



PennState

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Michele Stine, Chair
University Faculty Senae
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Chair Stine,

Thank you for your email dated February 27, 2024, regarding the University Faculty Senate's creation of a task force on shared governance and your letter dated February 20, 2024, regarding the Agreement for Cooperation on Budget. Please accept this letter as a response to both messages, in addition to addressing shared governance more generally.

University Faculty Senate Task Force on Shared Governance

I am pleased that this conversation will be occurring and believe it will give us an opportunity to get closer to being on the same page on a complex and foundational tenet of higher education. My sincere thanks to Professors Amit Sharma, Beth King, and Roger Egolf for volunteering their time for this important conversation. From the administration, Kathy Bieschke (Faculty Affairs), Andrew Read (Research), and Michael Wade Smith (President's Office) have graciously agreed to serve on the task force.

Agreement for Cooperation on Budget

We had an opportunity to discuss the Agreement during our last FAC meeting on March 11. As you may recall, I shared with all of you my comfort with the spirit of the document, misgivings about specific aspects of the document, and the rationale for why I am unable to sign the Agreement on Cooperation on Budget as it currently stands. Below I commit my perspective in writing for your further distribution to others in the University Faculty Senate (UFS) as you see fit.

First, I want to emphasize, on behalf of the administration of Penn State, our unwavering commitment to shared governance. I agree there is more we can do together to build an even stronger relationship between the University Faculty Senate and Penn State administration

around change in the months and years to come. I hope UFS sees the good faith effort by all the senior leaders in our administration to increase our engagement since the Agreement was passed. We will sincerely continue to do so.

The Agreement was written with good intent and evidences thoughtful engagement with our present situation. I agree with the list of contributions noted regarding our incredible faculty and educational enterprise. I do not have concern with this section and believe that there are more contributions that could be included.

Regarding the information requests, UFS now has a new mechanism already in place for all faculty senators to get updates from the various committees on how much engagement they have had with the administrators, including and especially the Joint Committee on Budget. We are also actively interacting with committee chairs of faculty senate beyond just senate leadership as was requested by the senators and you.

When it comes to budget conversations, thank you for Dr. John Cheslock's presentation at the recent senate plenary. Hopefully UFS found it to be as enlightening as my administration did, particularly his insights into the complexities of budget decisions and the need for careful consideration of trade-offs. I am grateful that he was able to serve on the Budget Work Group from the beginning so that our institution could benefit from his expertise in university budget models. Further, I was encouraged by University Planning Committee Chair Strauss's report at the last plenary indicating they had a very positive and informative presentation from and conversation with Sara Thorndike at their last committee meeting. Sara is more than happy to share this information with the entire senate at a plenary session if that would be helpful.

The final section of the Agreement includes a list of specific ideas. Again, I truly appreciate the spirit in which these ideas were offered. I attended the plenary meeting where the ideas were debated, and I appreciated the robust discussion for and against the Agreement. Most of the concerns appeared to be centered around this section of the document. I have strong and similar concerns about specific ideas, and I am not able to sign to indicate agreement on this section. I am happy to talk through those in the proper forum.

Shared Governance

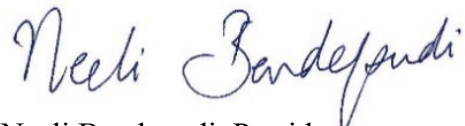
Chair Stine, I wish to partner with the senate not just based on this or any agreement, but because that is how university presidents and academic senates can and must work together. I commit to continuing to work hard to engage in ways that the UFS sees as meaningful.

Despite our best intentions and efforts, it is clear to me that we have not yet fully achieved the level of engagement with the University Faculty Senate that would be broadly understood and perceived as genuinely consultative. I suspect there are many reasons for this dissonance. As

president of Penn State, I understand and have accepted the mandate from the Board of Trustees to create a sustainable future for this great institution. As a faculty member myself, I fundamentally understand the important role of the faculty in ensuring long-term change, most particularly those changes related to curriculum, teaching, and learning. By working together in a shared governance model with a single definition that our joint task force will soon create, and with a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, we can navigate the challenges facing our institution and position Penn State for continued success.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to Penn State and your commitment to collaborative shared governance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Neeli Bendapudi". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Neeli Bendapudi, President