To: Members of the University Academic Senate  

From: Faculty Council  

Re: Progress in shared governance  

Date: March 19, 2012  

Faculty Council was charged with monitoring shared governance for the current academic year. The Council reviewed the Faculty Council’s recommendations from the last two academic years as well as the 2004 NCA report and the Final Report of the Joint Academic Senate/Committee on Faculty Task Force on Shared Governance submitted to the Academic Senate in May, 2007. Major change is never linear. Even as we see two steps forward and one step back, it is important to stay focused on the vision we have for shared governance and continue working in that direction.

Shared governance works when individuals and groups affected by a decision participate in the decision-making process. Its functioning involves, among other things, (1) providing to all participants information necessary to make decisions; (2) ensuring that the participants’ contribution is taken into account; and (3) communicating to the participants how their “input affected the decision” (Tina Nabatchi, A Manager’s Guide to Evaluating Citizen Participation, http://www.businessofgovernment.org, p. 6). The decision-making culture at Marquette has yet to be changed to effectively implement shared governance.

In response to the 2004 concerns raised by the NCA visit, structural improvements were instituted in the restructuring of the University Academic Senate (UAS): designating the Chair to be a member of the faculty, rather than having the Provost act as Chair; establishing a better ratio of faculty/administrators as required by the UAS statutes (i.e. reduction of Deans’ membership on the UAS from the previous high number to the current number of 5); and creating enhanced representation of part-time faculty on the UAS.

In 2009, Faculty Council members and Senators held discussions with academic deans, department chairs, and section heads regarding shared governance. Summaries of the meetings were presented to the UAS and discussed at a UAS meeting. An executive summary of the discussions was posted on the UAS website. In addition, the current UAS Secretary compiled a summary report of all UAS motions recently passed and posted the report on the UAS website. That canvassing of MU faculty revealed a common perception that shared governance required trust, transparency, communication, and accountability—all four of which were described as lacking.

In response to the 2009 report, several more changes were initiated. These changes included an improved and more accessible UAS website, regular e-mail communication of UAS agenda to the entire faculty, a one-course release for the UAS Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary during their term of service, and improving the election process for filling committee vacancies. It was also recommended that all Chairs of committees establish regular meeting times to improve the recruitment of new members. This has happened with some, but not all the committees. In addition, the UAS Chair and Vice-Chair began
attending University Leadership Council and Dean's Council meetings in 2012. Another concern was the lack of faculty participation in the budgetary process. During the current academic year, an effort toward transparency was made with the addition of two faculty members to the University Budget Committee though some concern still exists as to how much of the true process was actually revealed and the extent of real influence in the budgeting process.

Other recommendations to improve the quality of shared governance, however, have not been implemented. One recommendation that did not happen was an August or September orientation of the Executive Board, new senators, committee chairs, and committee members to provide continuity for Senate business. This has not occurred, and the responsibility appears to lie with the UAS faculty leadership, rather than the administrative leaders. In addition, based on a Faculty Council sponsored faculty forum with the trustee chair of the Subcommittee on Academic Excellence and Enrollment, Fall 2010, it was recommended that the Chair and the Vice Chair of UAS should meet with the Subcommittee on a regular basis. This has not happened. It is not clear if this is the fault of the UAS faculty leadership for not initiating this meeting or the fault of administration for discouraging interaction between faculty and trustees. Similarly, it was also recommended that the UAS Executive Committee appoint other faculty members to meet with this Trustees’ Committee in May for better follow through and to plan how to make the best use of time with the Trustees. This has not happened.

In addition to failure to implement recommended changes, a major concern focuses on both recent Vice-Provost and Vice-President appointments done without consultation with the UAS as well as the lack of a clear procedure for the future selection of academic deans. "Trust" was deemed to be a critical ingredient in the success of shared governance at Marquette. Recent events have tarnished the first buds of an uneasy trust, and it must be tended before it wilts, taking with it some hard-won victories. Choking the growth is a misrepresentation of statutes by those whose duty it is to uphold them. Statutes are not in existence just when they are convenient—by their nature, they are often NOT convenient—they are designed for the good of all as opposed to the imagined good of just a few, or one.

While some structural changes have occurred to address those concerns, fundamental flaws at significant levels in each category of concern—trust, communication, transparency, and accountability—remain and may be worsening. Attention to the latter two—transparency and accountability—seems at times to be flagrantly disregarded by administrators. The result is a deep deterioration in trust. The trajectory at this point suggests that faculty will experience increasing disillusionment as they watch the deterioration of the positive steps toward shared governance made in the past.

The Faculty remain suspicious of the administration's commitment to shared governance. Faculty members perceive that the administration has not made a sustained, genuine and overt commitment to shared governance. Various actions of the administration are interpreted as contrary to shared governance. Faculty members perceive that the administration is suspicious of shared governance and that this suspension is impeding the development of trust, accountability and transparency.
Shared governance at Marquette, as it is currently structured, requires all parties to act in good faith, and for everyone to see and feel that all parties are sincerely trying to make shared governance work. Unfortunately, events of the past few years have shown that this is not the case. Shared governance at Marquette is continuing to be a struggle. One of the reasons for that struggle is that the administrative side of the university has not been living up to agreements set out in the UAS statutes, and to promises made with UAS and its Executive Committee. This is not to say that progress has not been made, there has been progress in many areas, and we can see that the climate under Fr. Pilarz is more open and transparent than it has been in the past. However, if the UAS (and by extension the faculty) cannot trust that university administration is communicating honestly with the Senate, and honestly reporting Senate communications to the broader university administration; and if UAS cannot trust that university administration will follow through on promises made to the Senate, then there is no shared governance at Marquette.