

CFA Report on Shared Faculty Mission

On March 4, 2010, the Campus Faculty Association held a symposium for faculty from across the campus to discuss our shared goals, work, and contributions. After much discussion and revision, we are publishing the final report below. This document is part of an ongoing and often heated discussion of the overall mission of the University Illinois. At the end of our document we direct you to other places where similar issues are addressed. We hope to further this debate in academic year 2010-11.

Shared Faculty Mission Statement

Introduction

On March 4, 2010 the Campus Faculty Association sponsored an event titled “The University’s Core Mission: Are We Really All in This Together?” The event was attended by faculty from six different colleges (ACES, Education, Engineering, FAA, LAS, Las) and the university Library. Those who attended the event discussed the contributions faculty make to the university, our community, and society. Our discussions revealed some differences across disciplines. For example, the work of some faculty focuses on immediate contributions to society, whereas others do work whose greatest contributions may only be appreciated in the future. More importantly, our conversations also revealed significant commonalities. These helped clarify the components of that we believe is the university’s core mission.

Our discussions led to the drafting of a Shared Faculty Mission Statement by the co-organizers of the event. The draft was intended to summarize and integrate the discussions of March 4. Changes to the initial draft were made after receiving input from participants in the event. A revised Statement was then made available online, with faculty across campus being given the opportunity to provide additional feedback. This led to a final round of changes. The final version is presented below.

1. Faculty’s Collective Contributions

The core contribution made by all faculty is to generate knowledge, insight, beauty, intellectual provocation as well as practical products and applications that will make our campus, our community, the state of Illinois, and the world a better place in which to live.

The ways in which faculty do this are remarkably varied. Here are only a few examples. Some faculty will create music that no one may be able to appreciate immediately, but which may be admired by thousands or even millions in years to come. Others may delve into agricultural production and consumption or engineering problem-solving with the goal of producing

knowledge or other tangible products that will have an immediate impact, either locally or internationally. Other faculty do research, whether on the culture of a distant land or the biology of bees, that may not have an immediate impact, but which will prove to be remarkably useful at some future point in time for reasons we cannot currently even imagine. Many of us produce knowledge about our fields (be they in education, history, or the sciences) that is used to address inequities related to racism, sexism, or homophobia. But we also do research on topics that may attract little attention from the public at large, until and unless they have had the opportunity to participate in learning activities that excite new curiosities and interests.

Through their teaching in the classroom, laboratory, and studio, their advising, and their sharing of their own creative work with students, faculty teach undergraduate, graduate, and professional students how to think critically, communicate effectively, engage the world around them, solve problems, and be thoughtful, productive citizens of this community, state, country, and the world.

We teach 700 students at a time in some large survey courses, but we also give one-on-one training in skills that cannot be taught any other way. We teach students to appreciate chronologically, geographically, and culturally distant worlds they have never imagined, and the problems of people next door with whom they will need to work as fellow citizens. We train them in reading, writing, focused attention, collaborative work, and creative thinking they will need to succeed at work and with their neighbors – these are skills they will use to make their local communities, the state of Illinois, and the world a better place. We counsel our students with regard to the prospects of our professions and the skills they need to succeed there, and we grade their work in order to help them assess the level of their own skills. We write scores of letters of recommendation to help them enter jobs, internships, and further educational opportunities crucial to their goals. Finally, we instruct and learn from our colleagues across the globe through conferences, journal articles, and presentations, so we are able to bring the wealth of our fields' knowledge to Illinois.

Faculty also help graduate and professional students excel in their scholarship in order to carry on, refine, and apply the knowledge that we create and disseminate. We work in labs, offices, classrooms, clinics, and libraries where graduate and professional students are trained and make vital contributions to the University and community.

In addition to sharing their knowledge and skills with students, faculty engage in community outreach. The contributions made by faculty are not limited to the University of Illinois campus.

For example, we talk to community groups, elder hostels, primary and secondary school classrooms and teachers about what our knowledge means to them. We reach out to many communities of lifelong learning and engagement, among them farmers, labor unions, families and local organizations of many kinds. We provide free consultation and services. We serve on professional, business, and community organizations, from the local level to the international.

2. Implications of Collective Faculty Contributions for the Future of the University

Given that the core contributions of faculty revolve around their ability and willingness to be creative, it follows that the key to a successful university is the establishment and maintenance of an environment that permits that creativity to flourish. This means that ideas must be able to flow freely — in research projects and applications of research; between faculty and students, among faculty and among students; across our global professional networks and down the street to a local reading group.

Because we value the diverse ways in which we pursue, disseminate and apply knowledge, we value above all the varieties of creativity that the university promotes. For example, engineers and their students benefit from the opportunity to learn the skills of communication and group process from humanities and education professionals; humanists and their students benefit by the presence of scientists, engineers and policy specialists who are transforming the material foundations of our social, cultural and artistic networks. The different fields represented at the University of Illinois form an interdependent institution that cannot survive without supporting all of its parts. While groups of relatively homogeneous scholars and professionals, whether humanists at a liberal arts college or engineers at a technical institute, can make valuable contributions to society, the realization of the full potential of a university, as described above, depends on the ability of all fields to flourish.

Given the diversity of contributions made to this common purpose by faculty who are experts in so wide an array of scholarly fields and teaching endeavors, we need shared governance to make sure that resources are distributed fairly, and that the contributions made by faculty in different disciplinary fields are judged by standards of value appropriate to those fields. Shared governance helps to preserve the clear, consistent, and permanent lines of communication among all members of the University community which are essential if we are to appropriately represent our respective contributions to our collective mission.

For more discussion see:

The White Paper on Humanities at the University of Illinois:
<http://www.iprh.illinois.edu/documents/humanities-summit-2010.pdf>

Public I: May, 2010 edition: <http://publici.ucimc.org/may10.pdf>

Plus, some important Faculty Senate Resolutions:

Resolution on the Need to Protect the Quality of Higher Education in the State of Illinois.
<http://senate.illinois.edu/fb1001.pdf>

Resolution on Furloughs and Cost Cutting:

<http://www.senate.illinois.edu/rs1002.asp>

Resolution on Diversity and Equity Initiatives:

<http://www.senate.illinois.edu/eq1001.asp>