

Message from the Senate President March 29, 2018

Today I was planning to address the ways in which mindfulness about FOIA and public record should be passed down to constituencies.

I've had several folks talk with me about concerns constituents expressed in submitting via the Google Forms.

Initially, these folks were worried about their concerns being FOIA'd.

I wanted to remind you all, that **any** correspondence sent to senate is public record. One of the quoted concerns about Christina Madsen, for example, was never submitted by email or Google Form, but was instead anonymously mailed to my office via postal mail.

In the past few days, however, it has become clear that a second concern is more important than raising awareness about FOIA, and that is raising awareness about civility in inclusive and productive discourse.

First of all, I want to say that I am pleased with the level of respect that senators have shown to guests this year. I am thankful to Senator Barnes for her leadership in co-hosting civility training for the governing bodies. And, overall, I think that you as senators demonstrate respect even when raising contentious or passionate issues.

However, I am concerned that this message has not reached all faculty. Our constituencies may need to be reminded of the importance of respectful discourse in precipitating change.

For the most part, anonymous constituent concerns this year have not been personally disrespectful. However, in the past few weeks, there has been a noted difference—particularly in submissions of concerns about staff. Again, these concerns are not only the ones submitted via Google Form and reported in the minutes, but also the feedback from our colleges collected for specific initiatives, letters mailed, emails sent, and postings on UCANet. This is especially important for us to be conscientious about, as there is a community perception that faculty have more power and are better protected than staff in university settings. We addressed this perception in last year's senate, and again via the civility training this year, but we must continue to be mindful of that perception.

I DO NOT think we should censor faculty concerns. Additionally, I do not want a senate in which senate executives must assess all concerns and weed out the ones deemed inappropriate. I think it is the role of the senate body and our public meetings to acknowledge and record the concerns of the faculty we represent. I value the transparency that taking all concerns for the minutes affords us.

But faculty should be doing better in expressing their legitimate concerns, worries, and disagreements. Resorting to name-calling, making proclamations about the value of specific

individuals to campus, and using constituent concerns to engage in back-and-forth is not productive, civil, nor is it responsible or inclusive.

We can be leaders in expressing this message to faculty. I will continue to push for the transparency of recording, acknowledging, and addressing concerns. However, to ensure that such transparency does not result in backlash, we must all take responsibility for encouraging our college constituencies to express themselves respectfully.

I think the anonymity of concerns is important for enabling vulnerable constituencies on campus to express their voices. Additionally, I think that even those concerns that senate cannot solve, senate can still acknowledge and record. We learn much, for example, from seeing if a concern comes up every year on senate—even if it seemed trivial the first time, multiple submissions make it clear that this is an issue for the campus climate.

To ensure this pipeline of communication is effective, however, we need to take responsibility for encouraging civility.

Finally, I want to reinforce that acknowledging a constituent's concern **does not** equate to Faculty Senate endorsing the position in that concern. Often, constituent positions are directly opposed to each other. Other times, constituents may feel that Senate has more power than it does (this is generally true!). Recognizing a concern is not the same as Senate itself taking that position.

Thank you all for working so hard to make our campus community better. I know that is why you were driven to take on the incredible work of serving on senate. I want to work with you in making sure that we can continue to make our campus community better by encouraging productive, inclusive, civil discourse.

Best,

Taine Duncan
Senate President 2017-2018