MEMORANDUM

TO: Joette Stefi-Mabry  
Cynthia A. Fox  
Christine K. Wagner

FROM: Robert J. Jones, President

DATE: November 14, 2014

SUBJ: Request to Review Ex Officio Voting Privileges

Congratulations on the completion and publication of the findings of the Faculty and Professional Staff Survey on Shared Governance. The insights provided by the respondents have helped identify several opportunities for the administration, Senate leadership, faculty, professional staff and students to improve the sense of shared governance at UAlbany. The University leadership team and I are firm believers in the value of an effective, collaborative governance process and are committed to doing what we can to manifest that ideal in actions as well as in words.

In that regard, we read with interest and - quite honestly, disappointment - the often referenced perception that the Senate does little more than serve the administration; that its “role had been reduced to rubber stamping” the administration’s initiatives; and that, by virtue of their appointment to Senate committees and councils, the administration is exerting too much of an influence on the outcome of Senate actions.

Nothing could be farther from our aspirations for, or our expectations of, an effective governance partnership.

The evidence most frequently cited in the report as predicates for the perception that the administration plays too direct a role in the business of the Senate, thereby diminishing the sense of true shared governance, is two-fold: 1) the large number of administrators on the roster of some councils and committees, and 2) the fact that administrative representatives have voting privileges.

We retain a steadfast desire to have administrators serve as ex officio members of the Senate, believing that administrative participation provides the two-fold benefit of helping inform discussion of issues under review while helping to keep University leaders aware of the University community’s perspectives on critical issues. However, we too have reservations about extending voting privileges to ex officio members who serve on committees and councils by virtue of their administrative position in the
University. We understand and appreciate the collaborative intent of Article II.2.1 of the Senate By-Laws which grants voting privileges to certain ex officio members of the administration including: the President, the Provost, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Vice President for Research, the Vice President for Student Success, and the Vice President for Finance and Business. And we can understand how such inclusion may contribute to the perception that the administration has too much direct influence on the outcome of Senate deliberations.

At this point in time we consider voting privileges for ex officio members to be more of a liability than benefit to our desire to forge a governance process at the University at Albany that is commonly viewed as representing the opinions and recommendations of the Senate and the faculty, staff and students it represents. We therefore formally request that the Senate leadership consider revising the Faculty By-Laws and Charter of the University Senate as needed to exclude from voting those administrative ex officio positions listed in Article II.2.1 of the By-Laws, as well as other administrators who serve on committees and councils by virtue of their administrative appointments.

We all have a lot of work to do together to reverse the pervasive negative opinions concerning the effectiveness of shared governance at U Albany. The Provost and I are genuinely interested in forging a new working relationship with the Senate, one founded on open dialog and transparency. Undoubtedly there will be times when we see things from different perspectives and we won’t always achieve complete agreement; nonetheless, substantive consultation and a respectful exchange are the hallmarks of the academy’s tradition of faculty governance. We hope that the University community will view this request and other initiatives we have and will introduce in the coming year as tangible evidence of the Administration’s commitment to the principles of transparency, consultation and shared governance. We are available to discuss this with you further, as you deem necessary and appropriate.

Thank you for considering this request and for all that you do on behalf of the University at Albany.