

## Opening Remarks to the CLA Faculty Senate by Chair Michael Johnston

February 7, 2023

Welcome to our February CLA Faculty Senate meeting. I hope you will agree with me that it was a great privilege to have the provost visit us to discuss the role of the CLA within Purdue. We on the Senate's Agenda Committee sought to invite Provost Wolfe because it is so early in his tenure, and we wanted the chance for him to hear about the work we are doing in the CLA as he starts his work for the university. It is vitally important that the great research and teaching happening here in the CLA get on the provost's radar. For we are doing tremendous work. When I get the latest "For the Honor" email, I get a morale boost. It's great to know that my colleagues across the CLA are publishing books with top-notch presses and are winning prestigious grants, fellowships, and publication prizes.

I still remember the email Dean Reingold sent us in May 2015, when he had finished his first semester here. He wrote to us all,

Despite evidence which supports our claims for relevance, I am struck by the number of students who feel a need to defend their decision to study the social sciences, humanities and/or arts but lack the narrative to do so. Equally troubling is the sense from many of our colleagues who express feelings of defensiveness, who feel that Liberal Arts at Purdue is perceived as a lesser part of the institution.

That stops now.

It is time for a new chapter.

No longer will our faculty apologize for their commitment to the Liberal Arts.

No longer will our faculty present themselves as second-class university citizens.

No longer will our students have to find their own way.

No longer will people wonder exactly what we do.

Looking forward, Purdue Liberal Arts will set our students on paths to success and impact whether their aspirations are for careers in the business world or the non-profit

world, in academia or public service. We will celebrate the import of our faculty scholarship and the relevance of our disciplines. Collectively, we will be a force for good in the world.

Working as your Faculty Senate chair during this academic year, I have been reminded, over and over, about how intellectually diverse and energized so much of our faculty is. But I also know that many of us feel demoralized. I say this based both on anecdotes and reading over the results of our various surveys. I know that many of you feel like higher education in the liberal arts, across the country, is in a bad way. Now I'm just the Senate chair, so I'm not here to deliver any good news or offer any easy remedies. But I do think this institution—the CLA Faculty Senate—can be a small and humble part of the solution.

But how do we do that, and what role does the Senate have in helping that ideal become a reality? To my mind, it all begins with shared governance. In my understanding of the ideal university arrangement, we, as the faculty, are the heart and soul of the university. The administration's role is to support and amplify our work. Our teaching and research are what we give to our students, and our teaching and research is what expands the world's pool of knowledge. But our voice doesn't carry any weight *ipso facto*. The voice of the governed is only heard when it is expressed by the governed themselves. So I hold out the hope that this Senate can be the place where kvetching and grouching about whatever issues are of concern to the faculty can be brought to public attention and discussed among us all. We know that faculty have been discontented in recent years about a number of issues. But kvetching and grouching, done in isolation, behind closed doors, doesn't accomplish anything. Only by discussing ideas openly can we, I hope, reach decisions that reflect the will of the majority of this faculty. And we can insist that those voices get heard and considered by the administration. We have the power to

demand a seat at the table and to defend shared governance. But we have to be active participants in order for that to happen. And this Senate is the body intended to channel our energy as scholars and teachers into collective action in defense of our core principles.

I think here, for example, of the work that the Senate's ad hoc committee on hiring practices in the College is doing. You all will have received an email from five of your colleagues who are carrying out this most important work. Throughout the year, faculty have come to me and reported discontent with what they perceive as limited involvement in the hiring process—from the crafting of faculty lines, to the population of committees, to the input they are allowed to give on finalists. Dean Reingold addressed this issue at the q&a, and I hope that represents a start in these discussions. But the survey results are pouring in—more than double the rate of any other CLA Faculty Senate survey we have done this year. So clearly this is an issue you all care about. I fully trust that this committee will provide a detailed report that looks at the practices across the College, department by department, and looks at our peer institutions to see if our practices are in the mainstream or not. Regardless of what they find and produce for us to consider, it will represent an important step in the faculty making our will known.

So, as I hope I have made clear here, I think the Senate is an important governing body for us, the faculty of the CLA. But there is more work to be done yet. As we asked Provost Wolfe in the opening session, many faculty have expressed concerns about the CLA being remade into a STEM-adjacent college. Of course, many of us have long done STEM-adjacent research and scholarship, and there has always been a natural home for such work in the liberal arts. But at the same time, colleagues who work in the arts, humanities, and parts of the social sciences have expressed concerns that there is a dwindling place in the CLA for the sorts of scholarship many of us were trained in, that many of us produce cutting-edge research in, and

that many of us are passionate educators in. To be clear, I am not staking out a position here. That is not my job as Chair of the Senate. But I am aware that this is a serious concern, and I would hope that the Senate can find ways to address these issues. So I would challenge those of you on relevant committees to discuss these ideas and to bring proposals forward to the whole body. And I would challenge all senators, regardless of where you serve this body, to consider stepping forward with ideas and proposals. Senators are always welcome to offer motions, and we leave time at the end of all meetings for new business where you are encouraged to offer up ideas that we might tackle together.

If any of what I said resonates with you, then please consider putting your name forward for a leadership position. The Chair's term is one year, so I will be rotating off next year. Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler, the Vice Chair, is on sabbatical next year so cannot return. So we need a new Chair and Vice Chair. Last year, we were left scrambling to fill this position until late in the summer. I don't want that to happen this year. I think our faculty deserve better than that. And now that I have had the privilege of serving here for the past year, I can attest that it is well worth the work. If you agree with me that the Senate has important work to do, and that shared governance is key to the healthy functioning of our College, then please consider putting your name forward to serve on next year's leadership team. Jennifer and I stand ready to help usher in the new leaders. I will add that the Chair does not have to be a Senator, so if know of committed and passionate colleagues, please encourage them to speak with us. And please speak to me or Jennifer if you are interested in either position. And if you are ready to put your name forward, please speak with Nancy Peterson, the Chair of our Nominating and Elections Committee. Thank you.