

Annie Adams
Faculty Regent Statement

Biographical Profile:

I am a Professor of English who was elected, in May of 2019, to complete Dr. Jonathan Pidluzny's final year as faculty regent. In my 21 years at this institution, I have served on numerous department, college, and university committees, including SACSCOC reaccreditation teams, and both the 2009 and 2019 General Education reform efforts. As chair of the 2015-16 Faculty Senate, I reinstated the Senate chair's attendance at Board of Regent meetings, was appointed the sole faculty member of the Budget Taskforce committee, and worked with the newly formed MSU chapter of the Association of American University Professors to defend the principle of tenure and to present viable alternatives to fill the designated budget shortfall in order to retain 13 tenure and tenure track lines that had been slated for elimination.

As the current faculty regent, I serve on the Board of Regents, attend, along with the staff regent and student regent, the campus constituency meetings called by the President, and work in close consultation with the leadership of Faculty Senate. I have also instituted the practice of attending Staff Congress meetings and initiated conversations with the Student Government Association to facilitate collaboration across campus. I prioritized these connections because true shared governance involves representative groups speaking to one another as well as upper administration.

Since assuming regent duties in August, I have:

- actively participated in all Board of Regents meetings, including the Council of Postsecondary Education's "Symposium on Postsecondary Education Trusteeship;"
- helped the Chair of Senate address identified issues to ensure proper faculty oversight in curricular matters;
- met, at the interim Provost's behest, with senior academic leadership in order to consider the institution's accreditation needs, and, in concert with the Provost, significantly reduced the documentary burden placed on faculty;
- supported the initiative the Chairs of Senate and Staff Congress have begun, in conjunction with IT, to create viable online forms that are fully trackable;
- encouraged, with the Chair-elect of Senate, efforts to "augment austerity" by increasing athletic ticket sales and grant proposals; and
- worked with the leadership of Staff Congress to improve process efficiencies on campus regarding student hiring and advising.

A great deal of this work occurred while I was officially "on leave" in Fall 2019. Before our previous regent secured a position outside of the academy, I was fortunate enough to receive a sabbatical to study the crisis in higher education. Because I wished to maintain the positive relationship Dr. Pidluzny helped establish between faculty and the Board, I ran to fill his vacating seat and modified my research agenda to focus more on the considerations that I could address as acting regent.

Why I wish to serve as faculty regent

I wish to serve as faculty regent because I can help faculty navigate these trying times.

Admittedly these trying times are a far cry from the “perfect storm” of 2015-2016. Thanks to the work of the previous regent and changes in upper administration, the relationship between the Board and faculty has shifted from adversarial to amicable, performance funding, for all of its problems, has at least ensured that instructional spending is increasing, and the president is committed to hiring new assistant professors to fill our depleted ranks. The undeniably positive aggregate trends, though, are primarily felt at the edges, not in the lived experience of what we can term, borrowing the language of student success, the “murky middle.” It is this “middle”—the faculty already here who have yet to experience institutional recovery in their day-to-day lives—that the current faculty regent must advocate for and empower.

This advocacy should occur at the Board level when it is appropriate. If there is a viable case to be made for increasing stagnant faculty salaries while the institution also manages its debt burden and prepares for the inevitable losses “baked into” the performance funding system, you can be assured that I will make it, just as I will review university policies in order to keep faculty from being unduly burdened by new restrictions or mandates. This is the data-driven work I performed as Faculty Senate chair, and what helped stop the termination of 13 filled faculty positions and kept the administratively drafted version of PAc-26 from being approved without any modification or faculty input.

The primary advocacy necessary now, though, is not advocacy at the Board level; it is advocacy at the campus level, working to make sure that faculty are valued as more than CIP codes or aggregate trends in IPEDS data points. And my experience renders me particularly well-suited to assert this value in a credible way. Thanks to my work on the Budget Taskforce, and the training I received when I earned a scholarship to the American Association of University Professors’ summer academy, I can couch faculty concerns in contemporary budget realities, including the particulars of the pension crisis. The wealth of policy knowledge I have garnered also allows me to protect faculty interests while discerning ways that we might responsibly reduce institutional mandates, and thus lessen undue burdens on faculty and academic staff.

The role of faculty regent grants me the opportunity to deploy this hard-won knowledge for the common good. Because the regent is in frequent contact with the highest levels of the administration, I have been able to discuss faculty concerns (including campus morale) with upper administration. The regent’s role in Senate provides a public venue wherein I have worked to highlight the ability of faculty to productively control aspects of their work conditions by being knowledgeable about policy and working collaboratively with other campus constituents to achieve institutional goals. I have striven to use the authority of office to create a platform from which I may promote faculty agency while I offer a strong faculty voice that demonstrates our full value. If re-elected, I will continue in these efforts.

In these austere times, as the president works to right our fiscal ship, we need a regent who will draw attention to oft-observed human costs of austerity while also helping faculty to assert their collective agency in order to aid institutional recovery. I am uniquely situated to do just that.