

University Senate



December 16th, 2025

University Senate President's Statement before the Board of Trustees

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Board of Trustees.

When I last addressed you all in May of this year, I noted the value of further fortifying communication and collaboration within our University Community, including through our shared-governance bodies. The themes of communication and collaboration remain central as our University confronts challenges and opportunities- at times inseparable- arising from both within our institution and beyond it.

The University Senate not only serves as a University-wide forum for communication and collaboration, but also has a role in the general stewardship of shared governance at our Institution.

The Senate Executive Board, comprising the Officers and Council Chairpersons of the Senate, has been closely following developments in the intended restructuring of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS).

We have listened attentively to the members of the Senate, as well their front-line Faculty and Staff constituents. In turn, we have shared our observations and insights with President Koppell, on a regular basis in monthly meetings of the Senate Executive with the President and members of his Team.

We offer these observations in the spirit of collaboration and with a shared commitment to the long-term success of CHSS and the institution as a whole.

Notwithstanding the best efforts of many stakeholders, including President Koppell, the path of restructuring has been complicated by the need of our Institution to improve the robustness of shared-governance, in both organization and practices, to meet our institutional needs and ambitions.

These challenges are not about intent; rather, they reflect gaps in process that, if unaddressed, risk undermining trust and long-term effectiveness of the university and its mission.

One specific improvement we believe would strengthen shared governance is the use of peer-elected representation, rather than representation selected for stakeholders. Peer-elected representation enhances legitimacy, accountability, and confidence in the decision-making process.

When representatives are chosen by those they serve, it reinforces trust and ensures that frontline perspectives are authentically conveyed. This is one reason I believe the Senate's recent Resolution on maintaining Chair leadership gained traction among Senators last month.

More broadly, when each group of stakeholders, such as the administration, instructors, staff, and students are given the opportunity to contribute their perspective and expertise, in a structured orderly fashion, we create infrastructure where collaboration is not only possible, but natural. A clear and inclusive process does not slow down institutional progress, rather, it aligns us, and it ensures that our decisions are thoughtful, responsible, and durable.

A persistent request that has emerged throughout the restructuring process from stakeholders is for senior leadership to more consistently "close the loop" by explaining why a proposal or plan has been revised or redirected. Deliberate communication strives to go beyond announcing outcomes and into explaining the reasoning, constraints, and trade-offs behind decisions, especially when plans change. Even when outcomes are not what stakeholders initially hoped for, understanding the rationale behind decisions fosters transparency and preserves trust.

Ultimately, when we listen carefully, and help stakeholders feel heard, and engage openly across roles and responsibilities, we strengthen our shared understanding of both the challenges we face and the opportunities before us. These practices ensure that every voice is respected and that institutional decisions are grounded in a workable future for our university.

I would like to highlight recent examples that illustrate ongoing progress in shared governance on matters critical to the execution of our mission. The first is the Senate's Academic Calendar and Scheduling Working Group. Last Spring, the Senate recommended the establishment of a working group to address issues and concerns that arose in the scheduling of courses with the implementation of the new academic calendar. President Koppell responded to this recommendation by asking the Senate to form this working group and to provide actionable recommendations for improvement in the relevant policies and procedures. On behalf of the Senate, I welcome the willingness of the President to entrust this work to a Senate-led effort and look forward to the proposed recommendations that the Working Group will formulate.

A second is the Task Force that I expect will be established in our Senate meeting tomorrow to review the University's committee structures and processes, and also manifested from recent conversations with President Koppell and our desire to align practice with our values. These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the need for clearer pathways, better data, and more responsive governance mechanisms.

In closing, orderly and inclusive shared governance and deliberate communication together form the backbone of a healthy institution. By committing to inclusive communication and to governance rooted in mutual respect, we position ourselves to navigate complexity with clarity, purpose, and shared responsibility.

Finally, I'd like to wish everyone a restful break and Happy Holiday season.