

June 16, 2021

Via Email

American Association of University Professors - Purdue system chapters
Executive Committee, Purdue-West Lafayette
Executive Committee, Purdue-Fort Wayne
Purdue-Northwest chapter

Re: Civics Literacy requirement

Dear Colleagues:

Chair Mike Berghoff asked that I respond to your June 9, 2021 letter, which I was able to read prior to our June 11 Board meeting. I am not sure of your respective positions on the importance of civics literacy as an important element of undergraduate education. The Board believes it is critically important, which is why it acted on Friday to approve a civics literacy requirement that entails an assessment together with several selectives from which undergraduate students can choose to fulfill what we hope is a flexible yet substantive mechanism for instilling the importance of civics literacy in our students.

As for your process concerns, I assure you that I hear them and do not take them lightly. Still, I must respectfully disagree that collaborative governance principles were not observed in this process, particularly with respect to the West Lafayette campus. The Board fully understands the University Senate vote on this initiative and the feedback that was provided through University Senate review and discussions. The Board has now worked with University Senates chaired by three different faculty members over the past two and a half years on the civics literacy initiative. Indeed, the initial civics working group was led by a University Senate Chair, who was deeply committed to moving this proposal forward. Each Senate Chair has collaborated and assisted us in achieving this goal. I hope each believes we have patiently observed sound shared governance principles.

From the Board's perspective, we believe we have heard and considered each substantive concern faculty raised about the requirement. Faculty experts have designed each aspect of the civics literacy initiative, and the Board is so appreciative of their time and talents, which yielded a programmatic approach that exceeded all of the Board's expectations. We trust that you and all faculty will continue to evaluate and provide substantive feedback as the initiative is implemented, so it can be improved upon to meet our student's best interests.

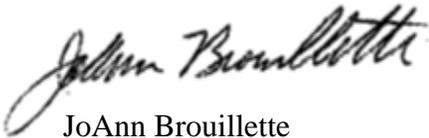
With respect to the Fort Wayne and Northwest campuses, we have taken your point, which was also articulated by the senate chairs on those campuses. While each campus has a representative on the Purdue University Senate, and we had envisioned some degree of inter-campus discussion via the Intercampus Faculty Council on the topic, the senates from those campuses clearly expressed their concern about the lack of their faculties' involvement on the initiative.

As a result, on Friday, the Board voted to extend the time for implementation at PFW, PNW and IUPUI by one year. We hope this will afford time for faculty and administration on those campuses to discuss and shape an approach to meeting the requirement, including by determining whether to fully adopt or adapt the selectives West Lafayette will implement for the requirement, or by developing alternative selectives that make the most sense for those campuses. We have asked the senates on those campuses to bring any adapted or alternative proposals forward to the Board for its review and approval in time for implementation on those campuses by the fall 2022 semester.

As I mentioned to a Senate committee chair late last week, it is exceedingly rare that the Board and the University Senate (as the recognized governance body of the faculty) see important curricular matters differently. I cannot think of another time it has occurred in my 15 years as a Purdue trustee. When it does occur, the Trustees have final authority and, indeed, the legal responsibility to “prescribe the curricula and courses of study offered by the...institution, and define the standards of proficiency and satisfaction within the curricula and courses established . . .” (IC 21-41-2-1). In this case, and after two and a half years of discussion, consultation, and planning, the Board believes the importance of this initiative warranted the discharge of this responsibility directly.

Again, I thank you for your input and I hope you will continue to evaluate and provide substantive ideas for improving upon the civics literacy requirement. We look forward to working with all faculty through the established Senate channels in the future.

Sincerely,



JoAnn Brouillette
Chair, Academic and Student Affairs Committee
Purdue University Board of Trustees