

From: A. David Trubatch, President of the University Senate

Subject: Statement to the Board of Trustees

Date: Delivered October 25, 2017

I thank the Board for this opportunity to address you all.

At the end of the last session of the New Jersey Legislature, Montclair State University was re-chartered by the State of New Jersey as a Public Research University. This re-establishment of the University is both a milestone, in that it marks a point on a long path of development and growth running both backward and forward in time, as well as a foundation on which to build.

As I understand it, beyond the re-labeling, the immediate, tangible results of the change are more mundane than glamorous in that the University has gained some additional freedom from State regulations. Nevertheless, such operational details can make a big difference in the ability of the institution to fulfill the role into which it has grown, and is now officially recognized in the legal structure that constitutes the University.

Another important milestone achieved over the Summer was the re-accreditation of Montclair State University by the Regional Accreditor, the Middle-State Commission on Higher Education. The Self-Study and Evaluation Team reports that formed the basis of the re-accreditation were present-focused documents, intended to capture the current state of the University, in order to provide evidence that the University is currently functioning in a manner which indicates a solid outlook for continued effective performance.

However, the accreditation process was actually more forward-looking than I have just stated, because the Self-Study and the report of the external Evaluation Team are starting points for the new Strategic Plan, the first Strategic Plan for Montclair State as a research university. In this regard, the external Evaluation Team suggested that the University also "review the mission statement, since it is almost 15 years old and significant changes have occurred in the external environment and the institution itself has evolved during this period." Both the mission statement and the new Strategic Plan are of particular importance as the University moves forward with its new form recognized by not only ourselves, but also the outside world.

One piece of data noted both in the Self-Study and the Evaluation Team report: a standardized survey administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at Montclair State found that 80% of Montclair State faculty believe that faculty and administration hold divergent views on important issues.

Before today, despite having discussed these reports in any number of meetings and informal gatherings, I have been reticent to cite this statistic, because I believe that it is too easily misconstrued. (For perspective, HERI reports that 71% of faculty at peer institutions hold the same view.) What is to be made of this finding? I choose to avoid the mirror-image analyses that either (i) administrators are isolated and 'out of touch' with the front-line reality of the University, or that (ii) faculty, and other front-line staff, don't really understand what it takes to operate an enterprise of the size and complexity of the the current University. Rather, it seems to me that the situation is more akin the parable of the blind men and an elephant, where each touches only a part of the large animal. In their partial knowledge the blind men remain in disagreement regarding the true nature of what they have found.

I suggest that a productive way forward lies in robust and effective shared governance that makes the most of the expertise, insight and perspectives that are dispersed among the diverse members of the University community. I am thinking about the description, by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), of shared governance as a "system for creating alignment of stakeholders on issues of institutional direction by developing common understandings of the challenges the institution faces" as well as "a system of checks and balances for decisions regarding operational issues", with a recognition that "this tradition ... is strikingly different from that of business."

I bring this to you, the Board of Trustees, because, as noted in the AGB 2017 Board of Directors' Statement on Shared Governance, "governing boards need to ... understand its potential value in executing needed institutional change, and help ensure its effectiveness in strengthening the institutions for which they are responsible." The Statement further recommends that "Institutional policies that define shared governance should be reviewed periodically to ensure their currency and applicability."

I note that both the guidance, and the description of shared governance, that I have quoted are from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, not for example, from the American Association of University Professors, nor some other group that might be expected to have a more faculty-centric perspective.

In undertaking the Self-Study and undergoing examination by the Middle-States Evaluation Team, the University—in effect—began a review shared governance. Relevant findings in the Team Report include:

- "Many staff and faculty with whom the team met were unclear on the roles and responsibilities of different elements of the governance structure";
- "... it is not clear that a definition of shared governance for Montclair has been agreed upon by all constituents. ... it was clear to the team that [the examples of shared governance offered in the Self-Study] are not sufficient for the expectations of some."
- "... The disconnect regarding what shared governance means ... sometimes results in frustration with the communication on various policies, and opportunities for input."

Partially in response to the findings , the Team suggested development of plans for "systematically assessing [the] governance system, to include individual governance structures periodically assessing their own processes", in line with the AGB Statement.

In the University Senate, there is a broad-based willingness to further the necessary review, as well as –more importantly– a willingness to do the work of proposing and implementing constructive changes in shared governance. In an Opening Day address to the University Senate, President Cole encouraged a receptive Senate to re-consider its own role, and we are actively doing so.

Of course, the University Senate does not, by itself, have the capacity constitute shared governance at Montclair State University. Indeed, at the founding of the University Senate in 1991, the Senate was envisioned in a coordinating role, with a system of University committees handling much of the more-detailed work of shared governance.

Nevertheless, the Senate assembles representatives from across the institution, including not only elected representatives of the faculty, librarians, professional staff and specialists, but also a broad-based set of administrators. Hence, it is logical for the Senate to have a central role as a focus, facilitator and steward of shared governance, in both ongoing activities as well as in the review and renewal of shared governance, including that embodied in development and realization of the new Strategic Plan.

On behalf of the Senate, we look forward to contributing to the next phase in the development of Montclair State University.