

Hey Cal Poly Humboldt,

Ok, last one.

Thank you all for bearing with me over the last couple of years. The circumstances in our shared community have been complicated and often harmful, and I have been a desperately flawed facilitator in that context. I apologize for my shortcomings in this role, and I'm deeply grateful for the patience, grace, and support I have received in spite of them.

For my final one of these little diatribes, I'd like to expand on a conversation we had at a recent roundtable of former and future senate chairs during the Student Activism events a couple weeks ago. One of the questions we considered together was "what is shared governance and why does it matter"? There were a number of good ideas amongst the participants, while I sort of pedantically trailed off in recounting a chapter in Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" that I was reading with a couple Art Ed students that week. Rather than let that pedantry slip away into the ether, I'll try to reproduce some of it here:

Briefly, I would propose that the point of getting together to talk about our institution on a weekly basis is to humanize an oppressive model. Universities are, along with libraries and K-12 schools and the like, amongst the more important spaces for the education and growth of our community towards a more just and perfect whole. They are also massive structural mechanisms that can subsume and obfuscate the humanity of the people who work for them.

Freire suggests in the first chapter of his 1970 book that "both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness," but that humanization is the people's vocation. He suggests that the great historical task of the oppressed is liberation, not only of ourselves, but of our oppressors, or those who are keeping the mechanism rolling without forefronting or perhaps even understanding how the gears are grinding us all down. He points to our duty to combat "prescription" of a repressive reality that comes from outside ourselves and dictates our ways of being with each other. He warns against artificial dualities through which, in supplanting those we deem to be oppressive, we subsequently become oppressors.

In terms of ways to move forward, he offers that "no reality transforms itself," and as such we must collectively foster a "praxis" of "critical intervention in reality" towards the changes we envision. This praxis is a continuous, critical engagement with our circumstances through which we imagine, debate, and enact how they might be otherwise.

Those of us who have been at a lot of senate meetings are likely prone to ask me at this point, "isn't this a sort of grandiose way to frame hours upon hours of policy discussions"? And, yeah, it probably is. We spend a lot of time diving into the minutiae of the boring, the mundane, the esoteric, and sometimes to little or no apparent aim or end. We sometimes get into mean-spirited arguments that aren't worth the ill-will they engender, and performative gestures that turn as many people away from our causes or ideas as they bring in. But, while we can

certainly improve in regards to those detractors and others, I might suggest that persistence in this “permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed” is impactful in and of itself.

Freire concludes his opening chapter with the following:

Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling...reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating... knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement.

Maybe shared governance as praxis, then, has as much value in the act of engagement, of involvement, as in the result of engagement? Maybe being together and taking each other's stuff seriously is meaningful regardless of the results? I don't know, but I kinda hope so.

I guess in conclusion and farewell, I'd encourage us to engage with the Senate as a structure as much as we are able going forward. Please, if you can, take on new or continued roles, and encourage others to join, too. Talk about shared governance as a serious and meaningful venture, if only in hopes that it will be. Communicate our needs and concerns to the body directly, rather than through backchannels and rumor mills. Practice talking to each other, rather than about each other.

Recent data that has been shared with me shows that considerably less than half of the tenure track faculty (the most overtly incentivized demographic on campus) participate in University committees. I'm not looking to sass anyone with that report; there are many other valid forms of service, and not everyone digs committee meetings. It's just that democracy seems such a frail and multiply-assailed thing to me right now, and there is a lot to be addressed and shaped and reimagined for our community. Let's affirm each other's humanity and critically recreate our shared reality by being together and listening to each other and fixing what hurts.

Thanks team. Peace and love and all the good stuff.

jim