



Provost's Response to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Renewal

May 7, 2018

I would like to thank the members of the Academic Senate's Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Renewal for the hard work they have put into producing their report on the Proposal for Academic Renewal, and particularly for their extensive consultation with the campus community.

The Ad Hoc Committee report presents three issues of concern, on teaching loads, tenure, and termination of faculty appointments and offers approximately 33 amendments, in seven groups, to the April 18 version of the Academic Renewal Proposal. These amendments address the three issues of concern by, respectively, proposing an alternative to the stratified teaching load arrangement in the Proposal, rejecting any involuntary termination of tenured appointments, and rejecting the termination of any contract appointments. The amendments also propose several other miscellaneous changes to the document.

Teaching loads

I am pleased that the Committee has presented a number of recommendations that make undeniable improvements to the Proposal. In particular, I welcome their idea for addressing teaching loads, which I think could be a creative way to achieve the original Proposal's intent to ensure teaching load consistency with the Faculty Handbook and across campus without the perceived disadvantages of the two- or three-tier system in the original Proposal. Many of the other amendments presented also contribute to strengthening the Proposal.

At the same time, I confess to being deeply disappointed by the rest of the report, which seems resolutely to ignore the most pressing challenge that the Proposal for Academic Renewal seeks to address, namely: How to strengthen *both* academic excellence *and* financial sustainability, *simultaneously*. This is admittedly not an easy challenge to meet. Indeed it is a very difficult one, because increased quality normally costs more, and reducing costs usually involves a reduction in quality. The Proposal offers as a solution to this conundrum the idea that we should uphold the *Faculty Handbook* mandated 3-course per semester teaching load ("3:3"), which would create a surplus of teaching capacity in some schools and departments. Eliminating this surplus by cutting 35 faculty positions, or 9% of our full-time faculty positions, allows us to cut costs and thereby strengthen our financial sustainability. At the same time, it will also help us take steps toward increasing the faculty complement in units experiencing significant enrollment growth. The Committee rejects this approach, but does not offer any credible alternative.

Tenure

Opponents of the Proposal for Academic Renewal have attempted to position the Proposal as an attack on tenure as such. This rhetorical strategy has been successful in causing widespread anxiety among faculty. Rhetorical flourishes like “playing with fire” grossly misrepresent the intent of the Proposal. The Faculty Handbook Committee, in weighing in on the question, has exceeded its authority to advise on and implement changes to the Handbook. By no stretch of its mandate¹ is the Faculty Handbook Committee authorized to sit as some sort of Supreme Court and pass judgment as to how the *Faculty Handbook* is to be interpreted or applied.

I wish to affirm, and I’m sure that the President and Board of Trustees will affirm with me, the vital importance of tenure to our function and identity as a research university, and that no action of the University resulting from the Proposal for Academic Renewal should be interpreted in any way as diminishing the University’s commitment to tenure.

The debate is a much more specific one. The Ad Hoc Committee’s report appeals to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) definition of tenure as “an indefinite appointment that can be terminated only for cause or under extraordinary circumstances **such as** financial exigency and program discontinuation”² (emphasis added). The debate we should have been having is not whether or not this University supports tenure as an institution—it does, unequivocally—but whether or not the current circumstances are extraordinary enough that they would be part of the acceptable set of reasons “**such as** financial exigency and program discontinuation.” I, the President, and our Office of General Counsel think that they are. Others disagree. This is the debate we should have been having all along, and I hope that we can leave the incendiary rhetoric behind and at last engage in this specific debate at the Academic Senate on May 9.

Termination of faculty

In addition to rejecting any possibility of eliminating any tenured positions, the Ad Hoc Committee report further proposes that no elimination of *any* full-time faculty positions should take place. To the question of how to address the approximately \$900,000³ per year shortfall, the Committee presents “other fiscal measures” (Amendment 29). What are these measures? We are given three examples: “allowing the academic units to keep the profit they make on summer programs, by further consolidation of academic units to reduce administrative costs, or by short-term deficit spending while the University works out a new marketing and recruitment plan for new students.” Each of these examples falls short. Summer program surpluses were used to mitigate budget cuts; they are not available to fill any other gaps in the budget. Consolidation of academic units provides minimal savings; the new School of Music, Art, and Drama is proposed as a revenue-enhancing, not a cost-cutting move. Deficit spending merely postpones the problem and carries other financial and reputational risks. And if it were easy to “work out a new

¹ “The Committee on the Faculty Handbook continually evaluates the provisions of the Faculty Handbook and the manner by which these provisions are being implemented. If on the basis of this evaluation the committee determines that revisions are needed, the committee will prepare and recommend revisions of the Handbook for approval by the Senate, the President and the Board of Trustees.”

<http://academicssenate.cua.edu/facultyhandbook.cfm> (accessed May 4, 2018).

² Memorandum from Rev. Robert J. Kaslyn, SJ, Chair of the Faculty Handbook Committee, to Prof. Gregory Doolan, Chair of the Academic Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Renewal, April 24, 2018, citing <https://www.aaup.org/issues/tenure>

³ At the time the Ad Hoc Committee produced its report. Further voluntary reductions have now reduced this figure to approximately \$700,000.

marketing and recruiting plan” successful enough to solve our financial woes we would have done so already. The undeniable fact is that there are no other sources for funding this remaining shortfall.

Anxiety

I reject the assertion that the Proposal has “regrettably--been the source for grief, anxiety, pain, and even division in [our] academic community.” Much of the grief, anxiety, pain and division was caused by the tactics of those who sought primarily to spread fear rather than participate in a productive exercise of shared governance. (And does the Committee not see the irony of presenting complaints about transparency when on the one side we have a process unequalled in its extent of consultation and candor while on the other we have its most strident opponents spreading half-truths and fear through an anonymous website and unattributed comments in the press?)

A certain measure of anxiety is the natural result of a community attempting to deal with a serious challenge openly and with strongly differing opinions: in other words, shared governance in action. The Committee cannot at the same time ask for transparency and shared governance and then complain that the transparent working out of a complex problem is anxiety-inducing.

Shared governance requires not just sharing, but also governance. The Academic Senate must be willing to make a difficult decision to address the challenge facing us. In the nine months since I first proposed the idea of increasing teaching loads and eliminating faculty positions, and asked for alternative suggestions, *not one* credible alternative has been presented. I think we should conclude, after this time, that this is because there are no other alternatives that do not involve cutting our libraries, study abroad programs, or doctoral programs, or otherwise harming our student experience. As challenging as the original Proposal is, it is the one proposal that does allow us to improve academic excellence while also strengthening financial sustainability. I strongly recommend that the Senate and Board of Trustees support this proposal, and reject outright any amendments that will neuter it of its financial responsibility.

Summary

A number of the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendations will strengthen the Proposal. The balance of the proposed amendments, however, are worse than an outright rejection of the Proposal. If adopted, they would mutilate the document to the point where a proposal to reconcile academic excellence and financial sustainability becomes instead a mere list of possible improvements for academic excellence, with no reference at all to how to address financial sustainability. This, I believe, is financially irresponsible, and should be soundly rejected by the Senate.

Response to specific amendments

I have labeled each amendment below as to its status: friendly or unfriendly. Friendly amendments are those that I consider to be improving the Proposal. The unfriendly amendments are those that either do not support the twin goals of academic excellence and financial sustainability, or that make the document or part of it incoherent.

Group 1: Acknowledge controversy in background and demographic data

1 - **Friendly with the following change.** “Insert: Concerns about the number of high school graduates **have contributed to an environment of increased competition in Higher Education**; ~~been raised and~~ the University experienced an especially small incoming class in the fall of 2016 that decreased incoming tuition and put a strain on the budget”

The main point here is that we are operating in an environment of increased competition in Higher Education. If this point is retained in some way, then the amendment could be friendly.

9 - **Friendly with the following change.** “Insert: There is currently debate in Higher Education regarding **the forecasted number of high school graduates** ~~graduation rates~~ and their impact on future **college** enrollments.”

What is at issue is the future number of graduates, not specifically the graduation rate.

10 - **Unfriendly, but could be friendly with the following change.** “~~Delete:~~ **Replace**

o ~~We are in the midst of a significant decline in the number of high school graduates in the northeastern United States, and a nationwide decline in the number of private high school graduates. From 2011 to 2022, the number of private high school graduates will decline by 28%.~~ **with**

o **Concerns about the number of high school graduates have contributed to an environment of increased competition in Higher Education**

o An annual report from the Center for Education Statistics noted that “the number of colleges and universities eligible to award federal financial aid to their students fell by 5.6 percent from 2015-16 to 2016-17. That’s the fourth straight decline since a peak of 7,416 institutions in 2012-13. It is also by far the largest.”

o In late 2017, Moody’s downgraded the financial outlook for the entire higher education sector from stable to negative. In January 2018, Standard and Poor’s also noted a bleak outlook for the sector.”

While there is controversy over the first point, the second and third points are important background for the Proposal, and unquestionable.

Group 2: Establish a Center for Teaching Excellence

Amendments 3, 11, 13, 14, 17, and 19 are all **friendly**.

21 - **Unfriendly**. “Delete: ‘sustainable’ [from ‘Support Sustainable Teaching Excellence.’]
Specific rationale for Amendment 21: This word was deemed superfluous.”

I do not think the word “sustainable” is superfluous. It is important to avoid short-term efforts that are unsustainable. If you think the word is superfluous, then you should have no objection to leaving it in — in a 14-page document, one extra word will do no harm if it is indeed superfluous.

Group 3: Affirm a 3:3 teaching load and establish a Unit Standards Committee that will determine course load equivalencies

*I support this initiative. However, as written, amendments 6, 12, 15, 16, 22, and 28 are **unfriendly**, because they are confusing and risk removing authority for teaching assignments from deans and chairs, where it belongs according to the Faculty Handbook (e.g. II-F-6.183d).*

Instead I propose the following, which I hope will be a friendly “amendment to the amendment(s)” since it achieves the same stated goal:

Amendment A

On page 11, insert after resolution #7: “8. The Academic Senate should establish a new standing Unit Standards Committee. This Committee should consult widely and recommend standardized weights for various teaching related activities, including but not limited to all the items listed in the current Draft Teaching Activity Measurement Standardization (Appendix G). Recommendations should be provided annually to the Provost and Deans by the end of each Fall semester, in time for consideration prior to planning the next academic year’s teaching assignments.

The new Unit Standards Committee is encouraged to propose eliminating the Doctoral/Professional/Undergraduate classifications and their associated differential teaching loads, and replacing them with a system that would assign the same load standard to all research faculty across the University, but with significant reductions (e.g. one course per semester) allowed for doctoral dissertation guidance.”

7 - **Friendly**. “Insert (at the end): funded through philanthropic giving and capital improvement projects.”

37 - **Friendly**. “Change “faculty teaching and research responsibilities” to “faculty teaching, research, and service responsibilities.”

Group 4: Delete all mention of involuntary termination of tenured faculty

8 - **Unfriendly but proposed alternative would be friendly.** Delete “The Academic Renewal project will adjust teaching loads...” etc.

The following alternative is offered, which addresses the Committee’s concern with the sentence, while still leaving intact the explanation of the central point of the proposal: that increasing teaching loads allows for reduced costs:

Amendment B

On page 2, **replace** “The rebalanced teaching loads will result in fewer faculty in certain academic units, which will be addressed through voluntary retirement incentives and, depending on the number of voluntary departures, potentially also a reduction of a small number of faculty through non-renewal of contracts and elimination of tenured positions.”

with: “The rebalanced teaching loads will result in fewer faculty in certain academic units, which have been mitigated by voluntary incentives offered by the University.”

26 - **Unfriendly.** “Delete: remaining [from ‘All remaining faculty.’]”

Rationale: “All remaining” was introduced to replace “Selected” as a friendly amendment from the Senate Budget and Planning Committee. Removing “remaining” changes the meaning of the statement.

29 - **Unfriendly but the following amendment would be friendly.** “Delete: 5. A reduction of approximately 35 full time faculty...” etc.

This amendment refers to “other fiscal measures” without specifying what they are. If such other measures existed and were feasible, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. The following alternative amendment is offered:

Amendment C

On page 10, **replace** “A reduction of approximately 35 full time faculty be implemented effective the end of the Spring 2018 semester. Currently this includes approximately 25 faculty who have indicated their intention to leave voluntarily—the majority by taking the current Retirement Incentive—and the balance whose contracts will not be renewed, or whose tenured positions will be eliminated. The final numbers will not be known until the end of April, when all intentions for voluntary withdrawal have been submitted. It is possible, indeed highly desirable, that through these voluntary withdrawals and other efforts, no involuntary reductions will be required.”

with: “A reduction of approximately 35 full time faculty be implemented effective the end of the Spring 2018 semester. The University has offered incentives to maximize the number of voluntary reductions. It is possible, indeed highly desirable, that through these voluntary withdrawals and other efforts, no involuntary reductions will be required.”

32 - **Friendly**. “Delete: That said, we are anticipating more voluntary reductions, and if a sufficient number of these arise, within the right academic units, the number of involuntary reductions will decrease, ideally to none at all.”

33 - **Friendly**. “Delete: Our intention is to ensure that no program, ...” etc.

34 - **Unfriendly**. “Delete the entire section [on Approval Process and Authority].”

Rationale: the Senate Resolution of December 7, 2017 (attached to the Proposal as Appendix A), requires an explanation of “how all aspects of the proposed process accord with governance requirements set forth in the Faculty Handbook.”

35 - **Unfriendly**. “Delete Appendix C.”

Rationale: I find this one to be downright incomprehensible. The report mentions concerns about transparency and “the lack of specificity in the Proposal itself”, and then proposes an amendment to eliminate Appendix C, which is the very part of the document that explains, transparently and specifically, where the impact of the Proposal will fall. How does removing this appendix do anything to make the Proposal more transparent or specific?!

Group 5: Establish a new School of Music, Drama, and Art

4 - **Friendly**. “Change name from “Music, Visual and Performing Arts” to “School of Music, Drama, and Art”

24 - **Unfriendly**. “Delete: Benjamin T. Rome School of Music and Departments of Art and Drama in the School of Arts and Sciences are closed. Specific rationale for Amendment 24: The Schools and departments will not officially be closed; they will be moved/combined.”

The Faculty Handbook contains no provision for moving or combining schools or departments. It only has provisions for opening and closing them.

25 - **Friendly**. “Delete: of Music, Visual and Performing Arts.”

27 - **Unfriendly**. “Insert: v. The new School will be formally established starting August 20, 2018. ... vii. The new School will be publicly launched at the beginning of the fall semester 2019...” etc.

While I think having a “soft launch” this summer and delaying the public launch to Fall 2019 is a good idea, it is not the role of the Senate to tell the faculty and new dean of the school when and how to run the public launch of the school. This should be left to the determination of the faculty and dean of the new school. I suggest that the Ad Hoc Committee withdraw this amendment.

Group 6: Establish a School of Business and the Department of Economics

5 - **Friendly with the following change.** “Insert: The **reestablishment** ~~return~~ of the Department of Economics into the School of Arts and Sciences.”

The Department of Economics does not exist currently, and therefore cannot be “returned” anywhere.

Group 7: Issues of transparency, accountability, and standards

2 - **Friendly**. “Insert bolded words: The specific objectives of the program are to enhance the University’s research reputation, support sustainable teaching excellence, and enable significant revenue improvements, **all while respecting and upholding the governing documents of the University.**”

18 - **Friendly**. “Insert (at end of iii): Implement a multi-year process to assess additional opportunities for academic unit reorganization.”

20 - **Friendly with the following change, or at least a clarification**. “Delete: Revise faculty and academic administration evaluation process to ensure meaningful outcomes for outstanding performance (e.g. merit raises, bonuses, research funding, teaching loads) and for substandard performance
Insert: Revise faculty and academic administration evaluation process to ~~increase transparency~~, **ensure** ~~implement~~-constructive feedback, and recognize outstanding performance (e.g. merit raises, bonuses, research funding, teaching loads).

It is unclear what transparency should look like in the case of faculty evaluation. Should faculty evaluations be shared with colleagues, or made public? Further clarification of what is meant by transparency here could make this a friendly amendment.

23 - **Unfriendly**. “Delete: and direction” [in “Goals and direction.”]

This identical amendment was proposed by the Senate Budget and Planning Committee and voted down by the Academic Senate in its April 18 meeting. A vote on this does not advance the process, especially given that the Ad Hoc Committee’s only rationale is that “‘goals’ is sufficient.” Clearly a majority of senators do not think it is sufficient, else they would not have voted against the amendment.

30 - appears to add two new sentences. I suggest that we divide into two:

30A - **Unfriendly**. Insert: “The “right-sizing” of units would be accomplished by evaluating the teaching, research, and service needs of the units and will not occur until the new Unit Standards Committee has evaluated teaching loads.”

Rationale: this will delay implementation of the Academic Renewal proposal. At the April 18 Senate meeting, all attempts to delay action were voted down.

30B - **Friendly**. Insert “Further defining the sizes of units in a transparent process will allow evidence-based future hiring strategies.”

31 - **Friendly**. “Insert words in bold: Be it resolved that this Academic Renewal Proposal be referred to the Senate Academic Policy **Committee, the** Budget and Planning Committee, **and the Committee on**

Faculty Economic Welfare who are charged to review the proposal and to submit their reports, separately or jointly, including any recommended amendments to the Proposal, to the Academic Senate by April 5, in time for action at the April 12 Senate meeting. Specific rationale for Amendment 31: The original Proposal neglected to mention the Committee on Faculty Economic Welfare. This is a correction.”

Small clarification: The original Proposal did not include the Committee on Faculty Economic Welfare only because the Faculty Handbook does not include the Committee on Faculty Economic Welfare as a reviewing body for such circumstances; it only mentions the Senate Budget and Planning and Academic Policy Committees. The addition of the Committee on Faculty Economic Welfare as a reviewing body came about as the result of an amendment proposed by Dr. Kurt Martens at the March 15, 2018 meeting of the Senate, which was accepted as friendly by the Provost.