

Chairman Kennedy and Board Members, President Easter and Chancellors and Vice Presidents

It is a great pleasure to speak with you at the start of a new year, as Chair of the University Senates Conference. After a contentious year, I am pleased to report that our processes of shared governance have come through stronger than before. With the leadership of my predecessor, Don Chambers, and the efforts of many of you, we have weathered some fundamental threats to the ethos and the processes of shared governance – and in weathering those threats I believe we have emerged with an even stronger commitment to shared governance as the way we do things at the University of Illinois.

As we face a year of new opportunities and big challenges, I believe that we are better-positioned now to address them, together . . . which is the only way we can address them effectively.

First, I have already experienced in my interactions with you a new openness and commitment to communication and sharing information, in both directions. One of the key elements of the 2009 admissions scandal was an unhealthy three-sided relationship involving the President, the then-Board of Trustees, and the Chancellor from my campus. As you know, there was a lot of back-channel communication with the Board, and it exacerbated a dysfunctional governing relationship. But I have to tell you that I think that the reaction to that problem over-corrected in the other direction, as we experimented with an arrangement in which nearly all communication and information flow to the Board, from the campuses and from the faculty, had to be channeled through the President. I think it is clear with hindsight that this did not serve the Board well, and that there must be legitimate and structured ways in which information processes can

provide the Board with the range of information from the campuses and the faculty that you need in order to enact your oversight role.

We saw this most dramatically in the turn we were able to make last spring with the controversial enrollment management initiative, once Chairman Kennedy got involved and was able to hear from the faculty directly. It became clear that we were not opposed to the proposal in its entirety, were not just being obstructionist or averse to change, but had legitimate and serious questions about whether it could work as originally proposed. The revised proposal that emerged after Chairman Kennedy's intervention laid a much stronger foundation for reform, with much more campus and faculty support, and that is the framework we are able to start with this year.

But there is another aspect of this shift we might reflect upon. With greater openness and willingness to listen, on both sides, came greater respect and trust. I would like to quote a brief passage from a document on shared governance Joyce Tolliver and I just wrote for the Urbana Senate:

[Communication between the faculty and administration] must be based upon the interdependent principles of trust, respect, collegiality, and transparency. When participants do not show respect and collegiality, there can be no trust; when there is no trust, information will not freely be shared and there will be no transparency. Trust, respect, collegiality, and transparency cannot be mandated; each of them must be earned through their daily enactment. Once established, these qualities build upon one another; once broken, they can be difficult to re-establish. . . .

Ultimately, shared governance is not just about governing documents; it is about people and the relationships they create and maintain with each other. It is strong when people

share an honest commitment to these processes; it is threatened when people approach it only strategically or as a token obligation.

I believe we have come a long way in re-establishing these relationships at the university level.

Second, I want to give you an update on a change the Senates Conference has made in its internal organization. At our last meeting we approved a change in our bylaws to re-establish a subcommittee structure that will allow us to work more effectively, and in parallel, on a number of issues that will be coming before us this year and in years to come. We have purposely mapped these four subcommittees onto the same topic areas as the four Board subcommittees, and we are asking the Chairs of our new subcommittees to attend and observe at open meetings of the Board subcommittees – as, for example, Don Chambers has already been doing on his own with the Hospital committee. We also hope that the Senates Conference subcommittees will be able to interact from time to time with the Vice Presidents, dealing with their respective areas of authority. The purpose here, again, is to improve communication and information flow over the range of issues on which the Senates Conference needs to be informed if we are to effectively fulfill our advisory role; and where relevant to be able to provide members of the Board with information and constructive input from the faculty point of view.

I will share with you my own hope that over time the relation of the USC subcommittee chairs to the four Board subcommittees might evolve beyond just being liaisons, to eventually being included as members of those subcommittees. That is entirely your decision, of course. The important thing now is that we are taking this step in order to promote the relationship-building I just talked about.

Third, and finally, we were delighted with the cross-campus retreat in July that Trustee Strobel, President Easter, and others helped organize, bringing together faculty, deans, campus administrators, and Board members. It was a milestone in the evolution of shared governance, we believe, and it was exciting to hear Chairman Kennedy express his intention that this become an annual event.

A central theme of the retreat – one of many important topics – was the “one university” question. The sensible way in which the topic was discussed by the guest speakers and in the break-out sessions made me realize how much effort we have wasted in the past couple of years spinning our wheels over the “one university” versus “three campuses” debate. The retreat discussions made one thing clear: this institution is both, and for decades has been both; the question was and is how much emphasis one places on one side of that relation over the other.

It is ironic, perhaps, to note that the more emphasis that was placed on the unitary university ideal, the GREATER the friction we saw amongst the campuses within the Senates Conference. That may seem paradoxical, but I want to share with you our very strong belief that when the campuses feel secure in their identity and integrity, they will be MORE willing to collaborate and work together. On the other hand, when they feel that their identity and integrity are threatened, fearing that they might be merged into an amorphous whole with which they do not identify, they will become more territorial and mistrusting.

The fact is that in recent months we have already made more progress in actually building the foundation for better cross-campus connections than was achieved in the two years previously.

I believe that what we have is a federation of three strong campuses, committed to working together for the people of this state, the nation, and the world. And I believe that the campuses are committed to supporting one another as we each strive toward the highest levels of excellence of which we are capable – and we realize that we will achieve higher levels if we do support one another.

The University Senates Conference is itself a manifestation of this sense of common destiny. I want to assure you that we are fully committed to working together amongst ourselves, and to working with all of you, to help lead our three campuses – and the wider institution – to an even brighter future.