The future of the University of Minnesota is apt to be very different from its past. All members of the University community will face myriad challenges in the near future: decreased public financial support; reconfiguration of departments and colleges in response to shrinking budgets and new opportunities; large-scale expansion and improvement of online education; increased internal and societal expectations of partnerships with private industry and other higher education systems. These challenges and more will require many timely and significant decisions with far-ranging consequences for teaching, research, and outreach.

The role of the faculty has traditionally been to decide the intellectual content of teaching and research. Members of the faculty are stewards of the curriculum and of the scholarly and creative activities that give public research universities their distinctive function. The challenges noted above, largely the result of rapidly changing external pressures, are likely to put more of these intellectual decisions in the hands of the President and other high-level administrators, not through their direct involvement in teaching and research, but indirectly through broad reconfigurations of budgets, facilities, organizational structures, and external partnerships.

A major challenge for the University of Minnesota's system of shared governance is to devise ways by which faculty, staff, and students can effectively provide advice and perspective regarding these major decisions that will ultimately—and properly—be made by the President and other high-ranking administrators. It may be argued that shared governance slows things down, but faculty committees have shown that they can act promptly when circumstances require. Broad, informed, and timely consultation is likely to lead to the best results, and as we celebrate 100 years of faculty governance, we remain committed to a future of fruitful consultation with the University administration.