

Good afternoon! Welcome, and thank you for coming to the Fall Faculty meeting. What we know, from reviewing literature regarding demographic changes happening all around us, is that the future of higher education will be substantially different from the past. For our little corner of the world, the future is likely to be more diverse, and more non-traditional. Some of the policies and programs of the past, then, may be unsuited to achieve our future aspirations. As your Chair of the University Faculty Senate, I'd like to take this opportunity to provide some insight into what the Senate is doing to systematically strengthen its resilience, so we can carefully make the needed adjustments, while preserving useful traditions.

Last year, under the leadership of former Senate Chair Amy Petersen, we examined the structure of leadership roles and duties in the Senate. After discussing the matter among Senate officers, we convened what we colloquially dubbed a "Council of Chairs", consisting of numerous previous Chairs of the Senate and of the Faculty. It became apparent that current and past faculty leaders were concerned about a number of vulnerabilities in our structures of faculty governance. We committed to overcome those vulnerabilities, to become a vital partner in shared leadership, with campus administration, the Faculty Chair, and United Faculty.

The lowest-hanging fruit, and the most immediately burdensome of these vulnerabilities, was the lack of institutional memory across generations of Senate leadership. In response, we took a number of steps last year to improve Senate record-keeping, creating a permanent virtual repository for storing official documents and correspondence, and identifying a long-term Secretary of the Senate in Gretchen Gould who, as a former Senate Chair herself, knows something of the importance of maintaining a meaningful historical account of our activities. Further, we added the office of Former Chair in the Senate leadership succession, to strengthen continuity of knowledge, and to provide a more effective distribution of leadership duties. Now, the Former Chair manages initiatives involving Educational Policy, the Chair serves in Advisory capacities with Administration, including oversight of

matters pertaining to budget and finance, and the Vice-Chair (who is also the incoming Chair), engages College Senate Chairs and the Committee on Committees in nominations and elections for faculty committee assignments.

In the next step, we plan to make adjustments that will enable us to become a little more nimble, as a faculty. We have begun to examine governance structures of other universities, and this year will undertake a survey of faculty governance practices of peer institutions. Our aim is to discover the most effective means to foster communication between the Senate, Senate committees, College Senates, and faculty in academic departments. We suspect this fact-finding mission may point to an updated model of Senate representation, a rationalization of Senate committees, and a means for creating linkages between remaining committees that routinely produce thoughtful, well-informed recommendations for Senate action. If done well, these initiatives could have a profound impact on our collective ability to respond effectively to upcoming challenges (or adventures, as I prefer to think of them).

You might ask, “What is the impact of today’s vote on these plans?” I served on the ad-hoc committee that developed today’s proposal, with a few of the contingent faculty that would be affected by today’s vote. From my perspective, they added a layer of diversity to the conversation that, as complexity science explains, provides for a richer consideration of alternatives, thereby improving the quality of resulting decisions. Scott Page, a student of Complexity Science, explains in his book, entitled “The Difference”, that diversity in perspectives can increase the number of alternative approaches considered when searching for solutions in decision-making processes, which works much like genetic variation in natural selection, to foster a pattern of well-adapted group decisions. I look forward to the benefits of that diversity in the Senate, in Senate committees, and in my own department. Thank you for listening, and thank you, again, for coming today.