

## Chair's Remarks for the First Senate Assembly Meeting of 2005

Bruno Giordani, Ph.D.

September 26, 2005

Thank you very much for coming, today, our first Senate Assembly meeting of the year. The membership of SACUA felt that it would be important to review the concept of faculty governance and the specific workings of our University faculty governance system at the beginning of today's meeting, and that was echoed in several e-mails I received from new Assembly members. I hope that returning Assembly members familiar with what I will say will bear with me during my comments. I offer these points as an introduction to an ongoing discussion we can continue as we meet throughout the year. I have taken my comments from a number of sources, including Nick Steneck's excellent history of governance at the University of Michigan, a number of documents available at the AAUP website which I recommend to all of you, and conversations with my colleagues on SACUA and the Senate Assembly.

Although each University and college in this country has its own unique approach to management and governance, there are three basic, general models that seem to capture most of these approaches. The first is the top-down or corporate administrative model. The basic tenet of this model is the belief that consulting extensively with faculty and others inhibits the university's ability to respond rapidly to economic, social, political, and technological demands. The appeal with this model is one of speed and efficiency. This model has its obvious short comings, however. Faculty become disenfranchised with this system that devalues their input, decisions are increasingly made by administrators without clear information about the everyday workings of the institution, and a crippling "us versus them" mentality can take hold.

A second model is that of collective bargaining. In situations of growing antagonism between faculty and administration and a sense among faculty that they have no security or clear channels for negotiation, faculty come to see unionization as empowerment. Unfortunately, this, too, often results in an "us" and "them" environment, when faculty and administrators are no longer free to address each others as peers or fellow stakeholders in the institution. In these models, faculty input is often channeled through only a few individuals and representative faculty senates can further lose their influence.

The third form of university structure is Shared Governance, our model, here, at Michigan. This model implies interdependence and assumes faculty members and administrators are peers who share common

academic values. The traditional model of shared governance is at the heart of a great university, as it reflects a general commitment on the part of the faculty, staff, and administration to work together to strengthen and enhance the University through communication and appropriately shared responsibility.

Central to any effective governance structure is a representative body through which the faculty can carry out its responsibilities in the process of shared decision making. That is where we all come in. Although responsibility for decision making often becomes dispersed across various components of our academic institution, there must be a central voice to link the units.

From the founding of the University, the Regents recognized the significance of that link. Some of the earliest University records note the importance of academic freedom and affirm that for its academic mission, the University values the advice and guidance of the faculty and that the authority to make decisions, such as those involving educational endeavors, rests properly with the faculty. At one point in the early the 1840's, there were 19 Regents, two faculty members, a librarian, and a hand full of students, so governance meant talking together. Clearly, however, as the University grew in size, a personal communication model of governance was no longer effective, and the University Senate was formed to represent all faculty and administrative directors. In the early 1900's, the University Senate had become too large for routine decision making, and smaller, representative groups were established, until, when in 1937, the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) was formed. It was made up of 8 faculty elected by the University Senate and four members from the President's Dean's Council that also had been formed. In 1948, SACUA was changed to 17 members elected by the Senate, and administrators were no longer members. In 1965 the Senate Assembly was created as a large elected membership body to represent the faculty.

At this time, the University Senate consists of all members of the professorial staff, executive officers of the University, deans of the schools and colleges, and designated members of the research and library staff and meets once a year. We, the Senate Assembly, now are made up of 72 elected members serving 3 year appointments, with membership apportioned among the schools and colleges according to their number of University Senate members. The Senate Assembly meets monthly and is the legislative arm of the University Senate. The charge to the Senate Assembly is to consider and advise regarding all matters within jurisdiction of the University Senate which affect functioning of University as an institution of higher learning. Decisions of the Senate Assembly with respect to matters within its jurisdiction are considered the binding action of the University Senate, unless later rescinded by the

Senate. Although jurisdiction over school- or college-specific academic policies resides in the faculties of those various units, when actions by any of those units or faculties affect University policy as a whole or general University policies are involved, actions by the Senate Assembly are appropriate.

SACUA continues as the executive arm of the University Senate and Senate Assembly. It is now made up of 9 members, each serving a three year term and meeting weekly. On behalf of the University Senate and Senate Assembly, SACUA advises and consults with the President, Provost, and Executive Officers of the University on matters of University policy. SACUA also coordinates and initiates governance activities and serves as an instrument for implementing the actions of the University Senate and Senate Assembly. The Chair of SAUCA is the Chair of Senate Assembly and the Presiding Officer for the University Senate. The Chair meets regularly with University Executive Officers and serves as the faculty representative in their deliberations. SACUA members provide leadership for faculty governance activities and serve as liaisons to various Assembly Committees that SACUA nominates and supervises.

There are basically two types of Senate Assembly committees. The first are those that are advisory to the Executive Officers of the University and represent the faculty's direct input to these individuals. A second type of Senate Assembly committees are those that are advisory on special issues of concern to the faculty, such as budget issues and tenure issues. SACUA also plays a role in membership selection for University advisory committees such as intercollegiate athletics and residency appeals.

Finally, an important new component of governance and administration has been added to the University model. This is the Faculty Ombuds position, currently held by Bonnie Metzger. "Bonnie, could you stand." This position was created to facilitate resolution of problems with respect to faculty interactions, policy issues, and administration by working with local unit ombuds and through direct contact with individual faculty seeking assistance.

In practice, then, as pointed out by Nicholas Steneck in his history of faculty governance at the University of Michigan, our current system of faculty governance provides an efficient and rational way to undertake governance in a large, complex university. The University Senate is too large to meet regularly as a whole and therefore cannot be the primary body for decision making. Most decisions are related to the representative Senate Assembly, which, in turn, relegates the duty of administering faculty governance to its smaller executive committee, SACUA.

The faculty's role in areas of shared academic responsibility has been discussed in numerous publications, both at this institution and elsewhere, including position papers of the AAUP. Its 1966 Statement notes that in most models of shared governance, the faculty, president, and governing board share decision-making with greater weight in decision-making accorded to one or another of the participants based on their respective authority, responsibility, or vested interest, though all groups must work together in a joint, open, and effective consultation and communication process. Faculty, for example, have unique responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. Other University functions still should involve significant participation of the faculty including budgeting, strategic planning, facilities planning, hiring of academic administrators, regulating intramural athletics, and a voice regarding institutional relationships with outside entities.

Finally, I would like to touch on some of the challenges facing faculty shared governance across this country's universities as have been catalogued by numerous writers and editors. In many ways, these basically come down to three inter-related issues: declining participation, not enough time, and poor communication.

Faculty participation in governance has been declining in some respects across the country. I am sad to report, for example, that in this body over the past several years, there have been a number of meetings that could not reach a quorum (or majority) of our membership, though this did improve noticeably last year. Faculty must be mindful of their responsibilities under university governance or they will lose their authority and influence. There are a number of conditions in the US that contribute to this very serious problem. When decision making that was formerly in the hands of faculty is concentrated more and more in the hands of executive bodies and administration, faculty attitudes toward governance decline. Disseminating decision making power down to units with strong administrative leadership and less effective or representative faculty leadership will follow a similar pattern. In addition, as professional administrators and support staff are increasingly less involved in scholarly pursuits and teaching, there is less common ground for understanding of the unique, daily difficulties facing an academic institution, resulting in a perception of poor responsiveness to faculty concerns. Faculty cannot help but become increasingly alienated and disinterested, if they feel they have become managed professionals with little control over their work time or work product. Also if faculty bodies are not inclusive of all faculty constituencies, as for example in our case for clinical faculty and certain librarian

groups, greater dissatisfaction and disillusionment among those not included will continue. Faculty must take their governance responsibilities seriously and actively participate if this system is to work. In our case, if you cannot make a Senate Assembly meeting, arrange for an alternate.

Administration and governance are time-consuming activities that must be balanced with teaching and research. It bothers me when administrators voice concerns about faculty spending too much time in administration and not enough time teaching, when they themselves may be spending too little time in teaching. However, effective faculty control is reduced when faculty, themselves, are in competition for scarce resources and do not see that governance is an effective time pursuit or when faculty identify more with national organizations than with their institution. We also must recognize that the work of sharing in the running of our university is devalued by ignoring it or deferring it until promotion to professor. Younger faculty should not be discouraged from at least limited governance experience, as their voice is particularly important for understanding daily issues and they bring a needed vitality and immediacy to demands for change. In addition, younger faculty can benefit from the interdisciplinary contacts and activities that even a once a month committee meeting can bring. Faculty governance cannot be left only to a few individuals. We must develop an appropriate recognition of the importance and benefits of faculty involvement in governance in all levels of the university.

Finally, I want to mention the difficulties of effective communication in governance. If faculty are not involved early enough in planning and decision making and feel that important issues are simply brought for ratification, rather than discussion, a lack of interest or incentive to participate will follow and effective change will break down. Requests and communications that do not come early enough to faculty can easily lead to misunderstandings or resentment, especially if accompanied by a request for rapid turn-around without reasonable time for deliberation. On the other hand, faculty must understand that is the current climate of cut-backs and change, reasonable speed is often a necessity.

Communications also must be open and early on all sides. Shared governance must not come to be viewed by administrators as an obstacle which must be overcome or circumvented and administrators should not be made to feel reluctant to meet with faculty for fear they are entering a hostile environment. Finally, faculty, as well as administrators, must understand the importance of cross-unit communication and appeal. Idiosyncrasies in decision making, goal setting, or procedural rules within particular units are important issues for central faculty governance communication and deliberation.

In conclusion, then, a faculty not deeply and communally involved in governance, whether through its own disinterest or through active devaluation by others, will cease to have an interest in their University. If this happens, there will be a real danger that the qualities that make a university the unique and special institution that it is will be lost.