

From: Erik Jacobson, President of the University Senate, 2020-2022
Subject: Report to Board of Trustees – As Prepared
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As the President of the University Senate, I am here to represent the faculty and professional staff that constitute that body. Because participation in the Senate's working groups and sub-committees is not limited to elected members, I believe that it is fair to say that resolutions and recommendations coming from the Senate draw on a diversity of perspectives and opinions. Indeed, I believe a key role of the Senate is to create a working space that brings various parts of the campus together to discuss key issues and ideas.

For example, over the course of the year, the voices of a number of caucuses have played a prominent role in Senate discussions. Each month we have heard from the African-American Caucus, the Asian Pacific Islander Caucus, the Latinx/a/o Caucus and the newly formed Disability Caucus. These groups each bring a distinct perspective to issues under discussion and they raise key questions that need to be addressed. They are a valuable resource and I want to recognize the contributions they are making to the university.

Despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic, I believe the University Senate had a productive year. As always, the priority concern is the student experience and what instructors and professional staff need to be able to effectively and efficiently support them. Key issues included ensuring that students' preferred names are used in various documents, revising the grade grievance policy and expanding the time allowed for instructors to submit final grades. Senators associated with the library also identified ways to support the use of open access materials and how to deal with copyrighted materials in obsolete formats. I believe addressing these types of logistical problems is important, and I want to thank all those who devoted time to getting the work done.

Of course, the Senate also takes on larger questions, as well. It recently passed a recommendation that the university, in consultation with the Land Acknowledgement Committee, retain several Indigenous expert external consultants to assist in the research and development of a Land Acknowledgement Statement as part of a broader university initiative to decolonize the institution. There is wide-spread interest across the campus in the creation of a statement that recognizes the fact that the university sits on unceded Indigenous territory and that also leads to concrete changes in university policy and practice. If it is to be more than a token gesture, it cannot be created in a unilateral or decontextualized fashion. For that reason, the Senate believes it is necessary to work with outside individuals with deep experience and wisdom in this area. They also need to be fairly compensated for their expertise.

In some regards, the Land Acknowledgement Statement is about the university's external relations and obligations. Over the past year the Senate was also a place for members to express their concerns about the internal dynamics of the university. This can be seen in two different resolutions. The first resolution, Tackling Challenges Together, addresses a belief that pandemic-related sacrifices made by faculty, librarians, and staff have been unevenly met across the University administration and managerial units. I am aware that the nature and length of the furloughs are a union matter, not a Senate one. However, open communication, transparency and fostering a sense of solidarity are not governed by terms and conditions. The resolution itself is forward looking, hoping that shared governance can play a key role in dealing with any future crisis.

In a similar fashion, a resolution was passed regarding the closed nature of the Presidential search that was just concluded. The resolution notes the Senate's concern that key aspects of historical precedent were disregarded, including the fact that in the past, constituencies selected their own representatives and finalists meet with members of the campus community in open forums. In addition to the Senate's resolution, a letter was also circulated by the four caucuses noted above, sharing their concerns about the process. The search is now concluded, and the issues have been debated in multiple contexts, so I just want to note that the philosophical differences with regards to shared governance this process highlighted will continue to shape the atmosphere on the campus. The Senate looks forward to working with the new president, and we believe that one of his priority tasks will be working to strengthen relations between the administration and the rest of the campus community.

I thank you for your time. Stay safe.

Erik Jacobson
President, University Senate