

Report from the Curricular Planning and Policy Committee to the Academic  
Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees

October 11, 2018

upheaval we are experiencing, the faculty have confidence in our curriculum and in our ability to provide our students with an excellent liberal arts education.

Now, I realize that I don't need to tell any of you this. You're here because of a DePauw education and your continued deep commitment to it. Thank you. But I do want to emphasize that whatever else one might say about DePauw's challenges and struggles, these numbers also make clear that the work of faculty members is not the problem. We're committed to our students' success. That's why we're here. And that's why our students come here. [I wish I could show you a few video clips of our students at a recent academic banquet].

curriculum offers. [And I'd be glad to talk more about this in relation to the hiring of the McDermond Center director]

DePauw's academic curriculum is its core. Faculty members, however, are concerned that the center of the university—its academic programs—is being displaced. The increase in the number of Centers on campus—ten and counting—and the push by those Centers to get students involved in “co-curricular” activities is undermining our Curriculum and moving us away from a focus on our core academic mission. Increases in funding and in staff positions for the Centers, as well as increased demands on our students' time, are shifting DePauw's focus away from its academic programs. Accordingly, one of the most important challenges that the Curriculum committee is addressing this year is the relationship between the Centers and the curriculum. It is unfortunate that this fundamental question had not been resolved earlier while the Gold Commitment was being planned and implemented by the administration. Faculty members report that the Gold Commitment rollout has been confusing— to put it charitably, it has been a continual work in progress--and that it appears to add costly quasi-administrative roles while doing very little to add to DePauw's core academic mission. Indeed, many faculty members would argue that it is detracting from this mission.

The curriculum committee is asking the Board to help us, in the words of one of my colleagues, to “Center the Academic Mission, which means placing faculty (and support staff) at the center of all budget considerations.” Faculty are concerned that the values of our core academic enterprise are not being reflected in the financial decisions of the University. We are seeking a better alignment of new investments with support of the

academic programs so that our core mission--educating our students— can be sustained and strengthened. Thanks to the amazing generosity of donors to DePauw, the Prindle,



suffer from mutual miscomprehension. As one of my colleagues wrote, "I don't understand what it means to be either an administrator or a student or a staff person, and they don't understand what it's like to be a faculty member." This is why we need institutional structures of communication that bring us all together. University presidents agree with my colleague. Earlier this year, I attended a panel on shared governance that was put together by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). It was made up of university presidents and administrators, and I was inspired by their repeated emphasis on thinking about shared governance in terms of aligning goals. Such efforts, however, are stymied by a lack of communication. Here are two statistics that stuck with me: in terms of how well boards and faculty members understand one another, only 32% of university presidents think that board members understand the work and responsibilities of faculty members. Even worse, presidents think that only 23% of faculty members understand the responsibilities and authority of the governing board. This mutual lack of understanding makes it very difficult to align priorities and goals. During this panel, Raynard Kington, President of Grinnell College, urged for more face-to-face interaction between faculty members, students, and boards of trustees. Grinnell has a non-voting faculty member on a board of trustees committee, as well as student government representatives. President Kington also explained that he instituted a group of board and faculty members who regularly meet without the President. He felt that such an institutional structure allowed for healthy discussion and the creation of trust. It is too evident that there's a lack of trust on campus, and we believe that regular dialogue through institutional structures of communication such as these could go a long way towards renewing trust. Without formalized communication channels, the risk of

mutual miscomprehension makes the effort to align goals a very difficult task. [In the discussion that followed this presentation, some suggestions were made for improving communication between the board of trustees, faculty members, and students: linking faculty governance committees with board committees in a formalized structure, a non-voting faculty member on the board of trustees, more face-to-face interaction between faculty members, students, and board members in classes and other campus events. I would add that faculty and board of trustee members might benefit from learning more about each other's roles during annual orientations.]

I teach literature of the Enlightenment, so I recognize the value of older texts. And

hard decisions need to be made, and we believe that the best way to make them is through informed, collaborative discussion and the alignment of shared goals. As one of my colleagues explained to me once, we need "to steward academic disciplines and to steward dollars." A university requires both forms of stewardship, and we need dialogue with one another to achieve success. I remain confident that all parties have the best interests of the university at heart and that we can find a path forward regardless of how challenging that path might be. Thank you.