

Report to the Faculty
Sara Freeman, Chair of Faculty Senate
January 29, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

I find myself thinking about the way that aspects to our work this year mark the culmination of long brewing and long overdue discussions while there are other aspects of our work that feel sudden and concern rapidly changing conditions.

Everyone, it is about to be February, which, as you may remember from last year, I always find to be the most challenging month in an academic year. I wrote in my report to the Board of Trustees for the upcoming meeting that “in light of just released Budget Task Force recommendations; the many crucial, overlapping needs being addressed in curriculum reform; and the imperative to address the pressing concerns of our students and staff colleagues about their experience of life and work on campus, I think it is fair to say the faculty feel a certain weight. Faculty are resourceful, thoughtful, and creative, but have natural human limits of energy and evaluative capacity, so the pace of work continues to be a concern. We are all aware we are in the midst of transforming ourselves as a university for a new phase of institutional history. It is not a simple process by any measure.”

Concerns about energy and endurance matter. But so does our sense of purpose. We have work to do and at this point we have options. As we digest the current budget situation, look to the future, and continue our work on curriculum renewal I would like to note that we as a faculty have been talking about improving how we achieve our curricular goals for quite a while, gathering momentum ever since the Curriculum Committee evaluation of the core as a whole in 2015. The strategic plan provided another impetus to think about how we serve our students and build our institutional stability.

As we continue curriculum revision, concrete recommendations will be forthcoming from the CTF. Those recommendations will work with the existing categories in our curriculum rather than choosing a whole new “model,” as was directed by the vote last November. To me it is not shocking that the vote narrowly expressed faculty preference for using the contours of our current core rather than replacing it with a new structure. This is a fair outcome — one that reminds us that one of the ways we achieve change is to not to change quite so much at once.

But it is also worth noting that in the first round of voting roughly three quarters of the faculty expressed support for changes to the curriculum to better achieve our goals. November’s vote does not mean the faculty have rejected making any changes in the curriculum. It means we are still synthesizing and editing to agree on what we *together* are willing to adjust. Our goals remain same. We are framing moves to:

better integrate student understanding of our core to increase student’s sense of purpose in and commitment to liberal arts study;

increase student's sense of belonging and trajectory during the first and second year to improve retention; and
provide a high impact education for life-long learning as described in our mission.

Last week, we took purposeful action in choosing to update our promotion language and educational goals. In March will return to the motion regarding the implementation of the new promotion language. Let us continue to be purposeful together in our other work as well.

Faculty Senate

I will close this report with comments about perhaps the most important work the Senate is engaged in as spring semester starts. We are in the midst of answering President Crawford's call to identify a co-chair for the Search Committee for the new Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion and provide recommendations of faculty members to serve on the search committee. This work stirs the feelings of many constituencies on campus. While the creation of the VPDI position is to be lauded and faculty are highly in support of it, there is also difficult history related to diversity and inclusion work and how it has been supported in the past. That history matters to how the work to the new Vice President will unfold. Senate recommended Professor Amy Ryken as a co-chair for the search and the President has invited her to lead the Committee with Dr. Uchenna Baker. Amy has accepted and Senate looks to have a conversation with the co-chairs about how to staff the search committee on February 10.

I am approaching February the way I approach a long hike or bike ride. I was not an outdoorsy child am not particularly athletic. But now I love a long hike or bike ride because I know that there is a pleasure in the duration, the decision to keep going, my persistence, and the beauty around me. Let's keep going together.

Sincerely,

Sara