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Letter from Faculty Council Chair Mary Coussons-Read [1]

October 26, 2021 by Faculty Council Communications Committee [2]

As we engage in another academic year, we must seek out and exploit opportunities to better ourselves as faculty, colleagues, and citizens of CU, including how we can be more deliberate about turning what we say is important to us into reality. This is particularly true for Faculty Council (FC), and specifically for our Executive Committee (EC). As the shared governance body that represents the faculty on all four CU campuses, FC has a unique responsibility to support the work of shared governance across the CU System. This includes collecting input from each campus' Faculty Assembly (FA) and expressing common concerns and hopes to CU System Administration. Perhaps most critically, FC is responsible for creating and sustaining a culture of cooperation and respect that supports faculty with diverse backgrounds, identities, and ideas. As is the case with many organizations, although committed to encouraging both professional and personal conduct that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), FC and its EC are still working to translate this focus into action and positive change. There are plenty of statements and plans that emphasize the criticality of developing campus climates, policies, and practices that foster DEI, but of course, the challenge is execution. Our campuses are beginning to transform DEI statements and strategic plans into action and outcomes, and FC and EC are working to do the same thing. Some positive changes regarding climate and DEI are afoot in EC and in FC, and there are more to come.

In response to criticism from within FC of both the lack of diversity in the slate of officers, the group elected earlier this Spring, and the overall lack of diversity of the EC (an ongoing issue), EC is taking active steps to address these concerns. For this academic year, representatives of the FC Committee on Racial and Ethnic Equity (CREE), the FC Women's Committee, the FC (Dis)ability & Access Committee, and the FC LGBTQ+ Committee are serving as members of EC. Although we have only had 2 EC meetings this year, the perspectives, voices, and priorities our new EC colleagues bring to the conversation are critical for our work and deeply appreciated. Collaborating with representatives from these 3 committees is already increasing the ability of EC to understand the multilayer issues and opportunities we have as faculty to make real change regarding DEI climate and practice in FC and on our campuses. This year, our colleagues from the CREE, LGBTQ+, (Dis)ability & Access, and Women's Committees are serving in an ad hoc capacity, but it is my hope that we will solidify this arrangement and permanently expand the EC to assure that these voices are consistently at the table. I have proposed a change in the FC Bylaws (currently under revision) to establish the permanence of these appointments to EC.

Finally, a key discussion item within FC EC is the pervasive challenge of attracting "new blood" into shared governance service with a particular eye on increasing participation by faculty who are members of underrepresented groups. Demonstrating the impact and importance of shared governance first, at the campus level and then at the system level is not

necessarily sufficient to attract and engage busy colleagues who are often pulled in many different directions for service. Initial responsibility for increasing and diversifying participation in governance resides with the campus assemblies with an eye toward connecting interested colleagues to FC and its committees. Interestingly, although many faculty are familiar with their own campus Faculty Assembly (FA), many are unaware that FC exists and others are unclear about what FC does relative to campus faculty governance. Thus, expanding participation in FC is at least a two-stage process involving 1) Education of faculty on each campus about the relationship between FC and their FA and the collaboration among the campuses which FC encourages and, 2) Commitment by current FA and FC members to personally reach out to colleagues on their campuses to educate them about FA and/or FC, encourage them to get involved at a level that makes sense for the career stage of each person, and essentially mentor them into shared governance. These plans are aspirational at this time, but FC and its EC are committed to deepening faculty involvement in shared governance with a particular focus on DEI; stay tuned for action steps and plans in this regard from FC and FC EC.

As always, our work as faculty is, at its best, a team effort in which we identify and pursue common goals that better our campuses, our system, and most importantly, the experiences our students have. Nowhere is this collaboration more essential than in the work of shared governance, but the progress made through the work FAs and FC do may not be readily evident to all faculty. Education and engagement are priorities for FC and EC as we seek to increase and encourage participation of our talented, committed, and dedicated colleagues.

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