

A Declaration of Declining Confidence in the Leadership of Provost Lori Vermeulen

We, the members of the Stockton Faculty, express our declining confidence in Stockton University Provost Lori Vermeulen.

Stockton University has a long and proud tradition of cooperation between the Faculty and the Administration. This record of trust has strengthened and enriched Stockton, and helped define our distinctive commitment to an engaging, rich, and interdisciplinary liberal arts education, achieved through a professional culture that values collaboration and shared decision-making.

However, we have grown seriously concerned with the Provost's apparent unwillingness to ensure the continuation of this tradition. Rather than addressing the need for change as an opportunity to build cooperation, community, and trust, thereby fostering a collective ownership of the planning process, the Provost has demonstrated troubling patterns with communication that have fostered confusion, alienation, distrust, and a general erosion of morale that is in direct conflict with the University's mission statement on shared governance.

Evidence of concerns rests in direct actions by the Provost including:

- The decision to end the Institute of Faculty Development (IFD) without full consideration for its impact on faculty. Actions were taken with Faculty Senate after the decision was already delivered in writing to the current IFD Director. An additional email was sent by the Provost to the faculty at large promising a "smooth transition to our new organizational structures." This was done prior to any formal announcement about the IFD causing confusion and concern among faculty. Adding to this confusion is the Provost's statements in "Listening Sessions" that the IFD is not closing while simultaneously asking the Faculty Senate to create a Task Force on Assisting the Creation of a New IFD/Academic Support Center.
- The recent presentation on "potential new organizational structures." Though there is currently a series of open forums and structures for comment, ideas initially brought forward were solely designed by the Provost. Initial discussions lacked rationale for why they were being proposed and, as a result, the presentation materials have changed multiple times as they've been presented but do not provide clearly outlined problems or explanations of how proposed changes correct any problems. They also lack any data from a cost-effective analysis. The faculty are left confused and distrustful of the Provost's motive and rationale for changes.
- Fundamental misunderstanding of General Studies and Interdisciplinary Minors. The Provost's proposed restructuring combines academic schools with administratively run units under an Associate Provost in a new entity called University College. The name and organizational structure replicates stereotypical University Colleges that provide orientation, academic advising,

- and support for a selective group of students or that refer to the general education and first-year seminar programs. Additionally, the Provost's plan removes interdisciplinary minors from General Studies and instead places them under Schools that are highly inappropriate to their actual areas of study and pedagogy. The faculty distrust the Provost's ability to support the interdisciplinary cornerstone of Stockton's distinctive educational mission.
- The Provost's admitted management style. When presenting the fully formed plans, the Provost declared this was "to get faculty attention." This is a tactic that engenders panic and discord rather than building consensus and harmony around a discussion of specific problems with solutions grounded in best practices. Additionally, an inaugural session of the Provost meeting with pre-tenured faculty was announced November 22nd for December 2nd. The call described the meeting as "ways that the Provost's office can support your success, discuss new initiatives with you, and answer any questions that you may have." This quickly turned into another slide show presentation of the restructuring plan making the faculty feel a "bait and switch" occurred and that they were meant to side with the Provost against other faculty.
 - The lack of use of current institutional efforts that represent processes of shared governance. These efforts include the work of the Leadership Taskforce and the Strategic Planning Implementation Teams. Work within both structures can serve to inform and guide decisions related to our academic units. Neither entities have completed their work nor has time been provided for the faculty, at large, to consider findings and decisions as part of the process. The Provost's neglect to incorporate the work of the Taskforce and the Implementation Teams has demoralized and alienated the faculty.

As a result, our collective concern for the future of Stockton is growing, and our confidence in Provost Vermeulen's leadership is waning.

We call on Provost Vermeulen to change course and to adopt a new strategy that rebuilds trust and allows us to collectively shape a more promising future for Stockton. We call for a genuine shift in practices including a disaggregation of the three major components of her restructuring plan with significant time to consider all data:

1. The revision of the current leadership structure (based on the locally negotiated expiring MOA on Coordinators)
2. The merger of academic schools and programs
3. The reorganization of academic support structures

We further request a clear delineation of specific problems for each of the three areas and establish a shared approach to collaborate on how to address identified problems.