

## Comments of the Chair of the Senate – J. Paul Robinson, October 15, 2012

**Colleagues:** I want to make a few comments before I talk about the focus of today's senate meeting. First as you all know the Board of Trustees met last week and a copy of my report to the BOT is on the senate website. I updated the 10 year trend of Purdue's data – all taken directly from Purdue official Data Digest. As I reported to the Board, it's *deja vous* all over again. The last year's figures for administrative growth indicate an additional 20 senior administrators hired making an 11 year gain of 62%. The faculty numbers are the lowest since 2006 with an 11 year change of 8%. The only real conclusion I can make from this is that the faculty are getting much smarter and achieving their goals faster, more efficiently and with less faculty. I don't know if the corollary to that statement is true or not.

I really don't know what it will take to change the *status quo*. On the one hand we have Board of Trustee members chaffing at the bit to become a member of the "on-line club" of universities. It's more than a flavor of the month. It's starting to permeate Board room talk and that should be of great concern to faculty. This is not an issue of us protecting jobs or refusing to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is totally about quality and endpoints. It seems to me, that we deliver a quality product and that should be the standard upon which change should be judged. This has nothing to do with faculty wanting to remain landlocked in a previous dimension. Indeed, by necessity faculty adopt as many tools that are available that facilitate and enhance their education and research goals. We don't use index cards for our references like I did when I was a grad student, we use modern tools that increase our efficiency and bring the world of research to our fingertips. We hardly write letters any more – we communicate electronically, and gone are the days when we are totally out of communication with our labs and classes regardless of where we are on this planet. That ability to remain in direct communication means we as faculty are on call 24/7. Not only are we on call, but I believe on the most part we respond. Maintaining our pace in a changing environment has been a fundamental aspect of faculty culture. We do so because we work with a group of individuals who are defining those changes – students accommodate every aspect of modern culture and so we do our best to bridge that cultural divide with the knowledge and experience we as faculty bring.

However, we don't do things just because someone else thinks it's a good idea. I don't know how we should deal with MOOCs and similar animals, but for sure before we jump into the post, we should at least measure the temperature of the water. That is in fact what we are going to do today.

The trimester concept has been more than floated. I think it started with Professor Sands in April 2010 in his paper "*Balanced Trimester plan for Purdue University*". As far as I know, I don't know any faculty who actually saw this concept paper. This appeared to be followed by many discussions as part of the Decadal Funding plan. While a few faculty may have been involved with those discussions, it is my understanding that the majority of the faculty had no idea about this idea until it was announced publically on January 11 this year by the President. In that news release, it said:

*"Purdue University is rolling out the first initiative of its decadal funding plan with the announcement on Wednesday Jan 11 that it will proceed with the first steps toward a balanced trimester" ..... The trimester*

is an effort designed to enhance students' academic opportunities as well as help them move more quickly toward graduation. President France Cordova during the announcement at the Lumina Foundation headquarters, said the balanced trimester initiative is one of several to be unveiled over the next few months in the decadal planning process....: *Beginning this summer, the university will expand its summer program offerings as a first step toward implementing a full-summer trimester... "...."Purdue has moved boldly to become more productive, affordable and supportive of students more quickly completing their degrees*" said Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels. *"This is how leaders act." ...."Purdue's decision to move toward a full-summer trimester offers students expanded opportunities to accelerate graduate rates and save money and is aligned with the commissions goal of increasing completion and ensuring affordability"* said Teresa Lubbers, Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education.".....I am not going to continue quoting everyone including trustees that said we are all behind it.

Now what was the problem with this process? Where I come from we have a saying "*its purring the cart before the horse*"! The surprise from faculty when this announcement was made was significant. The senate had never been informed – the ideas had not been discussed, it seems that on the most part, this was a case of an administrative decision that impacted mostly students and faculty. As far as I can see, neither group was properly informed or given the opportunity to discuss the implications of such a sea-change idea. When that happens, faculty start asking questions – come to conclusions some right some wrong and a whole lot of energy is spent trying to understand "what happened here".

What happened I think is that an idea walked its way through Hovde Hall, was apparently discussed in many meetings by senior administrators, but the people who actually have to make the most change in their *modus operandi* – the faculty knew little to nothing about it.

So where does that leave us? We need to understand what a balanced trimester actually is. We need to identify the advantages and the disadvantages. We need to look at every aspect as these sorts of change because the impact is very complex. So today we are going to have a sort of forum – it will be interactive. There will be presentations and discussion. We are not here to vote on anything – or make any decisions. We are here only to understand the implications of what the impact might be on major changes to a summer schedule that includes moving to a full summer trimester.