

From: A. David Trubatch, President of the University Senate

Subject: Report to the Board of Trustees – As Prepared

Date: June 12, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a report to the Board of Trustees.

Since I last reported to the Board in December 2018, the Senate has addressed several items of University Business.

Perhaps one of the most visible is the establishment of a uniform class-meeting schedule (without a separately scheduled exam week) for the fall and spring semesters, beginning with the fall 2019. This planned change in the semester schedule follows a Recommendation from the University Senate, which arose from deliberations of the Senate on means to address challenges, encountered in previous semesters, in scheduling final-exam periods. Beyond the specifics, this change in the organization of the semester is an example of the value of shared governance, and of the effective exercise of shared governance at Montclair State University.

There have been other substantive measures, and discussions, but I will not attempt to summarize them all in my report today.

Instead I note that, overall, in the last few years, the interchange among the Senate, Senate Executive Board and the Administration has, from my perspective, become more systematic in raising, considering, and in following through with actions that address, substantive issues and business of the University. This progress has depended on collaboration of the Administration and the Senate, including its Councils and Executive Board, as well as engagement by the constituent Faculty, Librarians, Professional Staff and Specialists. In the coming academic year, I intend to work with Senate and Administration to further embed and systematize this collaboration, with the result that shared governance is still more effective in addressing the business of the University in support of our multifaceted mission.

Even with the progress that has been made, further development of the systems and practice of shared governance will be essential to effectively manage continuing business and issues of the University. In this regard, I note that that the need for development of a clear, consensus understanding, and practice, of shared governance was in our University observed by the Evaluation Team from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (the accrediting body for Montclair State). In their Report, the Team stated "... it is not clear that a definition of shared governance for Montclair has been agreed upon by all constituents." And that "Many staff and faculty ... [are] unclear on the roles and responsibilities of different elements of the governance structure."

As a means to address these findings, the Team suggested that “strategic planning include strengthening open and effective communication channels” As part of this suggestion, the Team reiterated from the University’s own Self-Study a call to “consider additional communication strategies to actively involve faculty and staff appropriately in decision-making while also keeping them informed of developments ...’, Consistent with the spirit of these suggestions, the Senate Executive Board advocated with the Administration to provide updates on the development of the Strategic Plan and set a schedule for organized input and feedback from the University Community as the Plan was developed.

I regret that development of the Strategic Plan was effectively invisible to the University Community through most of the academic year just completed. While the President of the University outlined the Plan in her Spring Address, the actual draft was not released to the University Community until the last week of classes, just before the very busy final-exam period. Two open meetings were held, and input submitted electronically was solicited. However, these measures did allow for organized deliberation by the Faculty and Staff.

I bring this to the attention of the Board not raise issues with the past, but because I believe it has bearing on the path forward.

One salient concern, at the heart of the domain of shared governance, is redesign of the General Education Curriculum at Montclair State, which is included as one of the strategies in the draft Strategic Plan. Significantly, the process by which the redesign of General Education will be developed, reviewed, and approved, remains to be delineated. In the cover sheet of the May 6 Draft, Implementation Teams for the Plan are mentioned, but no further details are provided. On the other hand, degree-program alterations currently being adopted to bring programs into compliance with the new statutory 120-credit limit for bachelors degrees have been made with a limited, ‘liberated” curriculum-review process.

In contrast to alterations of individual degree programs to meet a specific technical requirement (120 credits for a bachelors degree), a redesign of the General Education Program will require: collaboration within and across the Colleges and Schools of the University; and, more profoundly, careful consideration of the educational goals and content of the Program, even as technical constraints are taken into account. Given the the intellectual breadth and diversity of the the Faculty, as well as the sheer numbers (over 560), a structured deliberative process will be needed to properly develop and ratify a redesigned General Education Program.

I want to emphasize that my comments are made with a recognition of the distinct roles of the Board, the Administration, and the Faculty, especially in regard to the curriculum. More generally, as you consider the Strategic Plan, I ask that include in your calculus the organizational means by which the strategies will be implemented and the goals realized with attention to the elements of shared governance which is central to a University in fulfilling its academic mission.

Thank you for your attention.