

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 causing confusion and concern among faculty.
- 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. The Provost's admitted management style in presenting the fully formed plans 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.
- The lack of use of institutional efforts under way that represent processes of shared governance. 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 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:

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.