

Presidential address 9-17-2018

Before I begin, I just want to say, thank you. Thank you to all of the senators in this room who have stepped up to serve your colleagues, to all who gathered to welcome some of our new trustees in the interest of better communication, to the campus leaders here who have not just talked about but actively partnered with us in shared governance solutions regarding our handbook and the much discussed but not much liked PPPR. We have, in the midst of upheaval and challenge, reasons for hope. Many of them are sitting right next to you. You all make me think of the Marge Percy poem “To Be of Use.” In it, she writes:

The people I love the best
Jump into work head first/
Without dallying in the shallows/
And swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.

Percy goes on to call these people “who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward.../not parlor generals and field deserters/ but [those who] move in a common rhythm/when food must come in or the fire be put out.”

The work we will do this year, the work we are already doing, will be of use to others, and I want you to feel inspired by that, especially when you are having more of a “mud and muck” experience, or feeling the tedium of academic housekeeping. That is where the work goes down, as every past president (Ownley, Lyons, Nolt, Gross, and others before them) will tell you. That is how we can be of use.

Earlier today, UT System President Joe DiPietro announced his retirement, effective November 21. It confirms what we knew to be true—that we are in a time of transition with the potential to reshape the Campus/System relationship. It’s a process that is rife with political dimensions, as is true of most public universities, which provide more reasons to be clear on our values as a Senate and as a Campus. When I last stood here as your president elect, I talked about 3 guiding values in our work: the values of excellence, civility, and the dignity of work. These are the guideposts I will continue to use. The pursuit of excellence at this institution depends on our research, our teaching, and our service. The more time we spend on documentation, on poorly conceived or rotating initiatives, or

on deceptive metrics that distort the academic landscape in pursuit of what can be easily measured, the less time we have for what is truly worthwhile, for the classroom, our students, the lab, the studio, the research. The new additional post-tenure review policy, as we should all note, duplicates existing forms of post-tenure review. In the words of the French guard in Monty Python and the Holy Grail, “we’ve already got one...it’s a verry nice.” All joking aside, APPR and EPPR serve that function; if annual reviews need tweaking, tweak them. Don’t build a new machine. Many of us spent too much of the summer trying to respond to the System template and then, later, helping to hammer out a campus implementation plan that meets the letter of the law while doing the least amount of damage to us and our national reputation. I commend especially senators Kwon, Skolits, and Past President Lyons, along with Vice Provost Zomchick and Provost Manderscheid, for pushing back and getting a change to the System template that represents a significant protection of the principle of tenure and an efficiency in the process. Later today, we will have the first reading of that policy and one more chance to see if we can make it “less bad” before we vote on the campus plan as part of our handbook on October 15. Again, we do not have the option to vote on Board policy, which goes into our handbook. We can only vote on the Campus implementation and its additional protections. But, we will also vote on a resolution articulating the reasons this is a poorly conceived, wasteful, and duplicative policy, something that this Senate can do publicly and officially, even if the Campus administration is constrained to carry out Board policy. Earlier today, I sent a message to the list with a google doc to gather your “whereases” for the FSEC to consolidate and arrange into a resolution for our next meeting, which, if it passes, will be presented to the Board, along with our Campus plan. Lou Gross has already provided documentation of the hours required to complete this process, valued at roughly 1.2 million dollars worth of labor time. The Board and the public need to understand what it will cost us. So, please, get your whereases together.

These policies bear closely on another of our values, the dignity of work, which includes valuing faculty time and effort. We will continue to work to change negative perceptions about faculty and how we use our time by working internally for meaningful (and mutually beneficial) shared governance, and publicly through PSAs and other forms of messaging about who we are and what we do. The first PSA shoot is Thursday, and with any luck, I’ll have an edit to show you when we meet next. As I have said earlier, we have a year’s worth of

messaging and outreach to our internal audiences, our public audiences, and our legislature. We'll also hear from the UCW later today about their plans to stand up for workers across this campus.

Finally, the value of civility, maligned on the extremes of political discourse, is something to which we have dedicated our lives: we teach. We believe that conversation, knowledge, and even debate can lead to change for the better, more knowledge, more understanding. That's not a partisan issue, though the most vicious forces in our culture would make it one. We as an institution have an obligation to foster civic space and civil engagement. We did that last spring publicly at United at the Rock, for which past president Beauvais Lyons deserves main credit, and Senator Monica Black equal praise for the teach-in she organized when neo-nazis threatened the safety of our students and demanded space on this campus. The Campus Free Speech Protection Act (TN public chapter 336) constrained us to provide it. The United at the Rock project lives on, now with an array of partners who want to work for a safer, more welcoming, and more engaged campus. That great work continues.

We know not all our students feel safe and welcome here, and many of them have not felt the institution would speak up or protect them, as the recent painful rating of our LGBTQ "unfriendliness" in the Princeton review told us. I take seriously our obligation to make our state flagship welcoming to all, by words and deeds, and I call on campus administration to stand up for our students, even as they are hobbled by state laws and legislative threats. Those politicians who find it politically advantageous to use campus events to consolidate their base should not be allowed to infringe on the safety and care of our students. No one in this room underestimates the challenge of the task facing this university. Saying diversity matters is an important first step, but it must be accompanied by action. The diversity champions and CDI reports are in; Vol Vision is in; what will we do about it? Provost Manderscheid has a first answer in the appointment of VP Matthew Theriot to materialize a response, and this body is committing to helping with the follow through. The Diversity Champions hammered out a list of measurable outcomes this summer in addition to their report, and these should provide guidance and standards for action as we move forward. If we are to serve our whole state, we have to serve all of its students, providing them the same resources that other SEC schools and regional campus support for multicultural student life, LGBTQ students, student with disabilities, and other groups. The

resources that students at Florida, Georgia, NC State, UNC, Appalachian State, Mississippi State, Texas A&M, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, and almost every other school in this country enjoy. This is not a political issue; it is a student success issue; it is a retention issue; and more importantly, it is a life or death issue for some. The world has noticed, our students have noticed, we have noticed, and the reports are in. It's time. What will we do about it? When we find the resources and the resolve to act, we strengthen the reputation, values, and purpose of this university. The Senate will be here, both to help and to hold the administration accountable.

We have much business to attend to today, but I do want to mention one of the current efforts from the Provost's office to provide faculty mentoring, especially for those who are in underrepresented or at risk groups. You can find that link on our website and ask Matthew Theriot more about it. The deadline is technically today, but Matthew is open to those last-minute signups. Again, I thank you for your service and for living out the ideas of public higher education.

Interim Chancellor Davis had a conflict and could not be here, so we will move in the agenda to UTIA Chancellor Tim Cross, followed by Provost David Manderscheid.

Rememebr Flavia's question: just one year from retirement? What about more?