Academic Senate Retreat
August 19, 2003
David Eisler, President

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

In thinking about our day together I’ve found myself reflecting on Senates I’ve worked with in the past – the personalities and unique characteristics of each group. In doing so I was reminded of some of the truly interesting discussions and how we as group struggled with what for us were contentious and controversial issues. At times some discussions felt tedious and I yearned for the leaders within the group to move issues forward toward resolution. It is important you know that with time those are the moments that have nearly faded from my memory. What I remember most is the wonderful intellect of the people involved with senate and their true passion for what they believed was right. Many, many times I sat in Senate extraordinarily proud of the people there and the example they set for the campus, academically and philosophically.

This is my 14th fall of working administratively with faculty senates. I believe each of those bodies represented their colleagues well and while one never agrees with all recommendations, in hindsight our combined efforts moved the university forward and improved the quality of our education.

Here are some characteristics I’ve noted of the most effective Senates with whom I’ve worked.

**Strong leadership** – The best senates were fortunate to have strong, experienced leaders. These were people who understood the university, the dynamics and politics of engendering campus support for the Senate and its proposals. They were leaders whose motivation was not the difference it made for them personally or for their department or college. They were involved because they believed in the concepts of shared governance and their vision what was in the best interest of the university as a whole.

This is very much in the context of servant leadership I discussed in my opening remarks yesterday. Over the summer I’ve had multiple opportunities to visit with your president, Bill Papo. I believe he is such a man and look forward to working with him.

**Respect** - Effective senates recognized that there would be times that they disagreed. Incorporated in their discussions was a concept that faculty were the curricular experts within their own disciplines. The focus of the discussions were on the interactions among programs for these issues and proposal. Most importantly during this discourse members were able to remember that disagreements were about issues and principles, not about personalities. When they may have disagreed, those occasions never transcended the
senators’ respect for each other as friends, colleagues, and as members of a community committed to a greater good.

**Communication** – The effectiveness of any Senate will be determined in a large part by its ability to communicate. This communication happens on many levels and in many directions. It creates and builds a spirit of openness with the entire campus community. Perhaps the most important component of this communication is with faculty colleagues. Sometimes the challenge here is that while we may have tried to communicate, unless faculty are aware and have heard and understood, we have not communicated. Ultimately communication is based on the perception of others not on ours.

**Fun** – The truly remarkable senates I’ve worked with have enjoyed each other and their company. While they worked very hard, they had a good time doing so. I’m not sure how this happens, but I too have enjoyed it.

I am committed to shared governance, have enjoyed the opportunities to work with the senate, and look forward to working with you. Somewhere in the multitude of boxes in our basement is a wonderful presentation I received from the Senate at Weber. This was one of the more emotional moments of our leaving Utah. Three past Senate chairs presented this to me at the campus-wide reception for Patsy and I. Together they represented over a decade of senate leadership. Because it was on the last things I received, it is not with the rest of my office items. Many of you know that we’re renting a home and as a result are not unpacking many of our boxes. While I’ve looked for it, I have no idea where it may be, perhaps in another of the boxes marked pillows.

Many of you yesterday heard my thoughts on a learning institution. I believe our goal should be more than to take students through an experience from which they graduate prepared for future success. It needs to be a university-wide commitment where we seek to have each year’s graduates better prepared than those who graduated the previous year. I very much look forward to working with you toward that goal.

Thanks for inviting me to be with you today.

David L. Eisler
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