

Academic Senate CSU

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Comments to the CSU Board of Trustees

September 19, 2012

ASCSU Chair Diana Guerin

A few weeks ago, I had hoped to be sharing a resolution from the Academic Senate recognizing the faculty honored as the outstanding professors at the campuses of the CSU. Unfortunately, as I will report in a moment, an intervening event prevented that resolution from being developed.

I can report to you that last week the Academic Senate passed resolutions on Prop 30, Prop 32, and your agenda item pertaining to the potential budget cut should Prop 30 fail. These have been forwarded to you.

In discussing with the Academic Senate leadership the topics to cover in today's report to the Board, immediate past chair Jim Postma suggested talking about the workings of the CSU as an airline. Please bear with me.

If the CSU were an airline, let's imagine together the fleet of planes. In my mind I see jumbo jets, gleaming white with black trim, and big red letters proudly proclaiming CSU on the fuselage and tail.

In CSU Airlines, the Trustees are like the Board of Directors. You oversee the activities of the organization, including establishing broad policies and objectives, appointing executives, and monitoring human and financial resources.

Next we have the campus presidents, who are CEOs in charge of overseeing the day-to-day operations at various hubs. They ensure that operations are in line with the policies and objectives set by the Board.

Who are the passengers on CSU Airlines? They are the students. In 2012, CSU had over 425,000 students seeking passage to their intended destinations.

These student-passengers are flown to their destinations by the pilots of CSU Airlines, the faculty. In 2011, CSU Airlines had about 10,000 full-time pilots and 6,000 pilots on associated commuter airlines, our lecturer faculty. The pilots are hired because of their specialized knowledge and expertise in flying the jets. It is their responsibility to deliver the passengers safely to their intended destinations.

Of course, many other employees are critical to keeping our airliners flying on schedule—mechanics, flight attendants, ticket agents, baggage handlers, and so forth, and these are analogous to the various staff and administrators on the campuses.

Everyone in CSU Airlines has an important role, and the smooth operation of the airline is dependent upon the employees performing their clearly designated duties and responsibilities.

So, back to reality.

According to the Board of Trustees Report on Governance, Collegiality, and Responsibility in the CSU adopted in 1985, “Collegial governance assigns primary responsibility to the faculty for the educational functions of the institution...” This includes curriculum and methods of teaching. Due to the faculty’s knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogic expertise, this makes good sense.

Not only is the authority of the faculty over the curriculum delineated in your own policy, but it is set forth in law. Faculty authority is also recognized in documents guiding the profession, such as the American Association of University Professors Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, which has been commended by the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

Thus, faculty authority over the curriculum is well established.

Notwithstanding these dictums, we on the Academic Senate were stunned to find item 3 on your Educational Policies Committee agenda when it was posted to the web on Friday, September 7th, because we received official notice just a few moments earlier in an email stamped 3:49 pm.

In our hypothetical CSU Airlines, we view this as the equivalent of someone bringing a bomb on board our plane.

We were stunned that our security procedures had failed us.

We were stunned because we met twice over the summer on June 1st and August 15th with Academic Affairs leadership for the purpose of jointly establishing security measures to prevent bombs on board our planes.

We were stunned because we met with Academic Affairs leadership at the Chancellor’s Office on August 15th and had what we believed to be a collegial meeting to discuss the agenda item specified as “new and continuing CSU initiatives relevant to ASCSU.”

We were stunned to realize that this item eviscerating general education was apparently known to Academic Affairs at the time of our meeting on August 15th yet it did not appear on any of the lists shared with us nor was it mentioned during our two hour meeting.

On August 23rd one of the senators contacted me, to tell me that a decision had been made to eliminate upper division general education requirements. I assured him I would check on it and immediately sent an inquiry via email, to which there was no reply. I followed up a few days later, again receiving no reply. I checked with the chair of the Chancellor’s General Education Advisory

Committee, who indicated no knowledge of such a proposal, in no uncertain terms. In response to my subsequent phone call here at the Chancellor's Office, I was told the administrator was working on a project and unable to respond. Hence, I officially learned of agenda item 3 only shortly before it was announced on your agenda.

After intense discussion during the past week, the Academic Senate was provided an opportunity to review the substitute agenda item a few hours before we adjourned last Friday. We note that the item suggests that faculty agree with the proposal. On the contrary, we were not able to review the proposal with care; it came to us much like a hijacker's note rather than a request for review or assistance.

Over the past few years, the Academic Senate has expressed its concern that the CSU has undertaken many curriculum-related initiatives which began at the system-wide level without appropriate consultation with faculty. This latest example is perhaps the most egregious and has not only undermined the work of our Executive Committee, the Academic Senate, and the trust of the faculty, but also made further progress on SB 1440 transfer degrees more challenging to achieve and led to unnecessary upset on the campuses at the start of what is to be another very trying year.

The Academic Senate Executive Committee was committed to establishing procedures to work proactively with administration to identify issues of mutual concern in the shared governance process envisioned in Board policy, enshrined in the law, and promulgated in the standards of the profession.

The original agenda item proposing to eliminate upper division general education and reduce lower division GE was developed without any faculty consultation. The faculty consultation on the substitute agenda item is analogous to the actions the pilot and crew would take to get the bomb off the plane upon reading the hijacker's demands.

It is certainly true that our airline wants to have on-time departures and arrivals. It is also undeniably true that when flying from Los Angeles to Chicago, it would be foolhardy to land in Des Moines rather than Chicago simply because the scheduled arrival time is reached. The goal is and should be to travel to the ticketed destination, not to fly the plane for a specified period of time. In other words, faculty agree with and seek to further the goal of students graduating within four years. However, that four year mark should not be more important than the quality and completeness of the education our students receive. Some journeys take longer than others. Some journeys require more fuel than others.

Pilots are responsible for ensuring that there is sufficient fuel onboard, including a safety factor [that is, more fuel than is strictly needed]. That fuel amount is affected by the size of the jet, weight of the passengers and cargo, headwinds, and so forth. Quite clearly, the pilots doing the calculation for fuel needs are better enabled to make those decisions than the CEOs of the airline. If nothing else, they are aware of the passengers, baggage and weather conditions for each flight. Teaching faculty on our campuses know our students best, and understand the factors that affect students' abilities to learn and to succeed. We need to leave sufficient latitude for our faculty to maximize

student success, even if that means having a major program that is more than 120 units. Students might need to take 16 units per semester, for example, in some degree programs.

In closing, moving forward given such a breach of trust, respect, and integrity is going to be challenging. Our September plenary was hijacked, undermining progress on the agenda items jointly discussed with Academic Affairs leadership at our August 15th meeting.

Your policy on Collegiality states that “The governing board, through its administrative officers, makes sure that there is continual consultation with appropriate faculty representatives on these matters [that is, educational functions]. Faculty recommendations are normally accepted, except in rare instances and for compelling reasons.”

We therefore formally request that Board leadership and the Chancellor insure that faculty consultation has occurred prior to items being placed on the Board agenda on matters where the faculty have primary responsibility due to their knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogic expertise, such as on curricular matters. Please ask, “Where is the Academic Senate’s advice?” or “What do the faculty say?”

If such input is lacking, we request that you refer the item to the Academic Senate without placing it on your agenda. In this case, assuming that meaningful consultation can occur in the two months between the appearance of an item on the board’s agenda and action by the board is akin to asking the pilot to discuss next month’s flight schedule in mid-air while defusing a bomb.

The AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities states the following: “...A college or university in which all the components are aware of their interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among themselves, and of the force of joint action will enjoy increased capacity to solve educational problems.”

Your own policy recognizes the value of the process of shared governance, and recognizes the authority of faculty over the curriculum: “Collegial governance allows the academic community to work together to find the best answers to issues facing the university. Collegial governance assigns primary responsibility to the faculty for the educational functions of the institution in accordance with basic policy as determined by the Board of Trustees.”

We ask you to be vigilant: when others who are not pilots want to take over and fly the planes our students are on, please make sure they haven’t thrown the pilots off the plane. The pilots are the ones certified to fly the planes.

At your July meeting, you praised the work on SB 1440 led by immediate past chair of the Academic Senate Jim Postma. He is here to explain the impact of the original agenda item 3 on his work with SB 1440 this year.