PURDUE UNIVERSITY | University Senate

Senate Document 20-60
19 April 2021

To: The University Senate

From: Rayvon Fouché, Interdisciplinary Studies

(alphabetically) Alex Francis, Speech, Language & Hearing Sciences
Michael McNamara, Design, Art, & Performance
Loring Nies, Civil Engineering
Alice Pawley,* Engineering Education
Dennis Saviano, Nutrition Science
John Sheffield, Engineering Technology
Kevin Stainback, SOC

Subject: On the need to demonstrate civics literacy through shared governance

Reference:
- Senate Document 19-17
- Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities
- University Code
- Bylaws of the University Senate
- Indiana Code
- Purdue News story on 4/19/21

Disposition: University Senate for Discussion and Adoption

Rationale: The Board of Trustees has announced its intention to vote in June 2021 to adopt a civics literacy graduation requirement. Purdue News has reported this graduation requirement will constitute:

> passing a test of civic literacy (currently undergoing validation and analysis), and one of three paths:
> - Attending six approved civics-related events.
> - Completing 12 podcasts created by the Purdue Center for C-SPAN Scholarship and Engagement that use C-SPAN material.
> - Completing one of these approved courses.

The University Senate voted on an identical proposal as SD 19-17 in April 2020. Numerous concerns were raised in discussion, documented in the Senate minutes, including why civics literacy would not be incorporated into the Core Curriculum when it appeared easy to do so, why Purdue would have an examination to satisfy a graduation requirement when it does not do so currently for other graduation requirements, concerns about control over the content of the exam, potential bias built into such an exam, other risks of high-stakes testing, and no clear timeframe for execution in

the legislation. The legislation was not adopted, with a vote of 28 in favor, 51 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

The Board's graduation requirement, while addressing the timeframe issue, does not appear to address other concerns raised by the University Senate, and indeed exacerbates some of them.

IC21-Article 23 of the Indiana Code describes Purdue University and the ultimate authority of the Board of Trustees. The Purdue University Code describes the powers of the Board of Trustees, and how the Board designates power to the President and to the Faculty.

Through the University Code, the Board delegates to the Faculty in A 4.00 "general power and responsibility to adopt policies, regulations, and procedures intended to achieve the educational objectives of Purdue University and the general welfare of those involved in these educational processes" (p. B-13). Additionally, in A.4.05, it states that the "faculties specifically shall" hold:

> [...s]ubject to the right of review by the appropriate University faculty through its governing body and except when the interests of that faculty as a whole or the University as a whole or the interests of other schools are affected, the power to develop curriculum, course content, instructional and examination procedures, and undergraduate degree requirements. (p. B-13)

This delegation of authority is picked up in the Bylaws of the Senate, ratified by the Board of Trustees, which state that "subject to the authority of the Board of Trustees and in consultation with the President, [the University Senate] has the general power and responsibility to adopt policies, regulations, and procedures intended to achieve the educational objectives of Purdue University and the general welfare of those involved in these educational processes."

The Board also has a commitment to the authoritative principles of shared, or "joint" governance, through its membership in the Association of Governing Boards. These principles are published as the "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities," which AGB commended to its member organizations in 1966.

The statement acknowledges that the Governing Board possesses final decision-making authority. However, it argues that:

> The governing board of an institution of higher education, while maintaining a general overview, entrusts the conduct of administration to the administrative officers—the president

and the deans—and the conduct of teaching and research to the faculty. The board should undertake appropriate self-limitation.

It goes on to argue that, in areas of faculty primacy—that is, areas where the faculty as a body are primarily responsible—including "curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process," Boards should "concur with faculty judgement except in rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail."

In sum, through the University Code, the Board of Trustees has delegated authority over educational matters, including the curriculum, to the faculty, which is represented by the University Senate. The authoritative statement on shared governance, commended by the Association of Governing Boards, articulates how Boards should undertake appropriate self-limitation when it comes to areas for which the faculty are primarily responsible, and it should concur with faculty judgement except rarely, and with explanation when it does not concur.

Furthermore, it has been claimed that because the original proposal was developed by faculty (through the initial working group, with former Senate Chair Cooky, Vice Provost Dooley, and Professors VanFossen, McCann, and Browning), and received feedback from the Senate as a body and through its committees, that the obligation of shared governance has been satisfied. But after the Senate declined this proposal, Professors VanFossen, McCann, and Browning were asked for a proposal for a *voluntary* transcript certification, not a mandatory one.

Proposal:

1. The University Senate believes the decision to initiate a civics literacy graduation requirement in the face of the Senate's SD-19-17 negative vote, without substantial change from prior legislation, demonstrates the Board of Trustees' intent to operate unilaterally, rather than in joint effort with the faculty on matters of faculty primacy, including the curriculum.

2. In the Board's decision to make participation in a civics literacy exam and additional curricular requirements a graduation requirement for undergraduates, the University Senate finds that the Board deviates significantly from contemporary faculty proposals.

3. On curricular matters that value civic literacy, the University Senate finds it is particularly important to follow authoritative norms of shared governance.

4. The University Senate requests that the Board request the Provost bring a revised proposal for a civics literacy graduation requirement for discussion, improvement, and ultimately, another vote, thereby following authoritative norms of academic governance.