

Report of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee to the Portland State Faculty Senate and the University on Administrative Leadership and Shared Governance, May 27, 2019.

Since March of this year, in consideration of controversies regarding the PSU presidency, as well as other governance issues of concern to Senate leadership, the Senate Steering Committee has undertaken an examination of the available evidence with the intention of offering our assessment of administrative leadership to the Senate and the University by the time of the Senate's final meeting of the academic year on June 3, 2019. Though the announcement on May 10 of the president's resignation, and of the immediate appointment of an acting president, may appear to render much of this work moot, we believe that this is an important time for the University to reflect on the lessons learned, on the structure and recruitment of administrative leadership, and on the future of shared governance at our institution.

Sources:

During the spring of this year the Board of Trustees commissioned two external reviews of presidential leadership known as the "financial audit" and the "personnel audit." The Steering Committee had anticipated the publication of these reviews as a valuable opportunity to examine the performance of the administration, and to work collaboratively with the Board and the administration on strategies for amelioration. We have therefore been highly disappointed to learn that a legal settlement reached with the former president will apparently prevent these reviews—presumably conducted at considerable expense to our institution—from being made public, even in redacted or summary form. The sealing of these audits represents a lost opportunity for meaningful strategic planning.

The Steering Committee has nonetheless obtained and examined the documents regarding the PSU presidency that were previously obtained in recent months by the *Oregonian* through public record request. Though the majority of these documents are of little or no relevance to the issues of concern to us, some are more concerning. The Steering Committee and its members have also been in contact, both formally and informally, with a number of members of the PSU faculty and administration who have described to us their experience of the work and leadership style of the presidential administration. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this report, the Steering Committee can draw on its own experience of shared governance over the past two academic years.

Consultation & shared governance:

In our view, the most problematic theme for shared governance that emerges from this body of evidence is the tendency of administrative leadership to make far-reaching structural decisions without adequate consultation. This problem became especially apparent during the summer of 2018 when the president issued a series of major decisions, at a time of year when most of the organs of shared governance were in recess. We count at least five major administrative restructurings that summer: The Office of Academic Innovation and Student

Success was removed from the oversight of the Office of Academic Affairs to become a vice-presidential position, the Office of Enrollment Management was separated from Student Affairs, a new vice provost position was created to oversee Student Affairs, the Office of Graduate Studies was transferred from Academic Affairs to the renamed Office of Graduate Studies and Research, and the Office of Strategic Partnerships was eliminated. While it is plausible that there were sound reasons for these decisions, all appear to have violated the Faculty Constitution, which requires that:

Prior to the creation or abolition of a principal administrative office, the Advisory Council shall normally be consulted by the President, and the Council may ask for wider Faculty consideration. (Art. 3, Sec. 3)

Moreover, we have learned from a reliable source in the administration that the president made these decisions during the summer of 2018 not only without consulting the Advisory Council, but even without consulting his own Executive Council, which is composed of the university's vice-presidential officers.

Administrative leadership needs to understand that consultation, far from a weakness, is one of the hallmarks of great leadership. Consultation is all the more necessary in higher education, and critical to shared governance. While leaders may not always follow the advice they receive, they should always take the time to listen to it. PSU possesses a rich array of administrative and faculty governance bodies whose wisdom, expertise, professional experience, and institutional memory are constantly available to guide the institution. For these reasons:

- We call upon the University to conform to the above-cited clause of the Constitution, and cease the practice of issuing major and permanent decisions during the months of June through September, when the organs of shared governance are not available to participate in the decision.
- We call upon the University, whenever feasible, to draw on the expertise of the faculty and staff, rather than contract with outside consultants.
- We hold that the University should not contract with external for-profit education providers to provide PSU curriculum, except with the approval of the faculty of the concerned academic unit, and of the Senate.
- We call upon the University to adhere to our existing policies on alteration or transfer of an academic unit, which are available on the website of the Office of Academic Affairs (www.pdx.edu/academic-affairs/academic-units).

Looking ahead to the summer of 2019, we are concerned that several far-reaching decisions might again be made when many of the University's governance bodies are unavailable for consultation. We must therefore insist that these decisions, if they cannot be completed with appropriate consultation by the first week of June, must be delayed until the fall term:

- The selection of an interim president of the University.
- The selection of a search process for the president of the University.
- Significant changes that have been suggested in the Intensive English Language Program (IELP), including its proposed transfer to the Office of International Affairs, and its proposed partnership with Shorelight Education.
- The renewal of Portland State’s contract with the Confucius Institute, the full contract language having only recently been submitted to the Educational Policy Committee for review.

Administrative redesign:

This moment in PSU’s history—without a permanent president, and having not yet initiated a search for a president—provides us with a highly unusual opportunity to rethink the function and structure of the University administration at the highest levels. We urge the entire PSU community to seize this opportunity to examine whether the office of the presidency in its current form is necessary to our mission, and even whether a better system of administration might be designed without a president. A quarter century ago PSU gained national recognition for boldly reimagining general education when we founded the University Studies Program. Today we find ourselves at the convergence of multiple crises of university leadership, at a time when our national democracy is also in crisis. We call upon the Faculty to consider whether it is now time to reimagine governance. Instead of a president, we could consider an executive council of vice president-level administrators promoted from the Faculty for limited terms, and a more collaborative relationship with the Board of Trustees, but all such details are open to discussion and reinvention.

The first advantage of elimination of the presidency would be to save the cost of the presidential compensation package, funds that we could invest instead in faculty excellence and student success. Along with the Faculty and the larger Oregon Community, the Steering Committee has been alarmed to learn of the escalating size of presidential compensation packages, and the extraordinarily large severance package granted to the outgoing president, at the very time when we are forced to undertake severe budgetary cuts to programs and an unusually large tuition increase.

We believe, however, that there might be broader advantages to a system of university administration without a president. As a model of self-governance and community engagement, PSU would quickly gain recognition as a center of the movement to revitalize American democracy, attracting students from across the state and across the nation who believe in America’s democratic promise. PSU would better align its mission with the agenda of Governor Kate Brown, who following her reelection in November 2018 announced as her first policy priority: “We must renew and strengthen Oregonians’ faith in democracy.” (Kate Brown, “Turning Point: An Agenda for the Future,” 2018). We could inspire the Oregon community, the scholarly community, and the students, and serve as a model to other universities.

To this end, and in order to initiate a dialog, the Steering Committee proposes to convene Meeting of the Faculty, as described by the Faculty Constitution (Art. 4, Sec. 3), in the form of a Fall Symposium to consider the structure of the administration and shared governance at PSU, on a day in the fall term to be scheduled by the Senate Steering Committee. The Constitution provides that a special meeting of the Faculty will be convened “upon the written request of 7.5 percent of the Faculty.” We will therefore be circulating a petition to this effect.

FACULTY SENATE RESOLUTION REGARDING ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP AND SHARED GOVERNANCE

Whereas the Steering Committee report entitled “Report of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee to the Portland State Faculty Senate and the University on Administrative Leadership and Shared Governance,” dated 27 May 27 2019 and submitted to the Faculty Senate on 3 June 2019, presents several concrete recommendations on the structure of the administration and shared governance at PSU,

The Faculty Senate, as the representative of the Faculty, **resolves:**

- (1) That significant changes to academic units, to centers and institutes, or to the administrative structure of the university should not be decided during the months of the summer when most organs of shared governance are unavailable for consultation,
- (2) That the University should adhere to Art. 3, Sec. 3 of the Faculty Constitutions, which states that: “Prior to the creation or abolition of a principal administrative office, the Advisory Council shall normally be consulted by the President, and the Council may ask for wider Faculty consideration,”
- (3) That the creation, transfer, alteration, or elimination of academic units, or of centers and institutes, should be conducted only in adherence to the University’s established policies regarding the decision-making roles of the concerned faculty, of the constitutional committees, and of the Faculty Senate.