UTICA
UNIVERSITY

Board of Trustees

January 26, 2023

Following is a statement from the Utica University Board of Trustees concerning the voting members of the Faculty Senate's formal censure of the Board of Trustees.

The Board deeply respects the faculty's right to have their individual and collective voices heard on a matter as important as the institution's academic offerings. We respect our faculty and their vital importance to this University.

Utica University, much like every college or university of its size and profile, has a responsibility to ensure its academic offerings reflect the significant shift in the higher education marketplace and align with and anticipate changing student interest and workforce needs. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education, under the Biden administration, has requested that institutions provide information to help the agency develop metrics to measure return on investment of academic majors. This is, in part, the federal government's response to the student loan debt crisis.

The Board acknowledges the difficult decisions that all of this requires, and understands that decisions may cause anger and angst. However, no decisions have been made as of yet, and the Board struggles to comprehend a vote to censure the Board around decisions that have neither been made nor, for that matter, even taken up. Such an action inexplicably and indefensibly suggests the Board's upcoming deliberations are a fait accompli, and we incontrovertibly reject that notion.

The Board further rejects any assertion or insinuation that the process for reviewing academic majors was hastily borne out of crisis, not transparent, or outside the Board's purview. To the contrary, conversations about Utica University's academic footprint, including its future major offerings, date back nearly a decade, and have been discussed with faculty in numerous forums over that time. This August, the Board, acting within its legal authority, passed a resolution directing the University's administration to undertake a comprehensive academic portfolio review and provide recommendations for changes to academic degree credentials, including, but not limited to, expanding, modifying, or sunsetting majors. In September, the Provost appointed a task force comprised of the four academic deans, faculty representatives from each school recommended by their respective academic dean, and four administrative personnel, one of whom was not a voting member. On December 1, the task force submitted its report to the President. That report, along with institutional data provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and three open forums the President held with faculty during the Fall semester, informed the President's recommendations to the Board. The data used in the task force's evaluation of majors was shared with every academic department on multiple occasions over

1600 Burrstone Road • Utica, NY 13502-4892
Voice: 315.792.3222 • Fax: 315.792.3360
utica.edu

several years, and has historically been available to every academic department upon request. The methodology used by the task force as well as the types of data considered were outlined by the President when she presented her recommendations to the faculty.

The notification of the faculty's censure includes allegations that the Board does not respect faculty's role in shared governance. On the contrary, the Board acknowledges that faculty have primary responsibility for curriculum – which is different from degree credentials and educational offerings. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education's accreditation standards make it clear that faculty have authority for the design, delivery, and assessment of curriculum. The Board, on the other hand, is the legally constituted governing body that is ultimately accountable for academic quality, planning, and fiscal well-being as well as the approval of degree programs and the awarding of degrees. Furthermore, first-year applications are currently up 33 percent from this time last year, and the Board has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the academic degree programs consistently attracting and graduating the largest numbers of students are sufficiently resourced.

The Board has invited feedback from members of the University community through February 2. As has been shared, through this comment period, we continue to invite faculty to provide input before the Board considers the President's recommendations during its February 17 meeting. We want and need thoughtful input to inform and assist in the decision-making process.

Again, we respect the views of the faculty and encourage them to respond to the recommendations by providing any information that would help the Board in its decision-making. But make no mistake, this censure will not influence how the Board decides. We are not rescinding the resolution or rejecting the recommendations prior to our meeting on February 17.

This process, while very difficult, is right for the University and we remain committed to it.