

## Academic Senate CSU (ASCSU) Chair's Report to the CSU Board of Trustees

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The last time I spoke to the Board I developed a theme grounded in Aristotle's observation, "we are what we habitually do." This time, I'm going to advance a few centuries and use a recently released movie to frame my remarks. I don't think I need to issue a spoiler alert for this film, because even if you haven't seen it, you all know how it turns out. The movie is *Sully*, named after pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger who landed an airliner in the Hudson River in 2009. Given all of the flying I do now, my daughter said I was crazy to go see film about a flight that, shall we say, 'didn't go as planned'. But I went because I love Tom Hanks—he attended Sacramento State, so I can say by extension I was supporting my campus by supporting the film. I'm going to use some specific moments from the film to talk about what the ASCSU did last week during its meetings. Specifically, I'll talk about our resolutions, as well as issues that dominated our discussion which didn't end up in form of resolutions.

The first moment in the movie I'm going to isolate is a scene featuring Katie Couric interviewing Captain Sullenberger wherein she calls him a hero. She wasn't only one; it was a common theme in news reports. His response: I don't feel like a hero. His humility, firmly enveloping an abiding expertise that cannot be questioned, reminded me of the work of the Quantitative Reasoning Task Force: it was heroic! Task Force members are humble about their work, but their expertise and the expertise of those with whom they consulted cannot be questioned. Because of that, ASCSU generated three resolutions on quantitative reasoning.

The first resolution is titled, *Receipt of the Quantitative Reasoning Task Force Report*. The Senate formally received the Report so that it could be entered into the Senate record and we can then take action on what's in the Report if we think it's prudent. The resolution also forwarded the Report to Chancellor's Office with a request to begin discussion of the recommendations within the Report. Two of the four recommendations in the report had already been considered by the Senate in the past, which brings me to the second resolution.

It is titled, *Implementation of Quantitative Reasoning Task Force Recommendations That Reflect Items Previously Approved by the Academic Senate CSU*. This resolution references prior actions by the Senate which recommended a fourth year of high school quantitative reasoning be required for admission to the CSU, and the establishment of a Center for the Advancement of Instruction in Mathematics. It further asks that Chancellor's Office and ASCSU partner on pursuing those recommendations.

Finally, ASCSU discussed a resolution titled, "Endorsement of the Quantitative Reasoning Task Force Recommendations." This resolution was heard as a first reading, and action on it won't take place until our next meeting in November. This will give senators time to discuss with their constituents the elements of the Report that the Senate hasn't considered in the past.

As I indicated when I spoke to you in July, conversations about quantitative reasoning will be ongoing, faculty look forward to these curricular conversations, and we would be happy to have such a conversation with you, too. Doing so may help you understand the "Math Pathways" discussion from yesterday's Graduation Initiative presentation, taking advantage of Trustee Taylor's comment that he is excited to hear more, and could talk about quantitative reasoning pathways all day. I don't have all day, so I'm going to move from the heroic work of the Task Force to the second connection I see to *Sully*.

If you've seen the movie trailer, you know that prior to the water landing, the flight attendants shout to the passengers, "brace, brace, brace." I think that same mantra could be shouted to the people of the state of California if Proposition 55 on the November ballot doesn't pass. Yesterday you all discussed how important passage of this proposition is, and the Senate concurs. That's why we unanimously passed a resolution titled, *Support of Proposition 55 on the November 2016 Ballot: Tax Extension to Fund Education and Healthcare*. I won't go into the reasons why, you know them, I'll just opine that if Proposition 55 doesn't pass, the CSU will need to "brace for impact."

The third theme in the movie *Sully* that helps me frame the actions of the statewide Senate is a comment made by Tom Hanks' character when he says he spent over 40 years in the air, but in the end, he's going to be judged on just 208 seconds. This is similar to how the Senate felt when we learned there were questions recently about general education, questions raised by governor, the legislature, and Board members; questions about website clarity, transfer of general education (GE) courses, assessment, and so on.

Just like Sully, we on the faculty have decades of experience in general education. We hope that experience is valued, and we aren't judged on the last confusing website or student problem with transfer. To address those kinds of perceptions, last week we discussed two resolutions in first reading that we will act on in November. The first is a response to Assembly Concurrent Resolution 158 by Assembly Member Holden, and the second is the establishment of a faculty workgroup to study general education.

This latter resolution may be of particular interest to you, because this group would be examining the value, quality and diversity of GE curricula across the system. It would start by *analyzing* the data currently being collected in a system-wide survey of general education programs initiated by a recently released Coded Memorandum. It would also examine and offer suggestions on best practices in general education. This effort would be entirely consistent with the Graduation Initiative presentation that took place yesterday, in particular the "serving students differently" discussion and its emphasis on faculty-led curriculum review. We on the faculty welcome discussions about general education, including potentially the opportunity to talk with you in this room, and we trust our expertise as developed over the decades won't be eclipsed by recent hiccups.

Returning to my overall frame, I'll develop the fourth theme from *Sully* very briefly. It has to do with a moment in the film when Tom Hanks' character corrects a National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator who calls the incident a "crash." Sully says it wasn't a crash, it was a "forced water landing." That reminded me of the fact that words matter. What you call something, what it is, and what it isn't, matters. There are a couple of things on the minds of the faculty that matter to us very deeply, and the Senate talked about them quite a bit last week. We discussed the development of system-wide policies on academic freedom and intellectual property. We're working with Chancellor White and his cabinet to try to find a way for faculty to be involved in the development of those policies, because the words in those policies matter to us more than some of you might ever know. What is and isn't considered academic freedom, what is and isn't protected by intellectual property rights—those kinds of words are matters of academic safety and health to us. We want to be involved in crafting the policies that go in the seatback pocket in front of us. We hope these discussions don't crash, we'd much prefer a smooth landing.

Finally, there's one last theme I'd like to develop from the film. According to this fictional plot point, the NTSB conducts flight simulations and alleges that Sully could have landed at one of two airports instead of in the river. He tells them, though, that their simulations haven't accounted for the added reaction time of a real, live human

being, rather than a machine. This has been called “the human factor.” Once it was taken into account, the NTSB concludes that Sully did the right thing.

This scene reminded me of the Graduation Initiative. Remember yesterday during the discussion when Trustee Kimbell made a joke about how those of us on the Graduation Initiative Advisory Committee spent our summer reviewing algorithms? Well, that reminded me of what blogger Paula Barton wrote about the movie. She said: “When it came down to it, a gut feeling saved the 155 souls on board Flight 1549. It was the human factor. Few if any of us will ever face a decision comparable to what Capt. Sully faced. But in this age of communication chatterbots, information algorithms, and data analysis, it’s important to remember the human factor and how it impacts our work and our personal lives.”

What does that mean for the Graduation Initiative? It means that all of the algorithms and all of the data dashboards in the world can’t replace understanding our students. They are the human factor. It means we aren’t in a flight simulator under controlled conditions, when we’ll go home to dinner no matter how many times we crash the plane. It means understanding more than just the numbers, and the view from 30,000 feet. Our students are the human factor and the decisions we make affect their lives.

Instead of passing legislation and otherwise telling students we want them to graduate “on time,” how about if we say we want students to graduate in “their time”? Then maybe we won’t be sending the message that they’ve failed if they don’t graduate “on time.” “Their time” accounts for their complicated lives. “Their time” accounts for their choices, their constraints, their mistakes, and their successes, and everything else that goes into their university experience. “Their time” accounts for the human factor. Let’s help them graduate “their time.”