

Dear President-elect Chiang,

As you prepare to move to Northwestern, we write to welcome you to campus. You will find here a faculty that is wildly diverse across expertise, experience, and interest, and also unified behind the ideals of excellence in teaching and research. As president (Ian Hurd) and president-elect (Rebecca Zorach) of the Faculty Senate, we have had the privilege to work with faculty from all campuses, all schools, and all forms of appointment. To aid your transition into the President's office, we offer three insights:

First, the faculty care deeply for the university: by which we mean Northwestern, but also the very notion of a university. As you know, Northwestern is remarkable because of its emphasis on a truly diverse range of activities: if not "universal," then aiming in that direction. We hope this is part of its appeal to you. We value a place in society for careful, sustained inquiry. Such a place needs some independence from the buffeting winds of fashion and parochialism; it needs a commitment to honesty; and it needs some acceptance of the value of disagreement. A university that stands for independence, honesty, and disagreement is a tremendous social asset, with the benefits spread throughout society and into the future. We look to the university administration to embody these values and to defend them by its practices.

Second, the concept of shared governance is central to this university. It is also subject to diverging interpretations. Our experience at Northwestern suggests that if you listen carefully you will notice two models in wide, if implicit, circulation. The two can be understood by imagining first a snow-globe and then an organizational chart. To many faculty, the university is a snow globe: all the action of scholarship and pedagogy provides the excitement inside the sphere, while the administrative parts of the university are the base upon which it rests. The base exists to make it possible for the faculty and students to do their best work. By contrast, the organization chart shows lines of accountability and authority which suggest that faculty exist within the confines of departments and schools, connected to the university through deans and provost.

Shared governance in a snow-globe university means that faculty expect to set priorities and hold administrators to account in the service of facilitating scholarly excellence. In the org-chart view, shared governance isolates faculty authority over academic matters to what happens in departments and schools, separated from all the administrative boxes that have authority over everything else.

Neither image is entirely apt to describe the relations that make a university. You will find at Northwestern many faculty who incline to the snow-globe model, but much diversity as well. With the exceptional challenges of today, shared governance makes the university better by making full use of the expertise and authority of the faculty. In recent years, we have been working hard with the university administration to strengthen and deepen the meaning of shared governance at Northwestern, and we look forward to continuing these conversations with you.

Finally, faculty are also aware that the university is an employer. We are sensitive to the terms of our employment and alert to their diminution. We are aware that faculty compensation at Northwestern is falling behind inflation and that our benefits have been reduced; that some salaries are so low that

faculty qualify as “low income”; and that university staff are often in even more precarious situations. You will find that faculty are ready to mobilize around the terms of employment. This is in part to defend ourselves and our families, but it is also in pursuit of excellence for the university: the institution requires excellent faculty, and faculty excellence requires investment in our work of teaching and research. Balancing the budget by cuts in compensation is not a strategy for excellence.

The faculty look forward to working with you on the shared project of continuing Northwestern’s growth as a world-class institution. We are sure you will continue to find the Senate, and the faculty at large, eager partners in our common enterprise.

Yours, in anticipation,  
Ian Hurd

Professor of Political Science and  
President of the Faculty Senate

Rebecca Zorach  
Professor of Art History and  
President-Elect of the Faculty Senate