. R1 schools train tomorrow’s scientists and scholars, and a significant amount of faculty energy must be steered in that direction. Those 8,000 students are key to our mission and we must not overlook them! We must continually help outsiders looking in to understand that Purdue is not a factory that produces a product called an undergraduate education.

**Student Growth**
A new way of measuring student growth has been proposed. Faculty are committed to doing it right. Purdue is well-known for scholars who are experts in psychometrics and in designing longitudinal studies that generate results that are reliable, valid, and significant. Purdue faculty is committed to the highest research standards for any project that bears our name, and that is why we have committed to work with the Provost to do this with rigor and reliability. We are confident that we will perform well on any such assessment. We have never shied away from accountability.

**Space**
We agree completely with the President that it is absolutely essential to undertake any capital projects very thoughtfully, making sure they are necessary, and understanding that upkeep is tremendously expensive.

When we talk about space, data and context are equally important. Understanding the metrics is necessary. Any analysis of space use must take into account the various ways
that space is used as well as the quality and appropriateness of the space for its varied purposes. A classroom must be multi-usable—we may need to fill rooms to capacity for one undergrad classes, two-thirds for another, all while having space available for grad classes and seminars. No one would build a classroom that only seated ten students. You would never build a house assuming that every room would be fully occupied at all times.

By the same token space needs to be available sometimes for workshops, guest speakers, faculty meetings of all sizes and descriptions, for thesis examinations and doctoral defenses. Just as we think excessive federal regulations tend to steamroll over states’ rights, we believe that local understanding of utilization of space should be respected, and that excessive centralization would be bound to lead us to some disastrous results. All of the stakeholders should talk about this. The faculty is always available for consultation.

We would like the people of Indiana to know that with few exceptions, the Purdue community is not wasting space or resources. Yes, we can always improve, but we have a long record of responsible self-management. We have earned the public’s trust and respect.

**Positivity**
There are good reasons for us to celebrate Purdue. Every time we speak in public, we are sending a message to the senior faculty we are trying to hire, to the alumni, the legislators, the taxpayers, the prospective students, and their parents. We believe we can honestly deliver a very positive overall message inside Purdue and outside.

**Aspirations**
We want to give our undergraduate and graduate students peerless education. We want to carry out world-class research and entrepreneurship. We pride ourselves on training the thinkers of tomorrow through our graduate mission. We will strive to continue to raise our profile, and we will do nothing to undercut our strengths and our commitment to excellence. Preeminence is our watchword.

Hail Purdue!

Patricia Hart  
Chairwoman of the University Senate

Kirk Alter  
Vice Chairman of the University Senate