

Remarks from Michael Dreiling, accepting UO Award for Shared Governance, Transparency and Trust - June 03, 2015

Greetings all! I want to first thank Senate President Rob Kyr for his most outstanding, compassionate and unswerving leadership in what was no doubt one of the most challenging years for academic leadership on this campus. You, sir, should get this award.

I must also thank all of you, my colleagues from every corner of campus, from every office and building, you keep this place working. But most importantly I thank my partner, Yvonne Braun, for her generosity and consistent example of living with integrity and kindness.

When I first stepped into the senate as a newly elected senator in 2012, I saw my colleagues from around campus doing something absolutely amazing, something we better never forget or take for granted –engaging in university governance. Yes, much of the work appeared mundane, even trivial. Yet beneath the surface I saw a living, breathing process where faculty, staff, students, and OAs translate their knowledge and experience of the micro-circuitry of the university into something that works, something that is grounded in higher intentions. We are pros on so many fronts, in so many unique settings on this campus and *our voice matters*. A university administration that listens to these voices, to our voices, *knows shared governance* and will thrive. I learned quickly that we are not actually asking for much here in the senate. There are really no areas where I witnessed the senate trying to usurp power. In fact, we are really only asking to be heard and find trust with what is said from this body will be weighed and regarded with respect.

Faculty, staff, students and OAs need a robust avenue to engage governance at the UO where significantly different power differentials and institutional legacies define positions relative to the top administrators and the board. The UO Constitution and our University Senate need to be honored for the vision of inclusion, trust and transparency they uphold. Challenges to this body and the constitution remind us that power exercised without regard for organized stakeholders begets mistrust, secrecy and conflict.

Our seat at the table, which is restricted by the University Constitution and the State of Oregon, need never be seen as a competing power. I worry some administrators have seen the Senate in such a light. I hope I am wrong in this concern, because ours is a power that works only in relation to the President and other offices on campus. It is a power-with, not a power over the president or other administrators. We are not here to fight, *we are here to advance and uphold essential academic* standards and principles through shared governance. Ours is a positive, affirmative movement, and we will always work to assure that the principles are honored and upheld at the UO.

Let me relate this to a few words about this award, the intention of which is noble and lofty: *To proliferate shared governance, transparency, and trust*. In the context of our university, each of these principles carry standards that are at once aspirational – as ideals – *and* deeply human, interconnected essentials to any vital community, especially a university.

In order to move closer to an ideal expression of these principles, each one requires the other. I cannot imagine shared governance – in its ideal form – without transparency and trust. Likewise, trust – in any relationship - is difficult to muster and elevate when secrets are held and disparities in power widen. Trust needs transparency and respectful power relations.

I distinguish the ideal from the practice, well, ***because the pursuit of ideals gets messy. Always... but not all of the time.*** The ideals are important signposts on the path, but it is the actual practice where the challenge lies.

For that reason, I think maybe we need two other principles – humility and courage. Why? I know that I take actions that others might wrongly or rightly see as a breach to the trust, a shroud over transparency, or a bypass of respectful power relations (shared governance). Anyone else in that boat? In my culture, it is vital to find the humility and courage to hear others, acknowledge mistakes, and then move on, lessons learned. The responsibility is even greater for those in public service and leadership because their powers and decisions weigh heavier on the lives of many. This pertains to university administrators in much the same way it does for political and corporate leaders in the wider society.

As we approach our ritual closure to the academic year, it is time to reflect on the past, acknowledge the challenges and mistakes, clear the heart and mind and move forward. From there, we can stand firmly and with conviction in upholding a broad, inclusive vision of governance at the UO. There will be challenges ahead. Some good people will make poor decisions. It is easier to clean up poor decisions when shared governance, transparency and trust guide the process.

In upholding these principles, we must not go light with our generosity towards one another. This is not about being nice. It is not about being a doormat. It is not about denying or hiding mistakes. It is about respecting our common, essential humanity.

There is no problem with generosity, in my mind, because when I am generous to others and do not experience reciprocity, I know it is time to examine that relationship, study the power differential, and resolve to act anew or move on. Generosity to others, especially in spirited conflict, helps us get to the other side of the conflict. And we need to get to the other side of conflicts.

What's the ***risk of not doing*** this?

Just look a few years where mistrust, secrecy and a barricade approach to governance prevailed. The results of years of conflict poisoned dialogue, festering into personalized differences and conflicts that built into resentments. There has been too much of that at the UO. Those practices and attitudes poison the very trust, transparency and shared governance that we need.

Now is the time to clear the waters and move forward with a generosity toward others and a fierce intellectual conviction to advance and uphold shared governance, transparency and trust - with a little humility and courage along the way. Thank you.