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CONVOCATION COMMENTS CONCERNING GOVERNANCE

Leon G. Giles
President, Faculty Senate

My comments this afternoon concern the status of the on-going governance discussions and Provost Conference on October 23.

In response to a call from the Senate, the Trustees sanctioned the formation of a discussion group to discuss issues of trustee and faculty roles and responsibilities in university governance. I wish to publicly express the appreciation of the Senate and faculty to the Board for its interest in proceeding with this initiative. These discussions have been frank and constructive. I believe it correct to report that all who have been involved are comfortable with the progress that has been made. Nonetheless, I also believe that we further anticipate that this is the first step in what should be a continuous process. As mentioned in the discussion up-date distributed this week via campus mail, the six members of this committee (known as G-6) met throughout the summer. Specific committee recommendations have been forwarded to the Executive Committee of the Board and will be discussed by the entire Board at its retreat and formal meeting on October 24 and 25. The Senate will consider recommendations in October.

The timing of the Provost Conference on October 23 was set to facilitate trustee participation at the Conference. One purpose of the Conference is to set a context for the Board's discussion of the G-6 recommendations because the underlying issues are broad and complex. But an equally important purpose is to engage the entire University community in considering the importance of governance for developing and sustaining an engaged, academically and culturally enriched community. It is the Senate's belief that these attributes of University life are absolutely essential to our quest to improve the quality and reputation of the University.

Unfortunately, we need not look far to observe the dysfunctional consequences of a breakdown in governance and management processes. Problems related to governance issues are frequently reported in the popular and academic press. If one can believe reports of current activities at Metro State College, for instance, one cannot help but conclude that current events there are doing little to advance the mission, quality, and reputation of that college. Effective governance (however that is defined) in any institution in a democratic society is tenuous, and it is the right and responsibility of all stakeholders in such institutions (trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, students, alumni and society in general in the instance of universities) to safeguard those mechanisms and structures essential to assuring effective, shared, and participative governance. Moreover, challenges to academic freedom, which is the cornerstone to the mission of higher education in a democratic, free society is constantly being challenged; witness the current debate surrounding the so-called "academic bill of rights."

ADDRESS:

In the life of any institution, therefore, it is useful, although sometimes painful, to periodically take inventory

of how well it is doing in safeguarding the governance process and sharing its responsibilities in appropriate ways. This is currently going on in the corporate community as serious questions are being asked about the roles and responsibilities of boards and senior executives. Clearly, in many publicly owned corporations, by any measure or standard you may wish to apply, governance is breaking down. We in higher education have a responsibility to society to assure that this doesn't happen in our universities. In doing so, one question that must be considered is "how do we know if we are a well-governed institution?" This question will be a part of our discussion on October 23. At the risk of being presumptuous, let me suggest that the answer to this question may lie in applying tests such as the following:

- Do checks and balances exist that improve the odds that good decisions are being made?
- Does the institution encourage constructive debate and respect differences in opinion in making these decisions?
- Does the institution and its management continuously evaluate the process of decision making to assure that the roles and responsibilities of trustees, management, faculty, staff, students, and alumni are respected and recognized?

Because the trustees have not had the opportunity to fully review and discuss the G-6 recommendations, it would be inappropriate for me to present them at this time. But it will be useful to provide you with some comments about the two primary concerns that are reflected in the recommendations.

- **Communications and interaction with the Board.**
The Chancellor and Provost are the primary links between the University community and its Board of Trustees. Other mechanisms also currently exist that provide for some structured interaction between the faculty and the Board in the decision-making process. The question is this: Are they adequate and as effective as they could be? These activities include UPAC, and Senate/Faculty representation to the Board and several of its committees. Because Board meetings are usually "business meetings," their agendas are usually full and often provide limited opportunity to fully explore issues of concern to the faculty and staff. Mechanisms are needed to facilitate more interaction between the Board and faculty on governance issues.
- **Developing a better understanding on the part of both faculty and trustees about the roles and responsibilities of faculty, trustees,**

and administrators about the process of shared governance

All parties usually approach this topic in good faith, but often their points of view are significantly, and legitimately, different. Most trustees come from the corporate world, while the majority of members of the faculty have spent most, if not all, of their lives in the academic world. These are quite different environments and, for good reason, the governance decision-making process can often be quite different. But it is easy to oversimplify and under-appreciate the importance of the difference between the so-called corporate and traditional academic approaches to governance. A simplistic distinction often mentioned is to characterize the difference as being top-down (the corporate approach) to bottom-up (the academic approach). Or, within the academic environment, to believe that as long as "academic issues" are handled within the academic side of the house and "business issues" are left up to management, the governance structure is appropriate and effective. The truth of the matter is that an appropriate and effective model for the University of Denver will probably embrace attributes of both the "corporate" and "academic" models. The question is how to capture the best of both models for effectively moving the University forward in its quest for continuous quality improvement in an increasingly competitive, aggressive, dynamic, and discerning environment.

Although the concept of shared governance in the academic world is traditionally the domain of the trustees, faculty, and administration, I hope that my comments today suggest that everyone in the University community must be concerned and involved. This is much too serious a matter to leave any university constituency out of the discussion. Our objective is to improve the culture at this institution, to re-engage those who, for whatever reason, have disengaged from active participation in governance issues. As much as we would like to believe that it isn't so, we do have apathy and morale issues on campus. Let's work together to make this quality institution more vibrant and engaged. We hope that the Provost Conference will be the first of a series of important steps toward making this happen.

I look forward to seeing you at the Conference on October 23.

University Governance:

Reflections of a G-6 Insider and a Modest Proposal for Change

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Department of Anthropology

We are at an important crossroads in the history of governance at the university. As Faculty Senate President Leon Giles notes in his column, G-6 discussions between trustees and faculty have been wide-ranging and productive. All parties in the conversation brought good faith and a generosity of spirit to the table. The G-6 group established what is currently possible and impossible as concerns university governance, and came away feeling good about it.

As part of its proceedings, G-6 trustees and faculty unpacked a lot of what differentiates us as carriers of “corporate” and “academic” culture. But removal of obstacles to better governance also demands we take note of some of the similarities. Three years ago Richard Chait, a Professor of Higher Education at Harvard, articulated in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* some of the common features of trustee and faculty culture. These include (1) organizational conservatism (e.g., neither group has blazed a trail toward governance reform by radically redesigning committee structures, meeting formats, or decision-making procedures), (2) reciprocal resentment of unsolicited advice (e.g., each group freely comments on how the other should conduct business within its particular realm, with little concern for the problem of “tissue-rejection” when transferring ideas wholesale between cultures), and (3) tendencies to prescribe for the other what each is reluctant to enact for themselves (e.g., both groups recommend greater accountability, transparency, and innovation as general principles of ideal practice, while simultaneously safeguarding a status quo that often runs on confidentiality, exclusivity, and utterly traditional ways of thinking and doing).

The G-6 group has made a good start toward establishing new trustee-faculty relationships that can mitigate some of the more debilitating cultural similarities, bridge the differences, and exploit shared commitments—chief among them a desire to see the university not only prosper but achieve world-class distinction. The upcoming Provost’s Conference will be crucial for bringing the rest of the campus community into the conversation in order to expand and deepen it. Faculty can and should have a crucial role in this conference activity. The key challenge, again as pointed out by Professor Giles, is to think about alternative ways that corporate and academic cultures can be brought together; that is, to imagine “hybrid” models of governance that are creatively and coherently integrative. Who better than faculty—with their cross-cultural and trans-historical perspectives on alternative organizational structures, the philosophies that underpin them, and the conditions that determine their relative success and failure—to provide grist for the mill?

Different governance issues—strategic planning, administrative searches, personnel evaluation, budgeting and fund-raising—will require different mechanisms and processes. The conference will explore some of them. It seems to me that where academic mission is concerned—arguably the governance issue of greatest interest to faculty—we already have a good mechanism in place that can facilitate broad-based conversation and collaborative decision-making. This is the University Planning Advisory Council, or UPAC. UPAC established the existing University statements of Vision, Values, Mission, and Goals. It is a multi-constituent group that includes trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students. UPAC is interesting and important because it kept coming up in G-6 conversations as a touchstone for ideas about how trustees and faculty can better collaborate in building and implementing a shared vision. Yet today UPAC, like many other committees around campus, tends to suffer from the all-too-common malaise that comes with its members either knowing too much or too little about what’s going on behind the scenes or in the interstices of the existing decision-making structure.

So, as one contribution toward imagining a more integrative governance model—and in the interest of floating a trial balloon for conference discussion—I suggest that we reinvent UPAC so that it becomes a more powerful and progressive engine of institutional evolution. We should downsize the Council without sacrificing the measure of representative participation that it already has. We should add more faculty who can better represent not particular units, but rather those transcendently important areas of academic life that know no particular boundaries in the organizational structure: sponsored research, interdisciplinary and cross-divisional teaching and learning, and public outreach and scholarship. We should add President Holtzman as a permanent UPAC member for insight on how he can support—for as broad a constituent base as possible—the academic initiatives developed and prioritized by the Council under the leadership of Provost Coombe. We should make UPAC and its deliberations better known to the campus community and regularly open it to constituents having something significant to say and/or recommend about the state and direction of the University. We should involve Chancellor Ritchie—early and often—in the meetings of a re-constituted and re-invigorated Council, something that would improve on past practice and help legitimize the proceedings. And, like G-6, we should encourage no-holds-barred discussions of how teaching, research, service, public scholarship, and the relationships among them can be strengthened so as to better establish the university’s identity, enhance its reputation, and secure its future.



Desired Results From the Provost Conference

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What results can the Provost Conference on Governance and University Culture produce?

Some answers are quite attractive but unrealistic. For instance, “shared governance” seems to be the only satisfactory outcome for some of us. And why not? Much of the integrity of our University is at stake in greater effectiveness of faculty participation in governance. The problem is that a conference cannot accomplish shared governance. A conference can help clarify obstacles and delineate ways around them or sketch out ways of removing them. But shared governance can come into existence only by years of concerted effort by all parties concerned. More basically, an important result of the conference would be to shore up and extend the groundwork for shared governance.

A realistic, if less flashy accomplishment than a guarantee of “shared governance,” would be “enlivening a community worth governing.” A hazy recollection of the first Provost Conference suggests that strengthening community was one of the original goals. And it is one worth pursuing even in a time of apparent rupture between some segments of the University. At the very least we want a community where we see each other and talk to each other, across disciplines, across sectors of University activity, across differences of opinion on a wide variety of issues, even issues as large as the structure of the University’s administration.

Vibrant community comes not by wanting it, but by doing it—by bumping into each other at the name tags table; sitting next to who knows whom during presentations; meeting in line in the restroom; talking at lunch; brainstorming about and debating the potential points of contact and division in our life together at the open mike and in small-group sessions.

John Henry Newman’s idea of a university (in the standard-setting book by that title) requires the meeting of fields of knowledge. The knowledges in their separate departments and schools fail to achieve the idea of a university at all. While retreat to our own specialties would be an understandable response to the lack of shared governance revealed here last spring, we risk the unhappy result of cultivating our own gardens on paths that lead away from a dirt lot instead of a thriving public square. The power vacuum in such an arrangement clearly would militate against faculty goals of shared governance. But more crucial than that concern is the sobering reflection that the barren public square impoverishes our lives.

To assert through our actions that we are a community where people take cognizance of one another—face to face and in our thinking—is crucial. At the Provost Conference we can enact such a mutual commitment. We can hope that the University’s most highly placed governing entities will recognize and join in the effort. But whether they do or not, we can achieve a significant part of what we want to be by insisting

for ourselves on seeing, recognizing, and thereby valuing one another.

Encouraging Your Attendance at the Provost Conference

*Cathryn C. Potter
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Graduate School of Social Work*

Last spring following the unexpected appointment of the President of the University, many faculty members found themselves concerned with questions of shared governance here at DU. Given our diverse views, the events of last spring prompted us to articulate and debate some important issues. The General Faculty Meeting was by far the best-attended and most interesting faculty meeting I have attended during my time here. Certainly, discussions in the meeting with the Chancellor were among the most frank I have witnessed. My work this summer with the G-6 group has deepened my understanding of the complex governance issues we are facing, and supported my hopes for positive change. I am writing here to encourage your attendance at the upcoming Provost’s Conference on Governance.

The conference is organized around four primary sessions. The first will feature a three-part keynote focusing on governance and the corporate culture of the university, models for shared governance, and governance “flashpoints.” The second session focuses on the practice of governance and involves analysis of several “flashpoint” scenarios. The third panel and discussion session focuses on promoting the engaged University community. Jim Davis, from University College and the School of Education, will lead a final integrative discussion as we consider how to move forward as a University community.

The Conference will take place on October 23. One purpose is to continue the governance conversations between the various constituencies of the University. A more important purpose is to extend those conversations to deeper analysis and practical planning. Last spring many of us asked for improved lines of communication, stronger consultative roles, and clearer decision making processes. This conference presents an important opportunity to act on these matters. It will take a healthy representation of the faculty at this conference to influence improvement in shared governance here at DU. Many community members see this current “governance flashpoint” as an opportunity for dynamic re-engagement with the governance needs of this University.

I hope to see you on October 23

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