

Senate ideas, R. McCarthy, 2/2

Theme: Why I want Collective Bargaining

Who am I?

Hi, my name is Randy McCarthy. I've been at UIUC for 18 years and I'm a professor in Mathematics. Like many of you, I came here because this is a great school in a nice community. I am a strong believer in the adage: "if you don't like something for 5 years it is your fault." To this end I eagerly sought to become part of shared governance on this campus. I had to petition to serve on the Department's Grad Affairs Comm before I was tenured and again to serve on the Executive Comm before I was promoted to full professor. The atmosphere of shared governance on this campus was so positive at that time that it played a major role in my decision to stay when courted by others schools. I again set a new standard when I served as the Director of Undergraduate Studies the year I was being promoted to full professor and then 5 years later serving as the Department's Graduate Director.

Transition.

Given this history of positive participation in shared governance, you may wonder how I became a supporter of collective bargaining. Certainly, during my first 10 years here I would not have conceived of it and truly it is only in the last couple years that I realized collective bargaining would help address problems that concerned me and upon further research I was surprised to discover that collective bargaining often improves shared governance.

Problems I see.

When I came to UIUC, our campus was rated one of the "best bargains" in the country, my classes, even the freshman level calculus classes, were 30 students, my research was stimulated by my 73 fellow faculty and a generous startup grant from the campus. Today, we are the most expensive public school, my calculus classes have over 200 students, and the now 60 faculty are often too busy to interact with one another. After all, the over 20 percent reduction in faculty met with no change in graduate students to advise and more than a 20 percent increase in overall instruction. In recent years my students have had to take exams on their books because the desks are broken, attend classes with coats because the rooms are so cold or sweating profusely because they are so hot. As a graduate director, I discovered that there are plenty of Deans in the Graduate College but it is critically understaffed for dealing with actual day-to-day problems of students. My research moneys are taxed and the ICR moneys are spent like administrative slush funds. What I do get to keep no longer is dictated by the granting agency but by an entirely new level of buracracy that was created as an inappropriate response to campus failing its audit.

Transition to the source.

The search for Hogan was a horrible example of top down business practices and the end result a predictable disaster. When I served on the LAS 5-year strategic planning committee put in by President White, we were told that the trustees and White wanted us to move to a more business model, but at the time I did not realize what this really meant. Only later did I begin to understand how the centralization of moneys takes away from shared governance. Not unlike the loss of state powers as Federal government centralized taxation. That year I watched Dean Mangelsdorf fight to keep what discretionary moneys she could in her terribly underfunded college but to little success. My own first serious signs of trouble happened the next year. I had been working to create a Bio-Math course, with 5 departments from 3 colleges to serve nearly 1000 students annually. We worked for over a year meeting almost weekly and it was shot down immediately because we needed space for 60 students throughout the day. At the time, there were whole floors of buildings standing empty in Engineering and rooms that were rarely used for CITES training, but so it goes. Is this shared governance? Over the following years I observed with horror the transformation of departmental administrators from dreamers and doers to pessimists and damage control experts. Not long after, my pension, health care and other benefits began to be regularly attacked, but the powerful centralized administration seemed unable or unwilling to take the fight seriously.

Administrators are not to blame.

I have rarely met an administrator I didn't like and who wasn't working to do their best and often with a schedule I would not wish upon my enemies. What I saw as administrative bloat collectively compared to what I observed individually confused me for several years. Then I learned of a Social theory for the Collapse of Complex Societies which provided insight to what I was witnessing. In a nut shell, the theory suggests that overtime, administration loses touch with the original purpose it was intended to serve as it becomes overly preoccupied in managing its own ever increasing levels of beauracracy. Eventually, the top becomes too heavy and the whole things topples.

We need to get the balance back. It seemed clear to me that somehow, in our panic to address growing financial concerns and the natural process of centralization afforded by technology (i.e. Banner) our process of shared governance was lessened. As an administrator, I can see how this happens. You need expediency and often you either can't or don't have time to fully inform everyone of what you know so they will see the correct solution as clearly as you do, so you act, with the best of intensions, but the shared process suffers.

Why we must act.

Once I understood this, I wondered what, if anything, could be done about it? For you see, I feel we MUST do something about it if we believe in the US model of a public research University. I do not intend to retire from an institution which is less than the one I came to serve in 94 and if we, the faculty, do not defend the educational prerogatives of our students and the quality of excellence in our research, then who will?

How Collectively we can.

We need a means to raise our collective voices to administration so that we will not only be politely listened to for advice but once again respectfully invited as a partner in the debate of our campus' future (remember our request to have a faculty attend the trustee meetings?).

When I looked to see what some other campuses had done, I learned that faculty Unionization was often motivated to address faculty concerns beyond salary, including issues of class size, work loads, shared governance as well as pensions, health care and benefits. In short, collective bargaining helps address the distribution of moneys within the campus as faculty needs are listened to. For example, with Union support, the faculty at UIC were able to get much needed and overdue safety equipment installed in 107 labs. Several years ago, the faculty at Rutgers University voted to not take their base pay raises for two years in order to preserve faculty positions.

I learned that the process of collective bargaining informs everyone of the needs and limitations of everyone else. The process of contract negotiations are a time when administration and faculty must actually listen to one another. Faculty senates often obtain contractual powers, not just advisory, and at research institutions, differential pay is maintained. Union contracts are written by the faculty and administration working together.

For pensions, health care and other benefits, shared governance is not the proper tool to obtain solutions. It is unfair to ask administrators who need to beg for basic operating funds to also fight like tigers for our benefits and it is cowardly to ask other public employees to fight for us. Collectively, through a Union, we could make a difference on these issues as well.

End.

I believe that a democratic faculty union would give us an independent voice on issues that lie outside the scope of existing institutional structures while restoring a balance of understanding to our process of shared governance. That strong faculty voice is needed to protect and advance the principles of our university.