

Library Council Preface to Faculty Statement

After a series of discussions that began last summer and were followed by a period of comment that continued into the new semester, on September 30-October 3, 2013 the Faculty in the Division of Libraries voted to adopt a statement (below) setting forth their views on the issue of university governance at NYU. The statement, [25 (in favor), 1 (opposed), and 4 (abstained) out of 54 full-time faculty], called for shared governance at NYU in which faculty and administration participate in decision-making with the involvement of others in the NYU community.

The statement expresses opposition to some of the previous mortgage loan policies of the University, and enumerates some concerns about the Global Network University and NYU 2031. It also registers the Library Faculty's support for the steps the NYU administration has taken to rectify some of the more contentious issues: (1) the cessation of loans for vacation homes, (2) the institution of the University Space Priorities Working Group (for NYU 2031), and (3) the initiation of the Joint Committee of NYU Stakeholders.

Although many schools and departments opted to hold "no confidence" votes, Faculty in the Division of Libraries decided that the central concern was not the individuals involved in the issues of governance, but the issue of governance itself – how it is defined and structured at NYU. If these issues are not resolved, it does not matter who occupies the administrative positions.

The establishment of the (elected) Joint Committee of NYU Stakeholders is a welcome step in the creation of a vehicle where members of the NYU community can meet to discuss the issue of governance and work toward the rebuilding of trust within the NYU community.

Library Faculty Statement

This past year has witnessed an unprecedented expression of discontent – across schools and departments – among NYU's faculty. While largely assuming the form of "no confidence" votes aimed at the University's president, this discontent concerns some combination of three issues: (1) The Global Network University (GNU), (2) NYU 2031, and (3) Faculty governance, and – as a subset of governance – transparency in the financial and ethical dealings of the administration.

Although the majority of organized faculty reaction has taken the form of "no confidence" votes, we feel that the substantive issue is not the individuals involved, but the form of governance through which individuals make decisions. Consequently, we believe that the only long-term solution is a change in the culture of governance at NYU – a change that incorporates the concepts of shared governance and collaborative policymaking.

Along with many of the NYU faculty:

- We are embarrassed by some of the financial policies that have come to light (i.e., forgiven loans, exorbitant administrative salaries, summer homes, etc.). Regardless of the particulars of each "revelation," they have cumulatively resulted in a besmirching

of NYU's image and a palpable decline in the reputation of the university. And we are also disappointed that, rather than offering an apology to the NYU community, the administration's initial response was to obfuscate and rationalize these financial improprieties. We are encouraged that the administration has discontinued the policy of loans for vacation homes.

- We are disappointed with the lack of faculty and community involvement in the initiation of the 2031 Plan. While we understand the necessity for expansion (lack of space in Bobst Library is an issue we confront daily), we believe that plans for expansion must include input from all concerned parties. We are, however, encouraged by the work and interim report of the University Space Priorities Working Group and hope that this group is a signal of the administration's openness to broader input.
- We have concerns about the Global Network University. We understand the financial advantages of expansion, but question the long-term viability of expanding, on the basis of partnerships, in countries with autocratic governments or governments that have demonstrated little regard for the tradition of academic freedom. This can be problematic and may lead to situations that compromise the University's integrity. Our call is one for vigilance rather than a disagreement with the principles of the GNU.

The roots of faculty disaffection with the financial policies, NYU 2031, and the GNU, reside in the weakness of the faculty's role in governance at NYU. Faculty members feel, with reason, that they are less than junior partners in the governance and decision-making of this university. Though there are historical causes for this weakness, prior practice must not be used as justification for present conduct. Some NYU schools have strong records of internal faculty governance; these practices should be studied and generalized across the University. The administration should be an active partner (with the faculty) in this endeavor.

Implementing the concepts of shared governance – which recognizes the roles of trustees, administration, and faculty (in consultation with student representatives and other members of the NYU community) – with collaborative policymaking would lay the foundations for a more harmonious culture of governance and preclude some of the more egregious past mistakes. The constitution of an elected body of trustees, administration, and faculty could concretize the details of how such a form of governance would work. The recent planned formation of a "Joint Committee of Stakeholders" is a positive step in this direction. This can provide an arena for a full, open discussion of the issue of how the faculty, and other constituents of the NYU community, can participate in decision making.

In his May 16, 2013 letter to the NYU Community, President Sexton referred to the root of faculty concerns as “a failure of communication.” Later he defines communication (dialogue) as “a commitment to understand and engage, through reasoned and civil intercourse.” Faculty members are calling for more than the right to be heard. They (we) are calling for an increased role in governance. That is, the right to be an equal partner in the decision-making process. Any administration reaction short of changing the structure of governance will only lead to a continuation of the current discord within the NYU community. A broadening of the decision-making process at NYU will bring needed transparency and will result in the faculty being invested in the decisions that are reached.

As faculty in the Division of Libraries, our role should be to join with the faculty of the other schools as they press the call for an inclusive sharing of power. At the same time, we should maximize the existing forms of governance in the Division of Libraries. The activities of the Faculty Senate should not be abridged to a quarterly report at Library Faculty meetings. There should be a vehicle for more regular exchange and discussion of Senate deliberations. Library Council, and other committees of the Division of Libraries faculty, should redouble their efforts to give concrete meaning to faculty governance, and all faculty members in the Division of Libraries should take seriously their responsibility as participants in university governance.

There are solutions to the problems that confront us, but it is unlikely that any action that excludes shared governance and collaborative policymaking will resolve the current issues facing the NYU community. It will take the conscious intervention of the administration and the faculty to transform the culture of governance at NYU.