



**FACULTY SENATE COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**  
March 15, 2018 meeting

**Caesar: “The ides of March are come.” Soothsayer: “Ay, Caesar; but not gone.” (Overview)**  
Faculty Senate held its thirteenth official meeting on the fifteenth of March. (The March eighth special session was devoted to the President’s presentation of academic reorganization in light of budgetary concerns.) The managers of the bookstore provided a thorough overview of ordering practices and trends, and Senators discussed General Education reform. Last, but not least, the Provost gave a brief update on the state of Academic Affairs.

**“I only speak right on; I tell you that which you yourselves do know” (Announcements)**  
Chair Tallichet relayed:

- Book orders are due March 16<sup>th</sup>
- The Faculty Committee Preference Survey is open through March 16<sup>th</sup>
- Faculty must change passwords by March 18<sup>th</sup>
- Abstracts for the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration of Student Scholarship are due Monday, March 19<sup>th</sup> (by 8:00 a.m.)
- The Board of Regents will meet on March 29<sup>th</sup>; at that time they will elect new leadership
- Senate has been invited to a reception at the President’s House on March 29<sup>th</sup> (at the usual Senate time)
- The Travel Coordinator (Harry Floyd) will visit Faculty Senate on April 19<sup>th</sup>

**“I should not urge thy duty past thy might.” (Presentation by Bookstore Gen. Mgr. Charles Gancio, Julie Ferguson, and Traci Webster)**

Key members of the University Bookstore (which is being rebranded as “University Store”) gave an overview of the ordering, pricing, and return constraints under which they operate. The Higher Education Opportunity and Affordability Act (HEOA)—voted into law in 2008 and enacted in 2010—mandates cost transparency for students. Compliance and best practices thus require us to get full course information (and costs) to students in time for advance registration. Because book orders have to be properly vetted before they can be made available to students, faculty have to submit them in advance of early registration.

Julie Ferguson walked the body through the bookstore's process for ordering, which involves multiple moving parts, and includes a fair amount of educated guestimating. The ultimate goal is for the bookstore to have enough materials on hand to meet student demand while still ending the term having sold everything that was ordered. Invariably, though, a number of ordered books and related materials do not sell, and this unmoved merchandise has to be boxed up and mailed to publishers via freight. This costs us in terms of labor and shipping fees and only nets fungible refunds that are not transferrable (as we have to "spend" publisher credit with the publisher that provides it). Last year, the bookstore had \$906,000 "tied up" in such credit.

To alleviate some of these problems, and keep costs down for students, the bookstore is focusing on the used book market. If the institution can buy back books that will be used in subsequent semesters, it won't have to order new materials (with their attendant freight and shipping costs), and it will be able to offer students more affordable options. Faculty can aid in this initiative: if you are planning on "reusing" texts in subsequent semesters, please let the bookstore know so they can plan accordingly.

Last year over \$320,000 was paid directly to MSU students through end-of-semester buybacks. The bookstore would love to get that figure to a half a million (or \$500,000). The store is also working on increasing rentals. Currently, the rental rate is 12%, with a target goal of 35%. Eventually, the bookstore would like to achieve the enviable rate of 95% (or higher) that some other schools have.

General Manager Gancio is going to meet with departments in the coming month to see what the bookstore can do to help meet programmatic needs. Because we are a university-owned store, we have more flexibility in terms of practice and policy than outsourcing chains, so the Manager would like to see what the institution could do to improve the experience for all. Some already scheduled improvements: the bookstore will start buying back and reselling calculators, and there will soon be a price match option on the webpage. There will also be added tools and functionalities for faculty, but the student enhancements are rolling out first.

Senators asked a number of questions about costs. Although General Manager Gancio did not have the median cost of books for students at his fingertips, he did state that he could supply the figure later, and that he was open to using textbook costs as an advertising point, assuming we could do so when we have important STEM programs like Nursing that necessarily have some expensive course materials. There was no indication that anyone at the institution was considering folding the cost of books into tuition (as is done at other schools), but the bookstore can help faculty control costs by monitoring the proliferation of ISBNs and allowing instructors to order books without access codes (when said codes were not needed for the class).

### **"Of your philosophy you make no use,/If you give place to accidental evils" (Update on General Education reform)**

Senators had a number of concerns about the push to reform General Education, concerns (and questions) which the Provost addressed. What follows is a streamlined summary of that wide-ranging conversation.

Despite what some faculty have been told, there is no administrative directive to discontinue FYS. The Provost was very clear on this point: the course will be offered until there is a new General Education plan in place. That said we are “finished” with our current Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which had been an integral part of FYS. SACSCOC does mandate that we have a QEP, but this mandate does not require the institution to have a plan continuously in place. As long as we have a new QEP created in time for our SACSCOC visit (in 2020), we will still be compliant. The Provost, who has not been a part of micro-level discussions of either FYS or QEP, confirmed these macro-level points:

- The process to formulate a new QEP will begin soon, and faculty will be involved.
- The sunseting of the QEP does leave a gap of sorts in the current FYS. Work is underway to add retention “tools” to the course. (FYS’s final fate, of course, depends on what does—or does not—happen in General Education reform.)
- The CPE wants institutions to address “financial literacy,” but it is not defining the method of the address. This component could be a course, a study module, or some other pedagogical unit.

A few Senators expressed reservations about certain aspects of the LUX proposal (such as the inclusion of only one Math class with six options, when survey results suggested that mathematical competency was highly important to many stakeholders, and the absence of civics education in the SLOs [CO aside: the “most unkindest cut of all”]), but, by and large, the concern was with the process of the reform effort itself. The Provost, who initiated the review of General Education by empowering a faculty member to assemble a taskforce (of fellow faculty members) under the imprimatur of the General Education Council, earnestly believes that he has facilitated a faculty-led process that has been transparent in terms of goals and timelines. Senators, who would contend that the General Education Counsel, formed in the wake of the last General Education reform movement, is answerable to Senate as well as the administration, believe that any process that does not include actual Senate approval (in terms of ratification) is not truly faculty-led, and, in fact, does not demonstrate that faculty are in charge of the curriculum.

The Provost, looking only at the description of the General Education Counsel (a description that had not been updated until this term—well into the reform effort itself—to account for the fact that there is no longer a General Education Director), determined that the Counsel was under the control of the administration, and acted accordingly. Senators, relying on agreements made under a previous provost, and drawing upon historical precedent, assumed that reform efforts would ultimately be brought before the Senate as a whole for endorsement. This discrepancy accounts for the divergence of opinion.

The Provost was genuinely surprised to discover this divergence, and openly wondered why he was only hearing of problems at the “eleventh hour.” Chair-elect Hare, who, by virtue of his position on Senate, also serves on the General Education Counsel, noted that he has repeatedly raised the issue with both the Chair of the General Education Council and the Chair of the General Education Taskforce. Chair-elect Hare also mentioned a time he broached this issue on the Senate floor, but freely admitted that this may have been during a regular Senate meeting the Provost was unable to attend. The Provost was disconcerted by the fact that the issue had not been brought to him, and he vowed to look into the matter. Chair-elect Hare urged the Provost to also follow up on the vote at the last General Education Council meeting. According to Chair-elect Hare, the Council’s decision was to refrain from a vote on General Education reform for the rest of the semester, but Council members and the faculty at large are now being told that the

Council would be having a final vote on the proposal the next GEC meeting (which will be right after Spring Break).

The Provost, who iterated his vow to look into the matter, assured the body that there would be no vote on General Education until the issue of who or what was “in charge,” and capable of ratification, is resolved. The Senate, for its part, passed a resolution calling on the General Education Council to submit any proposal for General Education reform (be it LUX or some other) to the Senate for faculty approval. Chair Tallichet will be forwarding this resolution to the Council as well as the Provost and the President.

Two other issues with process (unrelated to the General Education Council’s relationship to Senate) were also raised during the conversation: (1) the appropriate probative function of the survey in the creation of a new proposal and (2) the timeline in regards to faculty feedback and review. While all averred that the survey demonstrated that there are problems in our current General Education program, a number of Senators questioned whether a(n admittedly well-designed) instrument to ask “what’s wrong” could provide adequate feedback to formulate viable solutions to perceived problems. Such an approach, in these Senators’ estimation, encourages us to conflate something that is merely “different” with that which is “better.” Many more noted that the prescribed timeline did not allow for adequate feedback from the faculty at large. Evidence of this assertion: Senate was given an overview of two plans last Fall, but the bulk of that overview focused on an option that was ultimately abandoned. This term, faculty were given a more developed articulation of the plan that was eventually favored by the Council, but the developed version was only offered for formal review two weeks before a vote was to be taken at the General Education Council. While the developed version did follow the outline of the plan that had been sketched in the previous Fall, the inclusion of assessment particulars (and exclusion of an introductory critical thinking course) amounted to a substantive change. Faculty who were involved with the last General Education reform were also skeptical that an implementation team would have the ability to iron out the kinks and ensure that the necessary resources would be available for full implementation.

**“You know not what you do [. . .] Know you how much the people may be moved/By that which he will utter?” (Regent’s report)**

The Regent had no report. He just reminded the body that the next Board meeting would be in the DeMoss suite of the CHER building on March 29<sup>th</sup>.

**“Will you be patient? will you stay awhile?/I have o’ershot myself to tell you of it” (Provost’s report)**

The Provost, who had been put on the hot spot during the discussion of General Education, gamely offered a brief update on Academic Affairs. At this time, our SOAR numbers look good. Our head count is 318 over where we were last year, and, even more promisingly, our housing deposits, which are an even better predictor of enrollment, are up.

The Dean’s Council has had its “first pass” at the Self-Study review. After Spring Break, the Dean-approved draft will be submitted to departments for commentary. The Provost again stressed that all faculty commentary (unedited) will be included in the report because this document is designed to be a follow-up to our earlier study. There will be no recommendations.

In early May, the final draft will be submitted for all to review. At that time, the draft can and will serve as part of the routine “health check” (a programmatic review, made as a matter of course, not just in times of financial difficulty) called for in the new PAC-26.

In other news, we’ve reestablished a relationship with the Saudis, so we should be able to expect more students from that region now that we are back on a “good list.” This should help with finances in the future, but we still have a roughly \$1m hole to fill this year. The Provost will be meeting with the President to address discuss this budget concern, as well as the number of retirement requests his office has received. The administration is literally banking on these voluntary separations but still sad to see people go. The Provost is particularly worried about possible “holes” in programs after some senior people depart. On a related note, he is also concerned about the experience students have when they formally leave the institution, so he is asking Senate to help boost faculty attendance at graduation.

### **“Take thou what course thou wilt!” (Senate Committee Reports)**

- Academic Issues—The committee is looking at the service portion of FEPs and creating a database to aid this review.
- Evaluation—The committee will have a final report (on FEPs), hopefully by the next Senate meeting.
- Faculty Welfare and Concerns—PAC-2 is coming back to us for review in April.
- Governance—No report.
- Issues—Harry Floyd coming to Senate on April 19<sup>th</sup> to answer questions about travel. The committee still working on documenting the responsibilities of General Counsel in relation to faculty (and Senate), and looking at policy on departmental structures.

### **“By your leave, gods, this is a Roman’s part” (New Business)**

Chair Tallichet urged Senators to have their departments complete voting for representation before the Senate retreat in the Fall to avoid the endemic problem of new representatives being chosen after the first official meeting of the year.

### **“If we do meet again, why, we shall smile;/If not, why then, this parting was well made.”**

The Senate adjourned at 5:45 p.m. The next Senate gathering will be the reception at the President’s house on March 29<sup>th</sup>.



Submitted by the 2017-18 Faculty Senate Communications Officer, whose “rudeness is a sauce to [her] good wit,/Which gives men stomach to digest [her] words/With better appetite”