

October 13 – Faculty Senate Meeting

In conclusion, I want to say a few words about the resolution on collective bargaining. Because I meet regularly with the members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, I have had the opportunity to discuss some of these issues with them. I have not had the opportunity to talk with other members of the Senate about the resolution. In fact, I have not seen the resolution, but I assume that it has been provided to the entire faculty in a timely fashion so that they have been able to discuss it with their representatives on Faculty Senate.

I trust that the Senate responded to those faculty senators who asked on September 8 that the Senate provide information about collective bargaining that went beyond anecdote and what has been supplied by the AAUP. Members of the Senate asked to be directed to the type of dispassionate research that they expect from their students and that guides all of us in our work as scholars.

Over the past few weeks, I have done a little of my own research on collective bargaining. The question that I wanted to answer for myself, as the chief academic officer of the university, was to what degree does having a unionized faculty aid in enhancing academic excellence? The following questions and considerations are based on reading and on conversations with provosts on unionized campuses.

What is the impact of faculty unions on academic quality?

Examining the AAUP membership list suggests that faculty unions are most popular at certain types of institutions. More than three-fourths (76%) of the institutions that belong to the AAUP are either associate degree-only institutions, baccalaureate degree-only institutions, or

master's degree-only institutions. Those institutions have important missions in their own right, but the role they play is not the role that Ohio University plays in the landscape of higher education. My research came up empty when I tried to find a Tier 1 university such as Ohio University or Miami University or Ohio State University that has joined the AAUP in the past decade.

What is the impact of faculty unions on institutional reputation?

In academia reputation matters and, fairly or not, an institution is judged in part by the company that it keeps. In Ohio, the unionized institutions are either Tier 3 or Tier 4 institutions, according to U.S. News rankings. Whatever the AAUP has brought to those institutions, it has not been the ability to build their academic reputations.

One might say, that because we are already a Tier 1 institution, we don't need to worry about our academic reputation. One cannot take our current ranking lightly. Part of our ability to maintain our standing rests on our ability to continue to recruit outstanding faculty. So another question that I have pondered in this research is what would be the impact of a union on our ability to continue to recruit and retain the very best faculty?

What is the impact of faculty unions on faculty recruitment and retention?

I am sure that there are talented faculty who actively seek work at unionized campuses, but there are also many who will not join a university where the faculty work under a collective bargaining agreement. We all know that it is sometimes difficult to recruit faculty to Athens who do not immediately see the benefits of living in a small

but highly cosmopolitan community in rural Ohio. By becoming a unionized campus, we would potentially shrink our pool even further.

There are talented faculty who aren't looking to base their careers at an institution where the nature of merit pay is contractually determined. They don't want to work at a place where union representatives have a legal right to intervene in grievance issues, regardless of whether all parties to the matter desire their presence. They aren't interested in paying any portion of their salaries to an organization that needs the funding to support a separate class of employees and attorneys to keep the machinery of a union functioning. They aren't interested in being at an institution that cannot recruit strong chairs and directors internally because anyone who assumes that role ceases to be considered a faculty member, is no longer part of the bargaining unit, and is required by law to be considered and treated as a "manager."

Then again some people are gamblers. They are willing to put 204 years of academic excellence at risk by joining in a partnership with the AAUP that by its own accounts is having financial difficulties keeping its operations together. If we have problems, and I know we have problems, I'd prefer working to solve them ourselves.

Do we need the AAUP to help guide what is the first and the finest institution in the state of Ohio? Do we need to create a division on campus between faculty who are in favor of a union and faculty who oppose a union? Do we need to create an organization that by its own admission, will not be able to solve any of the matters that have caused faculty dismay on this campus?

At the close of the last Faculty Senate meeting one senator said, "let's take back our university." That statement speaks directly to the

passion and dedication that all of us have for this institution. But it is a passion and a dedication that we see exhibited not just by faculty but by our staff, both classified and administrative, whose willingness to go the extra mile constantly amazes me. It is a passion and dedication exhibited on a daily basis by our students, who teach us as much as we teach them. It is a passion and dedication exhibited by our alumni, who give generously of their time and treasure to make sure that this institution can be for others what Ohio University was for them.

Ohio University is part of all of us, but it belongs to none of us. It belongs to the citizens of the state of Ohio. Many of those citizens, particularly those who live in poverty or are in need of mental health and other support services, have had to undergo cuts in their benefits so that higher education can have the chance to do its job. I am haunted by this cold, hard fact and determined to do everything in my power to make sure that we do not default on the opportunity that we have been given, which is borne on the backs of many of the most vulnerable Ohioans. To me this is the business of the day and I am at loss to explain how a faculty union will help us to be successful in this enterprise.

I know and respect many of the faculty who are in favor of a union. Their choice would not be mine. My remarks are not intended to question their motives.

My words may be easy to dismiss, being the academic meddler that I am. But perhaps you might be willing to heed the words of President Ping who told me recently that he believes unionization of this institution would be, to quote his exact word, “disastrous.” A word to

give us all pause from someone who has known better about many things and may in the end know best about this subject as well.

When I talked with Faculty Senate Executive Committee earlier today, I asked whether I should remain in the meeting or leave after giving my report and offering some personal thoughts on the business at hand. They graciously left the decision up to me, but did suggest that my presence might inhibit some aspects of your discussion. As you need to have a free and open debate, I have decided to leave. Please be assured that my absence should not be interpreted as a lack of commitment or interest. Quite the contrary.