

January 10, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

I write with both good news and sad news as I look back on the past year and look forward to the next. I write this letter on my own, in my capacity as Senate president, but I am also going to ask your senators to work with me on the grave issues I raise at the end.

Let me start with the positive, of which there is much good to report.

The Senate has enjoyed a great working relationship with the new administration – without question, the most collaborative and productive relationship between admin and faculty since I arrived at Mines five years ago. In years past, this relationship had been shaken by some trust and confidence issues, undoubtedly exacerbated by all parties. But since Paul Johnson arrived, he has shown an unmistakable interest in working with faculty as true partners. He has listened to our thoughts and concerns, responded, and worked with us collaboratively. It has been precisely the sort of healthy relationship one would want and expect at a high functioning university.

Let me share some of the highlights:

- Paul's very first day of work as president, on July 1, began with a long phone call with me to discuss the broad range of issues that have concerned the faculty and that emerged from our two faculty surveys. He and I have met regularly ever since, with open conversations on many matters, including the issues you have brought to my or the Senate's attention.
- We have seen fantastic progress on the family-friendly proposal Senate put forward last year. New resources, including changing stations and a family friendly webpage, have been created. Two key recommendations are coming into place: (1) aligning the CSM calendar with that of JeffCo schools and public holidays, including the addition of MLK and Labor Day, all recently approved by the Calendar Committee; (2) modifications to the family leave policy so that there is not a one-year "waiting period" before such leave kicks in, and paving the way for teaching relief during the semester when family leave is taken; policy changes currently before the Handbook committee. We have also been discussing benefits that would help with child care. In short, virtually all of our recommendations have seen positive action, with the one exception of our proposal for a tuition exchange program, which obviously requires careful study. We owe special thanks to Mike Dougherty and Kirstin Volpi for the progress thus far.
- The Faculty Climate Survey – and the Senate – identified concerns about our promotion and tenure process, with faculty expressing wariness about the transparency and predictability of it all. Paul, Terry, and the Senate worked together to begin a conversation about improving the process, with two parallel initiatives moving forward: a committee focused on clarifying our expectations and guidelines, and the Senate working on the process itself. Both have proceeded quickly and collaboratively, and we will soon have draft proposals to share with the campus.
- The Climate Survey also drew attention to a torturous reality of our professional lives: the many hours consumed by email. The administration has taken the lead on developing a daily digest that should greatly simplify our inboxes and communications: it kicks in tomorrow! For this, we owe special thanks to CCIT and Kay Schneider.

- At the end of last spring, the Senate, acting on research provided by LAIS, drew attention to inequities in faculty salaries, especially among teaching faculty. With Paul's encouragement, the deans began addressing the issue at the very beginning of the fall semester, to the benefit of many of our colleagues, especially those burdened with the greatest inequities. We owe them our thanks.
- The Senate last year also drew attention to key shortcomings in our process for hiring new faculty, and the Senate proposed a significant overhaul via Handbook revisions. Paul has been supportive of this effort, as have been the department heads, all of whom suggested amendments that we have considered collaboratively. We owe them, Tom Boyd, and Anne Walker thanks for their assistance and ideas. That proposal, too, is working its way through the Handbook Committee.
- The Senate also discussed the leadership transition with the president, and we fully support Tom Boyd's interim appointment as provost. He has our faith and confidence, and we look forward to working with him and Paul as the campus continues through the transition.
- The president has also assured us of his belief in faculty ownership of the curriculum, and together with Tom Boyd we have discussed measures to improve the coordination and communication between academic leadership and the faculty on curricular matters.

If you look at the list above, you'll notice we have made progress in just about every initiative that has been on the Senate's radar since last year. Our colleagues in administration, from the president on down, have been supportive partners. So here is the take-away: Sometimes we faculty have brought a suspicious or adversarial mindset in our dealings with our leadership. Sometimes, we have been greeted with the same. But now it is time for us all to put such attitudes to rest. That time has passed.

I wish I could end this letter here, full stop. But alas, there are worrisome issues that we faculty must tackle openly and courageously.

Three issues related to faculty conduct (and to research ethics) came to my attention in December that suggest there are some problems in our house. These involved inappropriate relationships with students, abusive and exploitive mentoring relationships with graduate students, and a callous – if not also inhumane – response to a graduate student suffering from anxiety and depression. These appear to have happened with at least the tacit awareness of, and acceptance by, members of our community, possibly over a long period of time.

Full disclosure: for each of these cases, I have only heard part of the story, and I have an incomplete picture. But if only a fraction of what I have heard is true, I feel compelled as your elected representative to open a campus dialogue about the ethical standards we expect from ourselves:

- Is there something about our campus culture that has permitted us to look away from or accept egregious behavior that harms other faculty and students?
- Do we know how to report this type of behavior when we see or suspect it? Do we do so?
- Have we empowered our students to do the same?
- What ethical standards do we hold ourselves to – and how do we convey and act upon those values?

The following will help spark this conversation:

- Tomorrow (Jan 12), I am convening an executive session of the Faculty Senate to discuss these cases (and others) with a goal of identifying actions that we as a faculty community can take to advance our core values. As this relates to personnel matters, the meeting will not be open, but subsequent discussions will take place with, I hope, full engagement of the campus community.
- On January 27, Paul Johnson will speak at a Faculty Forum to lead an open discussion of these issues. (Make your calendars: 1/27, 4pm, Grand Ballroom, refreshments served starting at 330).
- Following these discussions, I will ask Senators to work with department heads to lead discussions about paths forward, and then to relate ideas to both Senate and administration.
- I also invite members of the community to reach out to me or your fellow senators with ideas for things we can do, now, to spark a dialogue and promote our values. In this regard, I have also asked the leaders of the Ethics Across Campus Program to help us address these issues.

Through all this, I hope we rethink what it means to be faculty in this community. We have labored to enhance faculty oversight and responsibility for maintaining academic standards – in hiring, promotion and tenure, and in instruction. This is not enough.

We must also take full responsibility for maintaining professional standards. This means broadening our understanding of professional ethics. It goes beyond fiduciary responsibility, beyond guarding against conflicts of interest, beyond the mere avoidance of misconduct. It means expecting the members of our community to treat students and colleagues humanely, with respect and compassion. It means that collegiality, professionalism, and kindness need to be upheld as values. Those values, in turn, need to be reflected in our standards. Perhaps most importantly, it means speaking up when we witness actions that contravene those values. Put most simply: We must model the behavior we want our students to emulate.

Will you join me in this effort?

Yours from the CSM Faculty Senate,
Ken Osgood