

Senate Chair's Remarks, 30 August 2024

(for 6 September Senate Meeting)

Welcome to another academic year. As I communicated in recent emails, the faculty senate will operate differently this year, and that will include placing any chair's remarks in written form to save meeting time. In these remarks I want to give a higher-level overview of where I think the senate stands, and also give you a sense for how I've been viewing things. Bottom line, we have a window of opportunity but we need senators and faculty to actively engage with governance.

I first want to thank Frank Gunter for his service as senate chair for the past two years. Frank has long been engaged with service to Lehigh, ever since Asa Packer hired him, but the role of senate chair carries particular weight and responsibilities. We'll formally acknowledge Frank's work at the faculty awards event in November, but for now, when you run into him, give Frank your thanks.

You'll be seeing more about how the senate plans to work this year, so I won't repeat the details. The goals of these experiments are to have the senate more effectively represent the faculty in shared governance. This means being more efficient, transparent, responsive, and focused on concrete outcomes.

Where does shared governance stand? **In the areas of cooperation and consultation** with the administration, I think things are looking up. As examples, Jenna and I attend biweekly senior-leaders meetings and the strategic-plan roundtable meetings; we along with other faculty sit on the new Budget Advisory Group (known, of course, as BAG); Jenna meets and coordinates with department chairs; and I am part of the leadership council for the Organization of the Future initiatives. Jenna and I meet regularly with strategic plan initiative leads. Finally, Jenna and I are taking steps to

better coordinate with the elected standing committees like Ed Pol and GRC.

One challenge for this year is how to improve the flow of information from this broadened consultation to better reflect diverse faculty views – while it's true that Jenna and I are charged with representing faculty, the two of us, or the senate executive committee, amount to only a few people each having our own views.

With the help of Nancy Carlisle, a provost's faculty fellow and former senator, this year we will be trying out a formal consultation process to augment the many informal conversations that occur with a manageable number of "official" consultation requests focused on important university issues and initiatives, those into which faculty want to and should have a say.

Process will only go so far, though. Our impression is that faculty and administration are open to consultation of various types, but what needs TLC is the culture surrounding those good intentions. Everyone involved needs a better understanding of how we and the institution work, and what factors of time, resources, workload, and perspective are involved. Timing and context are often everything.

Where I think we all have work to do is in navigating the **"shared decision making" part of shared governance**. At the margins it's clear who has authority and power to do what, but it's in the gray areas across many faculty and administrative interactions that conflict and frustration arise. This of course connects back to consultation and its outcomes – the solution is again partly about process and partly about culture and intentions. Faculty do not want to or cannot make all decisions at Lehigh (that's why we work with administrators!), but in my view part of being a partner would involve a robust degree of self-determination.

Let me close these lengthy notes with a comment about the nature of Lehigh and shared governance here. I think higher education in the United

States is properly diverse, offering students lots of options and creating many interesting niches for education and research. It's important that Lehigh remember this diversity and be uniquely what it is, and not pursue generic, shorter-term solutions and programs that amount to "typical higher-ranked university".

But what is this "Lehigh" that is doing this remembering? I'd argue that Lehigh is part of a relatively small number of institutions staffed by teacher-scholars who have a vested interest and partnership role in their professional home. Institutions like this should be treasured as special homes for human aspirations. Despite what has to be the transactional nature of our outward-facing work, at its core we faculty are part of something special. To be partners we faculty need to be active partners, engaged in helping Lehigh work and thrive, and this engagement requires time and it requires being informed. We need to exercise the academic freedom that we claim is the backbone rationale for having tenured faculty. We need to put our shoulders to the wheel: when it comes to shared governance, it's about using it or losing it.

Over the next two years, let's not just talk about this, let's do something! I look forward to working with you.

Peter

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Chair, Faculty Senate