

Remarks of the Faculty President, Travis Doom, to the Board of Trustees, Oct 6, 2017.

This Summer, the Senate focused on increasing our international footprint through the work of a newly-constructed International Education Advisory Committee. Additionally, we collaborated with the students and staff of the Student Success Committee to bring forward plans to significantly reduce the student-borne expense of textbooks. Finally, Senate leadership finalized proposed modifications to the Faculty Constitution to streamline its processes and normalize the oversight of graduate affairs.

This Fall, the University Academic Policies Committee is considering over a dozen academic policies, including those required to assure that instructional Faculty meet HLC guidelines. The University Curriculum Committee will begin using the new Curriculog system launched in August to streamline processing academic courses and programs. The Undergraduate Curriculum Review Committee continues to lead efforts to assure that our General Education (“Core”) Curricula meet their intended student outcomes and satisfy accreditation requirements. The Senate approved a new grading system to more accurately track student participation and to aid in accurate reporting for federal financial aid. In short, Faculty are fully engaged in fulfilling and expanding our academic and research missions.

President Schrader has only been with us a short time, but she has taken steps to learn our academic programs and to engage with our students through 33 departmental visits prior to the start of the term. Provost Sudkamp continues to earn our confidence in his administration of our academic mission. The general sense of the Faculty Senate is guardedly optimistic with respect to our top leadership.

Trustees, you took some painful, but necessary, steps to cut our budget, provide oversight, and stabilize our budget. Our faculty and staff genuinely desire to support the university in this hour of need, but it is surprisingly difficult to chart a positive path in the present cloud of uncertainty. There is a growing frustration among our faculty and staff who interact most closely with our students because of uncertainty regarding how each new measure will impact our instructional and research mission. Too many of these decisions are communicated with a focus on expense reduction and without expressed consideration of overall impact on revenue and revenue capacity. In times of transition and challenge, clear and timely communication are imperative.

Further, we sense that many existing and potential students are becoming apprehensive about the future of the university. This concern is only reinforced by budget cuts removing many small but highly visible support mechanisms for students.

Academic programs have endured significant cuts, both in terms of base budget reduction and in unfilled vacancies as outstanding personnel leave and are not replaced. These additional vacancies are opportunistic, not strategic; thus the losses are not well distributed among units. This approach to budget reduction has stressed some valuable units close to their breaking points and may ultimately lead to a further reduction in revenue.

It is evident that we cannot continue to cut our way out of our fiscal crisis. Additional across-the-board cuts will have a negative impact on revenue and our mission. We need to identify academic

units that have the capability and capacity to grow and ensure they are properly resourced. We need to identify valuable programs that are in danger of being starved. We need to properly resource service units that feed our academic pipeline. We need a plan, a timeline, and a process that is clearly communicated to the community for each new initiative. We need to stop making final-hour across-the-board budget cuts and start making reasoned decisions on where we will make targeted cuts, where we will invest, and make guarantees that inspire trust, confidence, and stability.

Faculty, too, are deeply troubled by the stalled negotiations of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. This inaction contributes to potentially crippling uncertainty. This environment has already caused some of our most productive faculty and staff to look elsewhere; continued uncertainty will undermine our ability to recover. We urge you to immediately move forward on contract negotiations with AAUP-WSU in good-faith and with full effort. Please make every effort to demonstrate the respect that the University has for its valued faculty and staff by not drastically changing their conditions of employment overnight.

The Faculty understand the importance of avoiding Fiscal Watch and are now, if anything, overly expense conscious. Faculty are cooking food at home to bring to student welcome events. Faculty are using personal cell phones to reduce the costs of office phones. Faculty are spending extra hours on recruiting events and raising funds to support student activities. We will continue to contribute at all levels, big and small, to help the University.

We work with you, for the good of our students and the University. President Schrader and Provost Sudkamp have promised to lead us towards a new era of transparency, productive campus conversations, and sincere commitment to shared governance. You can expect that from us, and we will expect that from you.