

**WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**  
**Executive Session of the FACULTY SENATE**  
**Tuesday, 24 October 2017**

5:00 p.m.  
Capitol Rooms - University Union

**ACTION MINUTES**

Senators reconvened to continue the meeting in executive session.

V. New Business

A. Follow-up Remarks Made at BOT Meeting of September 29, 2017  
(Ron Williams, Vice President for Student Services)

Chairperson Rock suggested that senators first give Vice President Williams an opportunity to either clarify his statements from the Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting of September 29 or go over what he actually said because sometimes reports do not translate accurately. He added that after Vice President Williams's comments, the meeting will be opened to the floor. Vice President Williams expressed his appreciation to senators for the opportunity to clarify his statements. He read aloud the same statement that he read at the BOT meeting of September 29, adding that this statement was a small snapshot from a 20-minute presentation on what is happening in Student Services:

“The entire Enrollment Management team submitted to the evaluation or re-evaluation of all of our recruitment and persistence initiatives. This assessment includes our Summer Orientation and Registration programming; how we set goals; utilizing students in the recruitment process; gathering student opinions on outreach and approach; and feedback from faculty and staff. Through this process we have learned that a good portion of retention hinges on how students are treated by faculty. We are a student-centered institution, but each member of the faculty and staff must do their part to treat students with dignity and respect. In my role as an administrator and a faculty member, I do all that I can to make sure that I am welcoming to all students. Earning a terminal degree does not give persons the right to be uncivil, rude, or unwelcoming to students. The Enrollment Management Committee is engaged in meaningful work; however, we need everyone's help to ensure that students have a desire to remain at Western and graduate from this fine institution.”

Vice President Williams told senators that he did not intend to indicate that these problems are endemic; he suspects some faculty think he was referring to all of the approximately 600 Unit A and B faculty members. Some faculty have reached out to Vice President Williams about his statement, but he told senators that everyone, with the exception of one individual, has been very respectful and polite, and his response to that one individual was kind and considerate, as well. He related that some people were concerned that, because he made the comment about a terminal degree, he was saying that Unit B faculty are great and Unit A are not, but Vice President Williams assured senators that this was nowhere in his thought processes because that is counter to his point. Vice President Williams stressed that he was saying that everyone should treat everybody with dignity and respect, no matter their status on this campus or in life, such as what they earn or have.

Vice President Williams has been asked about data or statistics related to his statement, but his statement was a qualitative one; he has not conducted a survey and does not have numbers. He stressed that it was not a quantitative statement but an observation of a phenomenon that is not endemic. Vice President Williams got a call related to this topic while he was writing his report, but he told senators these calls are not from students who are getting Fs or are disgruntled because they are not thriving in their classes but from students who are doing well at WIU and would not have to leave but are choosing to do so. He told senators that when students tell him they are leaving because someone has been mean to them, he probes deeper, something he has been doing more during the past one and a half years that he has been in Student Services. He added that most students tell him,

however, that faculty and staff members did everything they could to help them and that they are leaving the University due to their own inability to study, financial challenges, family issues, or similar reasons.

Vice President Williams characterizes himself as a nice person who tries to be kind and respectful, and he did not mean his statement to the BOT to offend anyone. He thinks WIU has great faculty members ; he has worked closely with many of the senators around the table and thinks very highly of them. Vice President Williams expressed that he does not treat Chairperson Rock with respect because he is the Faculty Senate Chair or has a certain status on the campus but because 1) it is the right thing to do, and 2) he is a decent person and a nice colleague.

Vice President Williams stressed that he did not speak in absolute statements to the BOT and that his statement was more about humanity than anything else. He has gotten some feedback from his comments that speak to his point about civility; specifically, some faculty and staff have commended his courage to make the statement to the BOT because they have seen this type of thing occurring also, but they do not think there is anything that can be done about it. He said some people even told him they hoped he was going to be okay after making his statement, but he does not know why anyone should think otherwise. Vice President Williams said he is very comfortable speaking before Faculty Senate and has no fear that anyone will say anything horrible or shout at him. He felt bad after hearing from a faculty member at the President's Brown Bag luncheon that his comments to the BOT had hurt this individual's feelings because that was not his intention. Vice President Williams told senators his intention in making his statement was to elicit some knowledge about this issue at WIU because he believes that only faculty can interrupt this type of behavior when they see it in other faculty members.

Vice President Williams has been asked why he did not take his concerns to the Deans' Council or to Faculty Senate, but does not know that Faculty Senate can do anything about a faculty member who says nasty things to students. He does believe, however, that if a faculty member in the same department hears about this or sees this type of behavior, that faculty member could address it with his or her colleague. Vice President Williams stressed that he is not trying to harm anyone or call anyone out, but he believes that the incident last year where one faculty member made an inappropriate remark about a pregnant student that led to the student going to the Office of Civil Rights should remain in the forefront of discussion because it illustrates that it does matter if even a single faculty member is uncivil.

Vice President Williams stressed that his comments do not refer to students who leave the University because they have challenges but to those really great students who suffer in silence or leave because of their treatment. He suspects that this is often not brought up on student evaluations of faculty because some students may be fearful. He has had students tell him that a faculty member called the entire class idiots or used profanity in the classroom. He related that in one case a student came to him in tears because a faculty member wrote on her paper that it was so good that her boyfriend must have written it for her; Vice President Williams in this case told the student to write the professor a note to generate a written response for handwriting comparison so that the student would have some verification to share with the faculty member's chair.

Senator Allison asked Vice President Williams why he decided to make his statements public at a BOT meeting before the press. She related that a friend, who has no relationship with WIU, read it and asked her why WIU's faculty is "being thrown under the bus." Her friend did not ask her about the accuracy of the statement, and this friend used the inclusive plural of faculty. Senator Allison realizes that in any large organization there will be people who do things that are inappropriate, but she does not understand why Vice President Williams chose to go to the BOT and say this in such a way that it will be reported by the press. She thinks this undercuts WIU's efforts to go forward as a united community, and she finds this hurtful. Vice President Williams reiterated that he has gotten a lot of positive feedback about his comments, and some people in the campus community have thanked him for his courage to make them, so it all depends on perspective. He related that the BOT

has asked him and the other vice presidents for a lot more information lately about what is going on and what they are hearing. Vice President Williams pointed out that he also has a fiduciary responsibility to the BOT to share what he is hearing. He added that the comments about the terminal degree are totally his own, that he owns them and believes them, because that is part of his value system. Vice President Williams hoped his comments would create some dialogue and help to address some of these issues at WIU, and he did not see his comments as causing an enrollment issue; sometimes the discussion must turn to issues or problems, such as student drinking, in order to address them.

Senator Allison stated that using the phrase “terminal degree” communicates that these are the people causing the problem; Vice President Williams stressed that is not what he was saying. He explained that he was trying to convey that just because people may have terminal degrees, money, celebrity, or status does not mean they have a right to mistreat others, and this is an integral part of his value system. Senator Allison expressed her agreement with this belief, but asked why Vice President Williams used the “terminal degree” example rather than just saying that all people should be kind to others. Vice President Williams explained that a parent called to share a “horrific” example about what happened to her daughter; the mother told him that just because a person has a Ph.D. does not give that person the right to mistreat others, and Vice President Williams agrees.

Senator Boynton remarked that *The Voice* article quoted Vice President Williams as stating that “I said that earning a terminal degree does not give persons the right to be uncivil, rude, or unwelcoming to our students, and this is something that I have heard often in the last year.” She remarked that this was not something that was included in the comments that Vice President Williams read to Faculty Senate, and the use of “often” indicates to her that this is something that he has heard a majority of the time. Vice President Williams responded that he has not heard about these instances a majority of the time. Senator Boynton stated that she is more concerned that parents will stop sending their students to WIU now that word is spreading through the high schools that WIU has rude faculty. She has heard from colleagues at Illinois Wesleyan and the University of Illinois-Chicago about the Vice President’s statement, so the word is out there. Senator Boynton related that when she was Chair of the Department of History, she would sometimes get calls from the dean about comments made by a faculty member and would talk to that person and put them on the Professional Improvement Plan (PIP), so there is a process that can be worked through when a faculty member behaves inappropriately. Senator Boynton agrees that there are always a few bad apples, but if a parent shares that an individual faculty member has behaved inappropriately, that information needs to go to the dean, chair, and faculty member so that the behavior can be corrected or, in some cases, end in ultimate dismissal. She believes that making this kind of statement to the press is counterproductive.

Senator Roberts asked if Vice President Williams was aware that the press was at the BOT meeting; Vice President Williams responded that he was, but this is not something that was at the forefront of his mind, nor was it his intention to make his statements before the press in order to cause problems. Senator Roberts read about Vice President Williams’s comments in the newspaper, and he does not know how such a statement helps collaboration between the administration and faculty in their collective attempt to present a positive image to students. Although Vice President Williams’s intentions were good, Senator Roberts believes the impact cannot be positive from that kind of language used at a meeting of the BOT.

Senator Hironimus-Wendt remarked that there seems to be two issues. One issue involves reporting that students in their exit interviews have commented a few times that some faculty are rude and uncivil and whether that information should have been made public. Senator Hironimus-Wendt remarked that Vice President Williams, who also has a terminal degree, reported to the BOT on the results of exit surveys, and he does not think it is necessarily inappropriate for negative things to be reported – whether about Sodexo, Athletics, University Housing and Dining Services, or about faculty. Senator Hironimus-Wendt does not think that WIU should have “dirty little secrets” but that these should be aired so that the University can fix them. The second issue involves faculty concerns

that somehow the 95 percent of faculty who are not problematic have been harmed by Vice President Williams's statements. Senator Hironimus-Wendt realizes that faculty may have feelings about being publicly outed, but the immediate problem of some particular faculty members still needs to be fixed. He believes that the incivility, while rare, is where the University needs to focus. He understands why many faculty are concerned that Vice President Williams made these specific statements, but he does not find them problematic because the statements were made as part of the Vice President's responsibility to the BOT.

Senator McIlvaine-Newsad asked what can be done to fix what has happened. She observed that some serious damage control is needed if senators' colleagues at other institutions are discussing the Vice President's comments, as well as WIU students who may go home over Thanksgiving and discourage friends from attending WIU. She thinks a concerted effort needs to be made to highlight not only WIU's outstanding faculty but also outstanding secretaries, building service workers, and others that work at WIU. She stated that while WIU, undoubtedly, does have some bad apples, the institution also has a lot of people who put in a great deal more than what is expected of them and do it because they love their jobs. Senator McIlvaine-Newsad asked what kind of public campaign can be launched that shows these pictures from every part of the University. She stated that if the mission is to go forward, build a better institution, and attract students, then everyone needs to stop fighting with each other and figure out how to work together collaboratively and positively.

Vice President Williams stated that, with the Faculty Senate's support, he can talk to Director of University Relations Darcie Shinberger and her staff, President Thomas, and the other vice presidents about what that kind of campaign might look like. He would like to bring back ideas to the Faculty Senate so that the University can move forward in a positive direction to promote its employees in a positive light. Vice President Williams related that when he attends welcome receptions and other events on the road, he always starts by saying that WIU's faculty and staff are second to none. He also highlights the opportunities in Macomb, such as great recreational spaces. He thinks the fact that there is not a lot of retail in Macomb provides students with more opportunities for studying. Vice President Williams teaches a College Student Personnel course through which students are admitted through a formalized admissions process, and he tells students that it is good there is no Target or Whole Foods in Macomb so that students can spend more time with their colleagues and in the Library. He thinks there are ways the positives of WIU can be highlighted, and he asked Faculty Senate to let him know how he can help.

Senator Rahman agrees with Senator Hironimus-Wendt that there are two issues, and she thinks conversations should occur about how to address them. She stated that issues of incivility can be conveyed to deans and chairs, but there are other methods of addressing these issues that can be discussed as well. She suggested that Vice President Williams could talk to *The Voice* to tell them the same things that he said during the closed session and reassure them that the problem is not endemic. Vice President Williams said he has no problem talking with *The Voice* and can suggest that to Ms. Shinberger. He said prior to the decision to go into closed session, he was glad to see the reporter from *The Voice* at the Senate meeting so that he could address this issue publicly. Senator Rahman stated that Vice President Williams's comments about faculty could be taken to mean that there are "more than several" instances of incivility reported, but the Vice President has said this is incorrect and that the problem is not endemic. She agrees that even one instance is too many, but damage control is what she is thinking about now. Senator McIlvaine-Newsad observed that a lot of time has now passed since the comments were made.

Vice President Williams expressed his appreciation for the chance to have this dialogue with senators. He would rather have these discussions than have people be mad about his statements. He reiterated that he is happy to make a statement to *The Voice*, but he is not sure that the best route is to bring his statements back to the forefront. Senator Perabo believes it is important to stress the existence of procedures to deal with these types of issues and get that information out. She suggested that Vice President Williams clarify that the issues relate to a specific number of faculty. Vice President Williams responded that he could probably tally up the more extreme examples he has

heard, but he hesitates to give a specific number. He reiterated that his statement was not quantitative because he has not done a survey. Senator Boynton remarked that “often” is a quantifiable word, and the report in *The Voice* said that Vice President Williams used that word. Vice President Williams does not recall if he used the word “often” when speaking to the BOT; he tried to be as transparent as possible, but he usually does not go off of his written report, and that word was not used in his report. Senator Perabo suggested that it still might be helpful if Vice President Williams could quantify his statements a little bit, such as saying he hears of these kinds of incidents “a few times a year,” for example, and reassure individuals that there are procedures in place – the student can report to the chair who then reports the incident to the dean. She added that verification of the incident reports is also an important piece.

Parliamentarian Kaul remarked that whatever the intent was of Vice President Williams’s comments, the question now must be how to control the damage, if damage has been done. He pointed out that WIU has a Disruptive Student in the Classroom policy and asked if there is something equal in the policy manual or the faculty contract that would apply to uncivil behavior on the part of a “bad apple.” He wonders how the University can tackle this issue going forward; had this issue been brought before the President’s Cabinet, they would have discussed what needed to be done and whether a policy needs to be created that is outside the faculty contract. Vice President Williams’s statement generated discussion, and Parliamentarian Kaul believes two aspects of it need to be considered: 1) what can be done to minimize the effect of the damage it has caused, and 2) what process should be followed going forward to address the issue of a few faculty being uncivil and not doing the job they are expected to do.

Senator Hironimus-Wendt observed that currently everything that has been said in closed session is to be held in strict secrecy until the minutes are deemed to be released. He asked that Faculty Senate entertain a motion to suspend the closed session and release the minutes as soon as possible.

Vice President Williams stated that he would not have known that his comments were as damaging or troubling as senators have shared or that there needs to be a response if he had not been invited to address the Senate. He has not heard any comments about this issue from anyone around the state, although he has heard some comments from people in the community. He added that hearing from senators has illustrated to him the level of faculty concern.

Senator Boynton said the reason she wanted the meeting closed was because she was not sure how explicit Vice President Williams would be about some of the incidents he has heard about, but she does not think there has been anything said that could not go into the regular minutes. Vice President Williams told senators he is more guarded now with what he says in general, but he feels comfortable talking before the Senate.

Senator Sandage related that she sat on the Judicial Review Board in the 1980s and 1990s, and she is currently serving on it again. She finds it appalling how dramatically changed students’ viewpoints are regarding what they consider to be rude behavior on their part. Senator Sandage related some examples regarding cell phone usage. Vice President Williams agrees that students are very different from previous generations in relation to how they speak to individuals in positions of authority, parents, or those that are their elders. He said that most of the incidents he has heard, however, are not related to academic rigor but regarding something a professor has said to the entire class or to the individual that is not related to their work.

Interim Provost Neumann remarked that this has been a good discussion. She has not had the opportunity to speak to Vice President Williams on this topic, but she plans to do so. She said they will consider the benefits of making a positive statement about Vice President Williams’s comments versus drawing more attention to them. She also thinks it might be a good idea to spotlight various faculty members every few weeks in order to push out more positive news. Senator Boynton suggested that this should be broadened to include other employee groups, such as advisors and building service workers. Senator Czechowski suggested that perhaps the spotlight could include a

student's perspective on a staff member and how that individual changed the student's experience at WIU. She believes there is a professionalism that everyone must exhibit to represent WIU. Senator Czechowski works closely with students in a studio environment, often late into the evening, and they sometimes complain about their professors, but she tells students to write a letter to their professor, the dean, or higher administration but not just to tell her about it. She thinks students should document their complaints and follow proper protocol; otherwise, they are just hearsay. Senator Czechowski stated that some faculty feel hurt this subject was broached at the BOT meeting while some other negative stories about the University do not get that sort of public discussion and while there are many good things that happen at WIU that are not publicized.

Chairperson Rock would like all senators to look over the minutes from the closed session closely before a vote is taken at the next Faculty Senate meeting regarding whether to immediately open them for the public.

**Motion:** To adjourn (Roberts)

The Faculty Senate adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Susan Czechowski, Senate Secretary

Annette Hamm, Faculty Senate Recording Secretary