

Faculty Convocation Remarks 2015

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President Esteban, Provost Robinson, Members of the Board of Trustees, Members of the Board of Regents, Distinguished Guests, and Faculty Colleagues:

On behalf of the faculty, I would like to welcome new colleagues, congratulate our newly tenured and promoted faculty, and thank retired and retiring faculty, upon whose shoulders we stand, for their years of service to our University. Today, I speak on behalf of the Faculty Senate. I want to thank faculty who serve now or who have served on the Senate, and in particular those who give so much of their time on its committees, including the Executive Committee and the Program Review, Academic Policy, Compensation, and Faculty Guide committees, to name a few of the busiest ones.

We begin this academic year with a freshman class of more than 1400 that is academically stronger than ever, a testament to the growing reputation of our University and to the hard work of many people. The University has a new college, the College of Communication and the Arts. Perhaps most exciting, the University is moving forward with a new Medical School, a development that will enhance the University's profile and will provide us with exciting new opportunities. Finally, we begin the year with a welcome and larger than expected cost of living increase in salary, for which we are most grateful.

I stand before you as the new Chair of the Faculty Senate. Although I've served on the Senate in several capacities, I can tell you that the learning curve is steep in this new role. For one thing, I haven't yet got the hang of knowing what not to say and when not to say it, which seems to be a critical skill. For another, it has made me more sensitive to issues of shared governance. So I've been taking a look at recent literature, and I have some initial thoughts based on that and on my experience, both in the Senate and over my 15 plus years at the University.

I'm interested in process because of my legal training, and the emphasis in law on the importance of process and the benefits of good process. Process is exciting! And I hope to convey some of that excitement here today, or at least to keep you from nodding off. But, of course, good process and effective governance aren't ends in and of themselves. They are means to the end of developing and maintaining a strong educational institution and we should not lose sight of that end.

What is shared governance? Most simply, shared governance is a collaborative approach to achieving common goals. (Bowen & Tobin, 6). In the University context, it means the involvement of faculty in the governance of the University in a structured way. I'll talk more about the definition of shared governance in a minute.

First, why should *all* of us care about shared governance? From the faculty perspective it seems obvious: a major aspect of shared governance is faculty's primary responsibility for the

curriculum and other academic issues. It seems only logical to assign faculty primary responsibility in these areas, where faculty have a particular expertise. It also allows faculty a voice in the operation of the University, which is, after all, a community dedicated to learning and knowledge, the vocation and profession of all academics. Having that voice also helps keep faculty invested and involved in the University.

There are other, broader reasons why shared governance is important. Shared governance helps achieve results: it helps to ensure the centrality of academic rigor, good teaching, and strong scholarship in the life of the University. As a result, shared governance can help maintain and enhance the credibility of the University's reputation.

In a sense, the involvement of faculty serves as a guarantor of the integrity of the academic mission. Universities make a credible commitment to academic quality by placing primary responsibility for curriculum and other academic issues not in the hands of the External Relations Office, for example, but in the hand of academics, who because of their training and professional ethos are dedicated to the academic mission.

Potential students, donors, governments, and the public can then have some confidence that a University does what Universities are supposed to do: impart and generate knowledge in a rigorous and unbiased way. A University's academic reputation is a main component of the product that the University presents to potential students and to the rest of the world.

Let me return now to the definition of shared governance: the involvement of faculty in the governance of the University in a structured way. In many ways, the contours of shared governance are fuzzy, and, indeed, one commentator has called the term a "floating signifier, a term so devoid of determinate meaning that it takes on whatever significance a particular speaker gives it at the moment." (Olson) Even so, we can say a few things about shared governance and how it's operationalized in American Universities.

First, there are some areas in which the faculty or administration predominate. In general, and in our own Faculty Guide, faculty have the primary role in matters related to developing, overseeing and teaching the curriculum, as well as in setting academic standards for admission. Faculty also play a major role in hiring and in the tenure and promotion process. Faculty play a consulting role in preparation of the University's budgets. Generally speaking, administrations have the primary role in decisions about budgeting, allocation of resources, financing, student life, and other areas.

In between these poles, however, the respective roles of faculty and administration are not so clear and are often contested. Various sources call for broad faculty role. The AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, for example, calls for joint effort involving faculty in, among other things, internal operations, such as planning, decisions regarding existing or prospective physical resources, and budgeting.

Given this background, it may be inevitable that faculty and administration will seek to specify and contest areas of respective responsibility between them. But I'm not sure that developing a precise taxonomy is necessarily the best use of our time. In idealistic moments, I hope for a

more fluid conception, in which boundaries are not so rigid and faculty and administration truly work in a collaborative way across a broad array of issues.

Another characteristic of shared governance under our Guide, is that faculty decisions are, strictly speaking, recommendations to the Dean or the Provost, to the President, and ultimately, to the Board. Faculty do not have a veto. Nevertheless, in practice, as I've said, there's a broad understanding that the faculty's oversight of curriculum is a dominant, if not an exclusive one. And that in the other areas I've discussed, faculty have a primary or major voice.

Shifting gears a bit, two key points that come through in the literature regarding shared governance are the importance of transparency and the importance of a chance for faculty to consult, or at least offer opinion, on a range of issues. As Stanley Fish has said, in the absence of information, rumor, conspiracy theories, and ultimately real conspiracies rush in to fill the space that would not even have existed if . . . disclosure had been the policy." [Fish, 13] What faculty value is the opportunity to voice their opinion, before decisions are made, even if sometimes the ultimate decision ends up differing from faculty preferences.

Where are we at Seton Hall?

I haven't done a survey of other institutions—yet—and I'm relying here mostly on anecdote. But my sense is that we're in a good place. That doesn't mean that we can say, like Pangloss in *Candide*, that "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds" and leave it at that. There is always room for improvement. Other Universities have more developed systems of shared governance. On some issues, there could be greater transparency and consultation. But we're doing pretty well and there's been definite improvement in the 15 years I've been here.

We have an operational, effective Faculty Senate consisting of elected representatives. The Senate is a key player in shared governance because under our Guide, it represents the faculty in matters of academic policies and procedures and faculty welfare and is the sole campus-wide vehicle of faculty governance. I've read of Universities where there's no faculty senate, including one of our aspirational institutions, or where the faculty senate has been dissolved.

In addition, there has been greater transparency and participation of faculty in governance over the last ten years or so:

- Since 2003, a Senate representative has participated on the Board of Regents' Academic Affairs Subcommittee.
- Senators participate in the Budget Committee and the Benefits Advisory Committee.
- The Provost or his representative reports to the full Senate and answers questions at each Senate meeting.
- On top of that, the Provost and the Associate Provost meet often with the Senate Executive Committee, as does the President, and the Executive Committee reports back to the Senate on those meetings.

The Senate has improved in its operations as well. Tension between the professional schools and Arts & Sciences has, if not disappeared, relaxed to a great extent, facilitating cooperation and efficiency. The Senate is a more effective and responsive body. The Senate responds faster to proposals from Schools and Departments for new programs than it did even a few years ago.

The Senate has moved quickly on other issues with short timelines. Thus, there's all the more reason to have confidence that the Senate can tackle even complicated issues with all deliberate speed and diligence when necessary.

And there are other factors, not directly related to shared governance, in our favor. We have a President and a Provost who are both academics, something that is becoming increasingly rare. That's important because administrators with faculty roots tend to be more understanding of faculty issues and concerns. Indeed, one study showed that 74% of administrators who came from faculty "usually" agreed with faculty view points, while only 57% of administrators without faculty experience did so (Schachter).

Indeed, I firmly believe the President and the Provost support and value shared governance and the role of the Senate. I know that the Provost has often discussed ideas of shared governance with the Board, to help them better understand the context of the University. On a related note, I know that the Provost has also supported faculty regarding issues of academic freedom.

President Esteban and Provost Robinson, moreover, have made changes on this campus to bolster the role of academic priorities. The Provost has been made the Executive Vice-President. Enrollment services has been brought under the jurisdiction of the Provost's Office. All of these steps have served to make academic priorities a main driver in decision-making.

What can faculty do to enhance shared governance? For now, just two thoughts:

-First, to the extent possible, make sure the Senate is operating properly, smoothly, and diligently, especially on issues that are time-sensitive. A well-functioning Senate is a Senate that can play a more effective and extensive role in shared governance. We should be open to modifying procedures when necessary to increase Senate effectiveness, when that doesn't diminish the Senate role in shared governance.

-Second, I urge faculty to participate in shared governance at all levels, Department, School, and Senate. Shared governance is not just part of the natural order of things and it must be nourished and maintained. We are all consumed by the other demands of our jobs: teaching and research, but we can't take governance for granted. On this note, I found particularly apt in my reading for this speech the words of one scholar, someone named Mary Balkun:

"Governance of any kind—shared or otherwise—is not a game for the impatient or the partially engaged." (Balkun, 563).

However, participation in the Senate is fun! It may not seem that way sometimes at 3:00 on a Friday afternoon It's a chance to meet smart, interesting, and dedicated people from other disciplines and get outside the box of one's own department or school. I've established good and rewarding friendships with many people I otherwise wouldn't have met.

So let me finish by highlighting a few of the initiatives the Senate will be working on this year.

- The Senate is working with the Provost on compensation issues, specifically on equity adjustments and on his proposal regarding merit or productivity pay. Again, we thank the Provost and the Board for the larger than expected 2.5% cost of living raise, as well as raises in adjunct pay in Arts & Sciences, where that pay was particularly low.

- The Intellectual Property Committee and the Executive Committee continue to work with the Provost's office to develop an intellectual property policy. Progress has been made over the summer, and we hope to finalize the policy by the end of the calendar year. This continues to be a high priority item both for the Senate and the University.
- Probationary faculty need to have some measure of confidence in the expectation of contract renewal as they work towards tenure. We will continue to discuss this with the Provost and hope to bring a proposal to the Faculty Guide committee and the Senate this year.
- A joint Senate and administration task force continues to explore the development of an Honor Code, in response to student and faculty interest. Judy Lothian and I represent the Senate. Faculty and student opinion and input are essential on this issue, and we plan to issue a survey to solicit that input.
- The Senate has approved an Academic Integrity policy that is the subject of final review and discussion with the Provost's Office.
- Finally, the Senate hopes to begin exploring the development of a parental leave policy for faculty.

We look forward to working closely with the Provost and making progress in these and other areas over the coming academic year.

The beginning of the semester, marked by Convocation, is always an exciting and hopeful time, especially this year. Let's enjoy this celebratory occasion, the fall season, and an auspicious start to the new academic year.

Sources

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