

Toward Truly Shared Governance

Our university has been in turmoil for the last several years. In survey after survey, faculty have provided scathing evaluations of the performance of the administration. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences has been removed, but the underlying bases for the lack of confidence in the administration remain. The lack of trust has recently manifested in a forensic audit of university finances, and this audit has cast serious doubt on claims made to justify damaging policies.

SBU faculty, students, and staff have tried on many occasions, in many ways, to get the upper administration to take their concerns seriously. These attempts have been rebuffed. Therefore, we now call on President Stanley to be responsive in three key domains, in time for implementation for the 2019-2020 academic year. For Stony Brook to be a true top-tier university it needs greater transparency in university finances, a commitment to restore support for the core teaching and research missions of the university, and a real shared governance model put in place before any further major university decisions are made.

Greater budget transparency

Extraordinarily disruptive decisions have been made over the last few years, with these decisions presented as being necessary due to a “budget crisis”. Minimal information has been provided by administrators to faculty, students, and staff about the finances behind such a crisis. An independent audit of the SBU financial situation has called into question whether the financial situation is in fact sufficiently dire to warrant the kinds of decisions that have been made, and that continue to be made.

In a system of even minimal shared governance, the university community – students, staff, and faculty – should have sufficient information to assess whether exceptional actions are truly justified by the financial condition of the university. Toward this end, the upper administration should provide all of the information that has been requested by the Senate in a timely manner and should provide answers to the Senate's questions about resource allocation and institutional priorities.

Immediate Commitment to Support for the Core Mission

The extraordinary decisions made in the last few years have crippled the functioning of the university's core mission and have done substantial damage to its national reputation. To repair this damage, the upper administration should promptly commit sufficient funding to meet the enrollment needs in the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences for AY 2019-2020. Such funding, at minimum, should be sufficient to ensure

that students at Stony Brook are able to enroll in courses that provide them with the kind of quality education that produces informed and skilled citizens. In addition to ensuring sufficient support for the university's teaching mission, the administration should also commit to the university's core research mission. Toward this end, faculty appointed to basic science departments in the School of Medicine should be assured indefinitely of state purpose salary funding for the full academic year. In addition, sufficient funding should be allocated to provide the kind of start-up packages that are needed to attract high quality researchers to Stony Brook.

Moratorium on Critical Decisions Until Shared Governance is in Place

Quality universities operate through shared governance – important decisions are made by administrators genuinely working together with members of the university community. The decisions made in recent years have not only been made in the absence of faculty and student input, they have been made despite strong objections raised by faculty and students. The time has come for true shared governance, with decisions about resource allocation and institutional priorities informed by faculty, staff, and students. There must be a new and genuine commitment to shared governance; major decisions should not be made until such a system is functioning. An important example is that no decisions that affect student fees should be made until a working shared governance model is operating.

In this context, there should be a moratorium on any suspensions, expansions, or closures of departmental majors or programs. In recent years there have been several such changes that have done substantial damage to the quality of the university. For example, the highly successful undergraduate major in pharmacology has been suspended. The undergraduate program in Cinema and Cultural Studies and the doctoral programs in both Comparative Literature and in Health & Rehabilitative Sciences have all been shut down in one way or another, without appropriate shared governance in these decisions. These highly regarded programs should be reinstated.

In summary, we ask President Stanley to commit by mid-summer (i.e., in time for implementations to be operative for 2019-2020) to true shared governance and decision-making, greater budget transparency, full support for the core mission of the university, and a moratorium on major administrative decisions until all of these are in place.