

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

Subject: Report to the Board of Trustees – As Prepared

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I always look forward to the opportunity to report to the Board of Trustees.

While the Senate has addressed a range of University business, and made number of Recommendations to the Administration, since I last made a report to the Board in June of this year, in my report today I will not summarize all developments since then. Instead, I call your attention to a few significant items.

Across the University, including the Board of Trustees, there has been increased attention to the collateral social and environmental impacts of the University not directly related to the mission. In this vein, the Committee on Socially Responsible Business Policies and Practices has proposed a Recommendation on Environmental Stewardship that includes a recommended commitment by the University to work towards the elimination of single-use plastics, as well as measures to reduce waste while increasing recycling and resource recovery. In parallel, the Administration has proposed an initiative to promote alternatives to single-use plastic water bottles on campus. I expect that, at our Meeting next week, the Senate will adopt the Recommendation on Environmental Stewardship with additional language that specifically endorses the water-bottle initiative as a visible first step in moving the University away from single-use plastics.

The Administration, the Senate, and its constituents, seem to me to be of like minds in their belief that the University can, and should, mitigate the environmental impacts of its operations, and adopt practices that promote sustainability. I suggest that taking on a visible leadership role in issues of environmental stewardship and sustainability in fact increases the stature and effectiveness of the University across all domains of its operations, including those central to the teaching and research missions of the University. For example, visible and substantial efforts to improve the environmental footprint of the University reinforce the credibility and standing of enterprises such as the Institute for Sustainability Studies, and the Clean Energy and Sustainability Analytics Center. Such initiatives also attract students from a generation concerned about the future of our environment.

In a separate development, the Office of the University Counsel, following direction from the President of the University, continues to develop a Web-based, searchable, comprehensive compendium of University Policies and Procedures. This effort was spurred by a Senate Recommendation on Policy Development, Review, and Dissemination, and continues to be a topic of consultations between the Administration and the Senate Executive Board. The full development and ongoing maintenance of this compendium will help to address the concern identified by the Middle-State Evaluation Team, "Many staff and faculty ... [are] unclear on the roles and responsibilities of different elements of the governance structure," as well as related uncertainty among members of the University Community regarding the actual, official policies and procedures of the University.

While the Compendium is not complete, and the culture of maintaining and using definitive sources to guide actions and decisions is not yet established, there has been continuing progress. The Senate Executive Board will continue to consult with the Senate and the Administration on further development of good-practices in the dissemination, and formulation, of policies and procedures that support effective work in achieving the mission of the University.

With the Strategic Plan now officially adopted, implementation is already underway. However, the Committee for University Effectiveness (CUE) has not yet been convened for guidance on supporting and monitoring implementation. The Middle-States Evaluation Team suggested that "the role and responsibilities of the CUE be clearly defined with respect to institutional effectiveness including strategic planning, implementation, and assessment". I look forward to learning about the methods the CUE will use to support realization of the Strategic Plan as the CUE is convened in the new year. The Senate has a representative on the CUE who will continue to facilitate communication not only with the Senate, but also through the Senate to the front-line Staff and Faculty of the University.

As you probably recall, one prominent initiative in the Strategic Plan, already being implemented, is redesign of undergraduate general-education, now sometimes referred to as the Montclair Core. At the Opening-Day Senate Meeting, the President of the University shared and discussed salient concerns, interests and considerations in the design and evaluation of a general-education program. Shortly thereafter, the Provost appointed a Task Force with a broad mandate to recommend changes to the general-education program in a report to be delivered to the Provost in this Spring. According to the Provost, the following steps in redesign will depend on the recommendations made by the Task Force. In many ways, the organized, transparent operation of the Task Force, and its outreach to the University community, have been exemplary. The University Senate does not, generally speaking, engage in curriculum review. Nevertheless, as University-wide shared-governance bodies, the Senate and Senate Executive Board have roles in supporting processes that embody the central, collective role of the Faculty in the development and review of curriculum, including anticipated significant changes in the general-education program, which plays a major role in the academic life of undergraduates.

Finally for today, I want to call your attention to some results of the Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey. This survey is administered at institution across the US by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. As part of a regular schedule of internal survey research at Montclair State, the Survey was most recently administered here in 2016 in support of the self-study that preceded re-accreditation. (The full results of this Survey, and others conducted at the University, are available on the Web pages of the Office of Institutional Research.) While the Survey ranges over a number of topics, I note today responses to the three questions focused on shared governance. These were: (i) "The faculty are typically at odds with campus administration"; (ii) "Administrators consider faculty concerns when making policy"; and (iii) "Faculty are sufficiently involved in campus decision-making". Responses were recorded on a "Strongly Agree", "Somewhat Agree", "Somewhat Disagree", "Strongly Disagree" scale. Unlike many other questions on the Survey, the distribution of responses from Montclair State was very different from the aggregate of comparison institutions. Specifically, less than one-third (30.2%) of respondents from Montclair State agreed that "Administrators consider faculty concerns when making policy", compared to over 60% of respondents across public, 4-year institutions. Similarly, less than one-fourth (23%) of respondents at Montclair State agreed that "Faculty are sufficiently involved in campus decision-making", compared to more than half (56%) of respondents overall.

Of course, the results of the Survey must be considered critically, with all the usual caveats of survey research. However, it is reasonable to infer that many of these caveats apply across institutions and that HERI makes appropriate efforts to maintain comparability across institutions. In this regard, it is not so much the absolute distribution of responses that stands out, but rather the difference between Montclair State and the aggregate of other public universities and colleges. According to the Survey Report, these differences are, in fact, strongly statistically significant ($p < .001$), in contrast to much of the rest of the Survey.

Perhaps the strongest caveat is that the Survey, by its own account, measures the perceptions of the group surveyed. However, in the domain of institutional climate and culture, perceptions constitute a significant part of the reality. In particular, individuals' attitudes and beliefs influence their decisions and the actions they take, thus affecting the actual operations of the University. Of course, such concrete effects are hard to quantify, in part because it is hard to see what is not present, what we have not yet achieved as an institution and a community because some members of the community are not as engaged as they might be in advancing the University in the realization of its goals and fulfillment of its mission.

Overall, in my perception, shared governance has moved in a positive direction in the few years since the Survey. I believe that motion in this direction is made possible, in part, by a willingness to see and address areas that can benefit from attention. I look forward to continued improvement of the actual practice of shared governance, which will, in a self-reinforcing manner, shift perceptions as we move forward.

Thank you for your attention.