BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

PROVOST’S REPORT: “THE POWER OF ENGAGEMENT”

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HERSHEY, PA

with accompanying 6-slide PPT)
Good afternoon. Today I’d like to talk about the power of engagement—and how vital it is in my role as Executive Vice President and Provost to engender insightful participation in University decision-making among faculty, students, and staff. It is a part of my job that I consider not only meaningful, but also indeed a pleasure.

The Board of Trustees, of course, as a governance body is the formal entity with overall responsibility for the direction and welfare of the University. And while the Board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to President Barron, the importance of the Board’s oversight in driving Penn State’s success cannot be understated.

Still, beyond acknowledgment of the work done by the Board and University administration, I think it’s important to spotlight what our faculty, students and staff bring to the table in influencing and guiding all we do at Penn State. One thing that makes universities different—and, indeed, I believe, our University unique—is the degree to which we strive not just to listen, but also to truly hear the opinions of our important constituencies. This manifests itself through various means and forms, and we truly embrace our opportunities to engage because it enables us to consider the opinions and needs of—and potential impacts on—our people when we make decisions.

Through formal and informal channels and processes, these Penn Staters have a meaningful voice, and that demonstrates the power of engagement. We connect with our people and hopefully engender their trust by involving them, and then continuing to encourage that involvement. Whether our opinions differ or align, having everyone’s perspectives sustains and strengthens our institution. How do we fully leverage their engagement?
With our faculty, we have the most fully structured approach to engagement regarding University management and operations: We call this shared governance.

The University Faculty Senate, which comprises individuals who are elected from each college and campus, serves as the sole body representing the University faculty as a whole, with primary legislative authority over all educational matters, including curriculum, student policies, admissions, and retention/graduation requirements. In 2011, the Senate legislated a fixed-size of 200 elected faculty seats, which are allocated proportionately by unit, based on the ratio of full-time unit faculty to the total number of full-time University faculty. Importantly, the Senate explicitly includes tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty, which maximizes faculty engagement across the University.

Penn State also recognizes the Senate as an essential advisory and consultative body to the President on all matters that may affect the attainment of the University’s educational objectives. Ultimately, the Senate seeks ways to improve communication and collaborative decision making across the University, and its prominence reflects how much Penn State continues to value the expertise and opinions of its thousands of faculty.

The University Faculty Senate, to which Board Chair Keith Masser is scheduled to speak next month, also elects members of specific joint faculty and administrative committees, such as the Standing Joint Committee on Tenure. To address specific topics, the Chair of the University Faculty Senate and senior administration will appoint joint committees and task forces. One example is the current Joint Diversity Awareness
Task Force. The university administration also routinely solicits comments from the Faculty Senate when specific policies are undergoing revision.

A few other examples of faculty engagement include three elected faculty and Senate officers who are members of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the President. The Chair of the University Faculty Senate, Mohamad Ansari, is a member of the Academic Leadership Council, and the Chair-Elect, James Strauss, is a member of Administrative Council on Undergraduate Education. As you are aware, three of the Faculty Senate officers attend Board meetings such as this one, and along with the chair of the Senate’s University Planning Committee, each sits on one of the Board’s standing committees. Effective in July 2015, an academic trustee, who was nominated by the University Faculty Senate, became a member of the Board of Trustees with full voting rights.

JONES – Slide 3: Student Engagement

Students across Penn State’s campuses have many ways to participate in University management and operations, including the University Park Undergraduate Association, Graduate and Professional Student Association, and Council of Commonwealth Student Governments. Students also hold positions on the Board of Trustees and are representatives of other leadership-oriented bodies, such as the Student Activity Fee Board. You met some of our student leaders earlier this afternoon.

Penn State is staunchly committed to involving students and having their voices heard. Examples of this include President Barron’s Town Halls with undergraduate students, plus a series of five Town Halls we held for graduate students, with University
leaders on hand to listen and respond to their ideas and concerns. We also appreciate hearing from graduate students through their representation on the Student Insurance Advisory Board and the Student Insurance Administrative Council, among other groups.

We actively involved students through their representative bodies in the development of our new strategic plan, and we received some of the most insightful feedback from them.

In University Park each fall, on the night before classes begin, the Lion Ambassadors host an event to welcome the newest class of Penn Staters. Approximately 7,000 first-year students typically attend the event in Rec Hall, where they are welcomed by community leaders, the Blue Band, and, of course, the Nittany Lion. The event, called “Be a Part from the Start,” strives to give attendees an all-inclusive, comprehensive look at what it means to be a Penn State student. To me, it represents both in name and action that we want our students to be engaged participants from the beginning in not only forging their educational paths and being involved in University organizations and events, but also in sharing their opinions regarding our operations and management on how what we do affects them.

**JONES – Slide 4: Staff Engagement**

When it comes to our staff members, Penn State encourages them, also, to be involved in University policy-making through a variety of committees and task forces. The broadest oversight belong to the University Staff Advisory Council, which exists to facilitate open and equitable deliberations about policies, procedures, and programming
that affect staff members. In addition, many of the University’s colleges and organizations have their own advisory councils on which staff and faculty serve.

Just last week I addressed and took questions from the Staff Advisory Council about the University’s future and how staff members—some of whom wonder how they can make a difference in such a large institution—can get more engaged with the work of the administration and Board. It was an energizing and motivating exercise. We have a lot of great minds among our tens of thousands of staff, and we would be foolish not to embrace that and include their voices and opinions in our decision-making.

**JONES – Slide 5: Why Engagement Matters**

Ultimately, Penn State is a growing global institution that requires ongoing integration of perspectives from across the University community, enabling buy-in to and support of our many endeavors. We strive to include faculty, students, and staff, all of whom have the opportunity to be informed and engaged participants in making significant decisions concerning our operations. Such participation empowers people across our campuses and the global Penn State community to come together to share ideas, make a difference, and gain experience in higher education management.

Effective University management demands powerfully engaged faculty, students, and staff, and we should thank all of them for being vital constituents in our educational community. The administration’s and Board’s ongoing interactions with all of them will ensure Penn State makes the best, most reasoned, and timely decisions to achieve positive impacts across the institution.
Thank you. I now welcome any questions or comments.