University Senate Chair Remarks  
January 27, 2020

Good afternoon and Happy New Year.

It is often during this time of year that we take a look back on the year that passed and look forward to the new year ahead. Some of us may have resolutions for the new year- commitments and promises to ourselves to do better and to be better, whether that be exercising more, spending more time with family and friends, eating healthier, or engaging in self-care. At the half-way point of my term as Senate Chair, I have spent the past few weeks reflecting on the fall semester and eagerly looking forward to the spring.

In my time as Senate Chair, I have seen meaningful change between the University Senate and the administration. We have successfully re-established trust, expanded channels of communication, and worked productively with the administration on a number of shared goals. Issues and concerns voiced in the Senate are being addressed and I am confident we will see more positive changes in the upcoming year. When we work with one another, together we get more done.

Specifically, I look forward to the work of the Education Policy Committee on the issues of Academic Rigor, Civics Literacy, among others. As a reminder, the town hall on Academic Rigor is scheduled for this Wednesday January 29, at 2pm in the West Faculty Lounge in PMU. Professors Kevin Mumford and Tim Bond will present their report on grade inflation. This is an open forum and I hope Senators will pass along this information to their units and encourage their colleagues to attend. We as a Senate will need to decide whether, how, and in what ways we might address the findings from the report. The Civics Literacy working group has also completed its findings and will deliver their report for consideration by the EPC.

The Faculty Affairs Committee several years ago raised important questions regarding the assessment and evaluation of teaching and I anticipate this semester we will learn more regarding the outcomes of those efforts including proposed changes from the Provost’s Office. Moreover, the establishment of University-wide ‘best practices’ in the use of Academic Analytics is a tangible outcome of concerns voiced by the Senate. Additionally, we are working with administration to address questions and concerns regarding the clarification of the Intellectual Property standard, and have proposed a ‘deans forum’ cohosted by the Colleges and Purdue Online to hopefully learn more about how colleges will work with faculty to identify and evaluate online opportunities as well as to discuss the clarification announced last semester. And I anticipate we will continue conversations regarding health care and how we balance continuing cost inflation with providing faculty and staff with the quality health care and coverage without imposing unnecessary constraints to access.

The Division of Diversity and Inclusion (DDI) has a semester-long program on ‘Democracy, Civility, and Freedom of Expression,’ which kicked off last week with an event to commemorate the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. featuring former Attorney General Lorretta Lynch and former Senator Jeff Flake. The discussion was both inspirational as well as aspirational. It
vividly illustrated how despite these polarizing times we can find common ground. Former AG Lynch, when asked what King would have us do today, identified voting rights as a key concern, one that threatens full democratic participation. To which, if I recall correctly, former Sen. Flake simply responded with “Amen,” fully supporting Lynch’s assessment. Certainly, the Senate Student ID resolution last semester and our work with administration to ensure students would be able to use their student IDs to vote was one small way we as a Senate are helping to carry on King’s legacy.

The “Democracy, Civility, and Freedom of Expression” program will continue throughout the spring semester and will include conversational groups to discuss topics related to this theme, as well as several lectures and performances. I encourage students, faculty, and staff as well as the community to take part in these events. My hope is that continued conversations in this space will generate important ideas and novel initiatives, and I look forward to the continued collaboration between the DDI and the Equity and Diversity Committee to lead these efforts.

As may be evident in the first half of my term, I have been deeply invested in establishing collaborative relationships with the administration. I have also engaged in self-reflection, something I believe any healthy organization much engage in on a consistent basis. I have asked myself and others, what can we be doing better as a Senate? Self-reflection can be difficult, yet it often illuminates potential for growth and improvement. Certainly, the COACHE survey results, which I mentioned in my October Senate remarks, should give each one of us pause. Our colleagues indicate deep dissatisfaction with governance and indeed we are in the bottom 30% of our cohort. Certainly, looking outside the Senate to identify why this might be offer insights. Yet, as with our New Year’s resolutions, self-improvement starts from within. In that spirit, I ask each of us: “What can I do as a Senator and representative of my unit, to better represent my constituents and to better serve my unit and this University?” As Chair, I have been thinking of ways to both elevate and communicate the value of serving on the Senate, especially to those who are in positions to assess our progress towards tenure, promotion, and merit. I have asked, How do we confer and convey value to this service? How do we foster an organization of which committed people will continue to wish to be a part? How does the Senate leadership convey its appreciation for the significant time commitment required for Senate service? One of the goals I hope to accomplish this semester is developing ways that we may elevate the service of the Senate and address faculty dissatisfaction, and I look forward to working with the Senate and the Provost’s Office on this issue.

My hope is by demonstrating to our colleagues that we can get things done, by demonstrating to our units, department heads, and Deans that university senate service matters, we will not only improve satisfaction with the Senate, we will also ensure the vitality and longevity of the Senate by attracting the next generation of faculty who will be motivated and committed to serve in this role, and will be rewarded for doing so.

Thank you.

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Chair, University Senate