UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATIONS
Item for Information

Subject: Faculty Governance Update

As my term as SACUA's chair comes to an end on April 30, I submit this final Regent's update before my successor, Scott Masten (Ross-Business) takes the reins. It has been a privilege serving on SACUA. The best part of the job has been being exposed to the stunning breadth of work done at the University of Michigan and to engage in discussions of some of the most critical and complicated issues facing the university today.

I want to take note of this moment of transition by thanking Mary Sue Coleman for her extraordinary leadership over the last 12 years. I would also like to welcome President-elect Mark Schlissel. I was fortunate enough to have a private meeting with Mark in March. He asked two questions of me: what issues are most important to Michigan faculty and how might we best work together?

Notes in hand, I arrived at my appointed time to discover him hunched over a laptop computer, in an office free of any of the trappings of the presidency. Slightly taken aback by the lack of receptionist, the open door, and his intense concentration, I eventually decided to knock. He waved me in, explaining he was just catching up on email. It was a scene with which any faculty member could relate!

During our meeting he listened intently. He also asked informed questions about AST, tenure and promotion, and other issues while offering comments from his experiences, which revealed the depth of his knowledge of university life from both a faculty and an administrative prospective. He expressed eagerness to experiment with different ways of interacting with faculty and soliciting ideas. A single recurring theme in our discussion had to do with the relative relationship between central faculty governance and faculty governance within schools and colleges.

In hindsight, I'm reminded of an early history of faculty governance at U-M written by Nick Steneck, describing a less complicated moment in time when there was "ample opportunity for informal involvement" of faculty with U-M's third president, James Angell in which, "the doors to his office and home were always open." I couldn't help but think this meeting served as the metaphoric equivalent of an open door approach.

What follows is a summary of some of my responses to President-elect Schlissel.

What issues are most important to Michigan faculty?

1. Forces shaping the university in the 21st century including:
    - Rapidly evolving technological landscapes which are revolutionizing scholarship production, dissemination and teaching;
    - Cost containment efforts
    - Affordability and access
    - Diversity and campus climate
    - Tenure and promotion in the 21st century
    - Erosion of academic freedom.

2. Centralized university policies and practices (SPGs and others)
    - Effective implementation of the Model Faculty Grievance Policy;
    - Participating in development of SPGs such as Fitness for Duty and Professional Standards;
    - Tenure and promotion, post-tenure review

3. Structural relationships, enhancing the governance relationships between and among:
    - Ann Arbor, Flint, and Dearborn campuses
    - Central faculty governance and College/Schools faculty governance systems
    - Central faculty governance and the Athletics Department

How might we best work together?

1. Engage standing committees as intended in the Regent's Bylaws to provide advice and consent to the executive officers, vice presidents, and other administrators.

2. Seek to change the culture of faculty governance such that it is the site of active engagement and meaningful exchange that is beneficial to faculty and to administration.

3. Use faculty governance to inform thinking on important target issues through task forces, white papers, and other commissioned work. For example:

    - Articulating the challenges and threats faced by the university
    - Making the case for the benefits of a public university (including innovation, economic impact, basic science contributions, etc.)
    - Utilizing faculty expertise, in addition to consultants and other external experts, on relevant issues.

4. Encourage the Colleges/Schools to value service on central faculty governance to create a culture of shared governance and common mission.

5. Encourage proactive, as well as responsive, involvement of the president/executive officers/vice presidents/provosts with central faculty governance.

References

Chapter IV Bylaws of the Board of Regents. The University Senate.

Steneck, N. (1991) http://www.sacua.umich.edu/resources/faculty-governance.pdf

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(Karen Staller, SACUA Chair)