QUESTIONS TO START THE DISCUSSION:

SHARED GOVERNANCE

From your professional perspective, what does shared governance mean to you? What’s its value? What are the challenges associated with truly shared governance? How sustainable is shared governance and meaningful consultation when administrators are often expected to move quickly, decisively, and nimbly?

University governance has changed here and elsewhere over the last 30 years. Given your experiences over that time frame, what changes have been for the better? What changes have been for the worse?

If you had to make one change to the current shared governance structure and procedures here at the University of Minnesota, what would it be, and why would you recommend it?

Governance here at the University of Minnesota has expanded to include Professional & Academic and Civil Service employees, and students. How can we keep the many constituencies engaged, influential, and effective?

When many of us think about shared governance, we don’t always consider the implications of governance for our students. What do you see as the relation between governance policies and activities and benefits to our students?

When it comes to governance, what remains uniquely in the purview of the faculty?

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND MISPERCEPTIONS

A recent Wall Street Journal article accused the University of Minnesota in particular of “administrative bloat,” with subsequent reactions appearing in the op-ed sections of a number of newspapers, including the Washington Post and Star-Tribune. In his compelling reply, President Kaler, among other things, pointed out that the work of many employees assigned an “administrative” label benefit students directly, and that the growth of funded research and regulations therewith associated necessitate more administrative oversight. Given that misperceptions can be real in their consequences, what can be done here at the University, by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation—the CIC—or through organizations spanning higher education still more broadly, to standardize best practices when it comes to organizing job families, so that reporters and readers are not comparing apples to oranges? In other words, how might we go about standardizing employment classifications?

To what extent is public support for the educational, research, and outreach missions of universities entangled in today’s divisive politics? There was a time when both political parties viewed universities as a wise public investment. Today it seems as if conservatives view institutions like the University as drivers of higher taxes, and would be happier to see a private model for financing all
aspects of our mission. And because political liberals are more plentiful in academia than in business, there’s the concern among conservatives that professors indoctrinate impressionable young people with their liberal biases. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, is there something we could do in higher education to win back politically conservative support?

And speaking of politics and public perceptions, what should each campus in our system be doing individually to better tell its own unique story to help increase legislative support not only for itself, but for the University of Minnesota system as a whole? What are the benefits and liabilities of each campus working independently to secure support for unmet needs such as capital projects, compensation, and student financial aid?

FISCAL CONCERNS

In many parts of the University, faculty members are expected to earn their keep by competing successfully for federal grants to fund both their salaries and their research. Moreover, securing federal funding is often a criterion with implications for awarding tenure, salary increases, and promotions. In light of both dwindling federal funding resources and the politics of funding priorities at NSF, NIH, and other federal agencies, what are the implications for academic freedom? How do we protect the freedom of researchers to follow their noses, given these pressures?

Just two weeks ago (January 16, 2013), Andrew Martin wrote an article in the New York Times. He reported that Moody’s—the credit-reporting agency—had revised its financial outlook for U.S. colleges and universities, and had assigned a negative grade to all of higher education, citing diminished prospects for future growth, a weak economy, and likely federal cuts to research and student aid. Martin ended his article by quoting from Moody’s report: “Until universities demonstrate better ability to lower their cost of operations, perhaps through more intensive use of online classes and elimination or reduction of tenure, we expect government officials to produce bolder solutions in response to the public outcry against the cost of higher education.” We’ve caught the e-learning wave; what are your reactions to the possible elimination or reduction of tenure as a way of reducing the cost of operations?

Over the past few decades, the proportion of tenured and tenure-track faculty in the entire instructional faculty in colleges and universities has decreased nationally. This has occurred in large part to ensure flexibility in both programming and financial allocations. How do we best balance the need for institutional efficiency and flexibility with the need for tenured faculty who, among other things, form the core of faculty governance?

These are fiscally challenging times here at the University and in other public colleges and universities. From your professional perspective, will you talk briefly about what seems to be in many people’s minds the trade-off among research support, state funding, private giving, and student tuition, all of which support our mission?

THE FUTURE

What do you envision the future of governance at the University of Minnesota to look like?