

These two weeks have been times that tried our souls, with race and sex, education and politics, knit together at every step. The soggy United at the Rock event, where students cheered Vice Chancellor Tyvi Small then scrambled off to read the Comptroller's report and the leadership's response to it; a protest about ending SPAC that morphed into a protest about the blackface incident. Then, on Friday, the new Board, responding to public hysteria about the portrayal of Sex Week, struck all references to the process by which Registered Student Organizations' request or contribute to decisions about student programming fees while promising future student input. That plan may be hard to deliver, since the policy now sidesteps the constitutional requirement for viewpoint-neutral programming decisions when there is a forum, a space or fund to which people can have access for the purposes of free speech; now, there is no forum. The decision became more complicated on Saturday, when the U.S. President vowed to cut off federal funds to any university that suppresses free speech. Let us be honest about what is happening.

In light of these events, there are three things I ask us to understand, name, and work to change. All of them are in the purview of this body.

First, these events were a missed opportunity for shared governance, which the Association of Governing Boards defines as a system for aligning priorities. That means before-the-fact consultation with the faculty's elected leaders, not after the fact explanation. There are many ways to accomplish this, even with an embargo on documents: at UT Martin, the FS president is on the Chancellor's cabinet. Whatever we do, meaningful shared governance must become a priority for UT Administrators. However, shared governance is not, and this will disappoint some of you, faculty decision making or even an equal vote. The state legislature creates the Board that sets policy to which campuses are held. To ignore this is foolishness. Until we can restore a faculty trustee to the Board, I ask the System to help the Board avail itself of faculty input from all campuses and to make sure that the one faculty member who serves for one year on the Education committee doesn't need "special permission to speak" on education-related policy changes during the Board meeting.

Next, we need a robust defense of what it means to be a public university.

Economic impact is not enough. Such thinking translates all good into economic good, and thus all life into dollars. We have a broader vision of what a meaningful life might be, one that is supported through higher education. I call on Provost Mandersheid to sponsor conversations, in the spirit of Christopher Newfield's charge, that go beyond marketing buzzwords to discuss the University's purpose in American society. Those conversations may have consequences if we talk about large class sizes, adjunctification, HB 0707 and SB0775, and their relation to student success. But they can help us reclaim the mission of the public University and defend it proudly.

Third, we vote on the outline of a new curriculum today, but we need to animate it with transformational courses and teaching, broadly conceived to meet the current climate crisis. I challenge us, with support from administrators, to do the following:

- to develop short, **faculty**-authored, topical curricular resources (like Senator Keffer's ppt after the last round of Nazi propaganda) for use in ANY classroom when we have a crisis incident.
- to imagine our work benefitting this community through co-curricular, faculty-driven educational programming, like Joe Miles' Intergroup Dialogue Project. Our own dialogue on Free and Hate speech is this week, March 6, 4-5, followed by the pilot of Intergroup Dialogue. Come, participate, and think together about engaged scholarship on this campus.
- to bring a sense of urgency to the creation and adaptation of Engaged Inquiries and Contemporary Issues and Solutions courses. RJ Hinde has assured us we have mechanisms for timely review and mobile designations that can allow for variations across special topics. This could transform our curriculum.

As an intellectually diverse faculty, we have a moral obligation to research and teach about everything from the effects of systemic racism, to poisonous plastics

in our ecosystem, constitutional protections, the range and history of human sexuality, or the opioid crisis. We have real challenges, but we know education is a remedy for ignorance. To paraphrase Elijah Cummings, we as a university are so much better than this. Your teaching will help UT to live into its better self so that it can continue to foster a healthier democracy. I hope this portion of our destiny will lead to a better UT.