

Chair of the Faculty Comments, November 6, 2020

Hello Everyone: Welcome to our November faculty council meeting which is also a meeting of the General Faculty. The first comment I'd like to make is to thank our staff in the OFG, Kadejah Murray, Lisa Jean Michienzi and Helena Knego. Putting together a meeting for two legislative bodies in complex technologically and they have made it happen. Please join me in thanking them via virtual applause.

We come to this meeting with a lot on our minds and on our hearts. If you're like me, you've been refreshing your news feed constantly as we wait for definitive election results. Like me, you are also probably concerned about the potential for violence no matter what the outcome. So many in our community have stepped forward to give us ways to engage, to learn, and to reflect on the election results. The School of Law, the Institute for the Arts and Humanities, The Center for Faculty Excellence, and many other places on campus are providing insights and resources open to all to understand nuances of election law and what happens if particular scenarios unfold. We are helping our students and each other process feelings, cope with uncertainty, engage through conversation and learning. Our safety professionals on campus are clear that, at this time, this is the best course of action. There are some across the country who want to provoke confrontations particularly as uncertainty continues. The best course of action right now is to remain patient and to not to give flame throwers additional oxygen.

Meanwhile on our campus, we have heard from our staff in the last few weeks via a report put out by the Employee Forum. Having read the report from cover to cover, I would note that there are a variety of perspectives on how staff are feeling and coping. But suffice it to say, that as a group, staff are often overlooked and do not enjoy the same level of choice and control over the circumstances of their employment that faculty do. Many staff members are in highly vulnerable situations – both in terms of the virus and their livelihood. Our staff feel this reality deeply and we should too. Although I am the Chair of the Faculty and supposed to be concerned only with your interests, in the current circumstance, that would be no way to lead. As I've said before, we are in separate boats in the same storm and we will only survive it if we form a flotilla and row together. That is a very difficult thing to do. But it is a mindset we can contemplate and work to espouse even as we voice disagreements, consider differing points of view, and propose differing solutions to the choices that confront us.

Toward this end, I am very encouraged by the work of the Campus and Community Advisory Committee. This group of 25 people – faculty, staff, and students, have been coming together every Tuesday for two hours or more, considering information and formulating recommendations related to spring. Likewise, committees within the faculty governance structure have been asking tough questions that move the discussion forward. In addition, individual faculty are reaching out and offering to provide their labor and expertise. Just in the last few days, Richard Smith, Jan Hannig, and Serhan Ziya from Statistics and Operations Research have offered consultation to the Provost, an offer he is pursuing, that would create models to examine the impact of various strategies for managing the virus on campus. These are the types of collaborative efforts that will benefit all of us.

Before I turn this over to the Chancellor, I want to return to the election for a moment. Almost always, history has something to tell us about our current circumstances. After I sent out my campus message last week, Vic Schoenbach, from the School of Public Health wrote to me and requested that I include some sort of historical reference in these remarks. For a moment such as this, we need true historical expertise. For that reason, I've invited former Chair of the Faculty, Lloyd Kramer, to say a few words to contextualize our current moment. We all miss Lloyd and I am grateful he was willing to be a part of this meeting. Following his comments, we will turn ourselves to a very full agenda.

Thank you, Lloyd, for joining us and I'll turn it over to you.