

Faculty Senate Chair's Report to the Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees (October 2010)

It is both an honor and a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I speak, as I did several years ago, as the chair of the Faculty Senate, a body whose greatest claim to fame may be that it is the most misunderstood component in the entire University. With your permission, I will take a few minutes now to rescue the senate from that bog of misunderstanding.

When I arrived at Notre Dame in August of 1967 as a graduate student in philosophy, Notre Dame was undergoing a massive transformation. Just a month earlier, Father Hesburgh had led a small group of Catholic men—sorry, no women—in crafting the most important, and contested, statement ever issued by American Catholic educators. The Land O'Lakes Statement, as you all know, asserted the necessity for institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and a strong Catholic presence as necessary features of a Catholic university in the modern world. The statement said much more than that—about serving the Church, about emphasizing ultimate questions in undergraduate education, about focusing research on the pressing problems of our era—but I want to dwell here, for just a few minutes, on one sentence in the Statement's penultimate paragraph:

The evolving nature of the Catholic university will necessitate basic reorganization of structure in order to achieve a greater internal cooperation and participation, but also to share the responsibility of direction more broadly and to enlist wider support.

In part, I am sure, this language presaged the involvement of the laity in the boards of trustees of Catholic universities—something about which several individuals in this room are quite cognizant. But it also recognized and endorsed an epoch-making shift in the day-to-day administration of Catholic universities. No longer would that administration be clerical and paternalistic, as had once been the case. Going forward, “in order to achieve a greater internal cooperation and participation”, non-clerics as well as clerics, women as well as men, non-Catholics as well as Catholics, non-Christians as well as Christians would play an ever-increasing role in departmental, collegiate, and university-wide administration. Crucially, I think, this laicization of the administration of Catholic universities entailed a radical change in both the self-concept and the role of the faculty at those universities. No longer mere helpers, but ever more partners in the

university's educational endeavor; no longer like the subjects of a medieval kingdom, but ever more like the citizens of a democratic polity, the faculty at a Catholic university would possess both the academic freedom that the Land O'Lakes Statement proclaimed and a significant role in decision-making at that university.

It would take more time than I have and more patience than you have for me to point out all of the ways in which Notre Dame's Academic Articles currently require the involvement of faculty members in university-wide decision-making. Let me focus instead on the Faculty Senate as one of the ways in which Notre Dame makes its commitment to a faculty role in university-wide decision making real. The Senate is the only university-wide body whose voting members are elected entirely by their faculty colleagues. The teaching and research faculty, the research faculty, the library faculty, the professional specialists all have representation in the Senate, and no one who isn't a faculty member has a vote there. This mixture of philosophers, physicists, accountants, librarians, technicians and engineers in the Senate and on its committees gives the Senate a perspective on the University—its strengths and its challenges—that no other University body possesses. When, furthermore, the Senate speaks after a vote of the membership, it speaks with all of the authority that comes from its representational base. The Academic Articles recognize this in giving the Senate the right of agenda with respect to the Academic Council and significant representation on the Council.

How do all of these abstractions play out in practice?

- (1) For the past thirty years, at least, the University has struggled to retain the brilliant and productive women that it has been able to attract to its faculty. For at least the past ten years, the Faculty Senate has worked with the University administration in finding ways to keep those women here in the face of offers of employment from other universities. As women who work on university faculties, no less than women who work in other settings, tend to be the primary care-takers of their children, they are likely to make the availability of top-flight day-care and early childhood educational facilities crucial factors in their decision to stay at Notre Dame or to go elsewhere. For that reason, the Senate has, in recent years, argued successfully for the expansion of the population served by the Early Childhood Development Center and continues to argue for further expansion of that population.
- (2) Few things are harder for a university to do than finding the best way to assess the quality of the teaching that is done under its aegis, yet few things

are more important for it than that. For the past several years, Notre Dame has struggled to do just that, while at the same time moving our students' assessment of our teaching on-line. No one would be so foolish as to claim that we have found the Holy Grail of teacher assessment, but the Senate has worked constructively with the administration to come up with an assessment instrument that is demonstrably superior to its predecessor, and we are willing to work with the administration to fine-tune the instrument that we now have.

- (3) No one can say for sure just how the information revolution through which we are all living will revolutionize our libraries, which for so long were rooted in the Gutenbergian revolution of 500 years ago. One part of knowing which direction we should take in that regard is learning how well the several populations that our libraries serve—faculty, grad students, undergrads—believe themselves to be served by those libraries. The Faculty Senate assisted in that evaluative effort last year. We hope that the search committee that, in accordance with the provisions of the Academic Articles, has been created to find a new Director of University Libraries will consult with the Senate as it goes about its important task.
- (4) The University's faculty is becoming ever more global in terms of place of origin just as the terrorist threat has caused the federal government to be ever more cautious about whom it allows into the country and about whom it admits to citizenship. This means that it is now much more difficult for our foreign-born faculty members to normalize their status in the U.S. and much more costly for them to do that than used to be the case. The Senate plans to work with the administration on helping our foreign-born colleagues to move through the toils of status-normalization as smoothly, as quickly, and as inexpensively as possible.
- (5) We have all become so dependent on our computers for the conduct of so much of our personal and professional business, that hackers, worms, and viruses can cause havoc of a sort that our grandparents could never imagine. This is a problem for universities as much as it is for governments. Last year, there was a breach in the security of the University's computer system, a breach that caused considerable and justified concern within the faculty. The Senate was helpful in addressing that concern before it developed into panic.

- (6) For all of its many delights, South Bend has not yet become a hub of intellectual and social ferment. Fortunately for us, Chicago is, in good weather, less than two hours down the road. Some of our colleagues have suggested that the University should provide some sort of shuttle that would facilitate our going to and coming back from Chicago on University related matters. The Senate will be exploring that possibility with the administration later this academic year.
- (7) The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of this past March and the Reconciliation Act of a few days later—popularly known as Obamacare—will have an impact on the health insurance packages that the University provides to the faculty, staff, and students. As has been true for the past several years, the Faculty Senate will continue to work with our Human Resources staff to make sure that the University is getting the best policies that can be had for the dollars that the University can afford to invest in benefits of that sort as the full implications of Obamacare become known.
- (8) No university can hope to excel unless it can attract and retain truly gifted graduate students. One component of our attractiveness to potential graduate students is a health care package that meets not just their needs, but the needs of their spouses and children. In recent years, Notre Dame has made great progress in insuring our graduate students, but less in covering their spouses and children. The Faculty Senate will, this year, work with the Graduate Student Union and the Graduate School, in an attempt to find family health insurance at a rate that the University can afford.

I could, as you may fear, go on and on about the ways in which the Faculty Senate contributes to the well being of the University. For so long as I am its chair, I will do all that I can to continue the tradition set by my recent predecessors—a tradition of collaboration with the central administration of the University in a never ending series of attempts to make Notre Dame the great Catholic university that we all aspire to see it become.

Thank you.