

Candidate Statement: Faculty Senate Chair

Catherine Fonseca, WVU Libraries

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My name is Catherine Fonseca; I am an Associate Librarian located at the downtown campus library here in Morgantown. I have been at WVU a relatively short time: coming up on just 4 years. I remember specifically asking in my interview if librarians here had representation in Faculty Senate, with the express intent of getting involved in committee membership and senator service. I very much believe that shared governance—that is, true shared governance, and not its lip service—is the lifeblood of a healthy higher education institution in pursuit of the research, teaching, and service missions that uniquely distinguish us from the corporate world. It is my opinion that sidelining faculty, staff, and student input in institutional deliberation and decision-making carries a strong correlation with many of the worst trends and crises we see in higher ed now.

At my previous institution—a teaching college in the California State system—I was also involved in academic governance. So I was honored to be nominated to Faculty Senate Chair and wanted to briefly share with you why I accepted that nomination. First, I believe strongly in the importance of running a contested race and wanted to avoid an uncontested election for a second year in a row. In light of our loss of voting rights on our Board of Governors, I think a robust election process is particularly important to signal the health of faculty governance and our readiness to reclaim that voting power. Second, I know one of the many fallouts from Academic Transformation has been an increase in service load, given our fewer numbers and the loss of senior, tenured faculty who typically have greater flexibility to take on service roles. As a faculty member outside the tenure track with less publish-or-perish pressures in my evaluation criteria, I felt obligated to step up in this time of need.

I would also say librarians tend to have a strong calling and penchant for service, sometimes to our detriment as a feminized and chronically underpaid profession. But I am struck by how this service orientation makes librarians especially well-suited for the role of Faculty Senate Chair. The library is often discussed as a ‘third place’ where those of any discipline can gather, share ideas, find common ground, and build meaningful connections. A librarian serving as Faculty Senate Chair can operate in much the same way: grounded in a role that is not tied to any single constituency, but instead committed to the whole, cultivating an environment open to thoughtful, productive dialogue on the university’s future, offering a space where coalitions can form to work collaboratively toward shared goals, and serving as a transparent conduit between faculty and administrative leadership.

As 26-27 Faculty Senate Chair, I would have three starting priorities:

- 1) **Reviewing the mergers of Academic Transformation** – I've already mentioned the increase in service demands following Academic Transformation. This represents just one of the many operational and structural challenges that have emerged as a result of Transformation. By the time of the appointment of the 26-27 Senate Chair, sufficient time will have passed for new, administrative leadership to settle into their roles. While I understand that both senior leadership and, to some extent, our own faculty body have sought some distance from the weight of this process, a more direct post-mortem on Academic Transformation is now necessary to ensure the health of WVU following this major change. The Culture Action groups represent a positive first step in addressing morale, reputational, and institutional culture pieces of this. However, I believe we need a focused review around the logistics and outcomes of the two major mergers that emerged from Transformation: the College of Creative Arts and Media and the Division of Land-Grant Engagement. These units have now had time to stabilize, and we all have had some time to catch our breath after Transformation. It is now time to pinpoint pain points and iterate for improvements.
- 2) **Discussion on the pursuit of AAU membership** – Following the challenges of Academic Transformation, I have been excited, hopeful, and optimistic about Dr. Benson's first year as our president. Though I was surprised by his continued and repeated call to pursue membership in the Association of American Universities (AAU). While the prospect is appealing in many ways, it is essential to ensure that this goal aligns with our own institution's priorities and values. Achieving AAU membership will likely require significant re-prioritization of faculty efforts and budgetary resources. Before fully committing to this pursuit, we must carefully consider whether it serves the best interests of our particular faculty and student body, rather than simply enhancing institutional prestige. This alignment is particularly important given the current AAU membership, which is disproportionately composed of private universities, with only a small minority of public, land-grant, or state flagship institutions represented.
- 3) **Vigilance around the newest wave of EdTech** – The AI-powered ed-tech boom is already at our doorstep; new products sure, but the same (often empty) promise to solve all of academe's problems. Without careful oversight and clarity on who makes acquisition decisions, we risk overspending on these products and compromising student privacy even more than we already do via surveillance tools rebranded as learning analytics. Faculty should play a central role in evaluating and guiding these choices, questioning the value and practicality of new tools before

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acquisition or continued subscription. Instructors often face challenges when technology does not align with teaching needs, while staff and administrators cannot make fully informed decisions without understanding how faculty intend to use these tools. I would like to see more active dialogue between these two groups on IT add-ons that shape our instructional environments.

These priorities are based on my observations of high need, but of course, I would take the time as Chair Elect to gather insight from the different constituencies regarding matters of highest urgency or concern. I am committed to listening, collaborating, and taking action in ways that reflect our shared values and strengthen WVU. Thank you for your consideration as your 26-27 Faculty Senate Chair.