

**BoT Meeting Speech**  
**October 19, 2018**

Good morning, I'm Dr. Nimisha Patel, Professor and Chair of the Teacher Education Department.

Trustees Langos, Fecher, Fitzpatrick, your prior comments related to the Strategic Plan make it clear that you lack an inherent understanding of the purpose of higher education. Rather than focusing on what is best for students, your comments suggest:

--that your goal for WSU is to align its mission and purpose with what is best for you and your respective companies, and

--that you care more about employees meeting your goals rather than facilitating students' ability to create their own goals to meet.

What you fail to understand is that the goal of higher education is not to singularly create a workforce for you. We are not here to create a structure that focuses on your specific needs. We are not here to ensure students become your employees; we are not here to do your bidding; nor to develop individuals who will be subsumed by your company culture, as you hope.

You see, everyone who works with students at WSU, including: staff, faculty, graduate student instructors, undergraduate learning assistants, and tutors and everyone else -- we all have a different purpose than you. We are here to cultivate minds; to provide students with knowledge and to develop their critical thinking skills, to teach students how to question – to question their beliefs, to question their perspectives, to question policies, to question leadership, to question corporate cultures, including those promoting unethical behaviors and those that disenfranchise employees and communities.

We are here to serve as life-long mentors to students, to guide them through their struggles and celebrate their successes; to teach them how to make thoughtful decisions in a world of contradiction, to inspire a passion not so easily extinguished; to leave with them lessons that will guide them in the presence of obstacles, lessons that will remind them of their greatness, lessons that will empower them.

We are not naïve. We absolutely know that students seek a 4-year degree to make themselves more marketable, to develop high need skills, and earn higher wages and better benefits. It is with this in mind, that we are here to help students attain the ability to successfully negotiate an ever-changing world, to transform work cultures not get caught in the fold of them. We are here to ensure students have a plethora of choices and opportunities, to be their voice when needed and to help them strengthen their own. We are to help students stand for social changes that create a more just, democratic society.

The Board's comments and actions make it clear that it does not share these same goals. The inherent nature of higher education focuses on accountability: accreditation,

state approvals, faculty governance, shared governance – IHEs thrive under mutual accountability at all levels.

The Board's past and continued process of using a corporate lens to lead this institution is at the core of our problems. It's the corporate lack of accountability for multi-million dollar losses over the course of numerous years that has put us where we are now. It's the corporate mentality that allows those at fault for our situation to stay in power, while others lose their jobs. It's the corporate approach that focuses on top-down management and works under the assumption that those at the top 'know better' than all others. Your strategic focus on "premium return on investments" further evidences how much you want us to be a company and how little you choose to understand about higher education.

I won't pretend that we were in perfect shape prior to the financial crisis; however, we had a plan to focus on what needed improvement. We were working on improving programs, on generating and implementing innovative ideas that required both human and financial resources - projects that align with our mission. Unfortunately, much of that work had to be either put on hold or largely scaled back – not because we stopped caring and we were no longer invested in them. Rather, the mess you created forced us to redirect our time, effort, and resources to other priorities – your priorities, rather ours and our students.

I have five requests for members of the Board:

- Have any of you stood up and apologized to every individual who has been laid off due to your lack of responsibility? You owe them that, at the very least.
- For those who truly want to understand and abide by the principles of higher education, learn from those who live by them.
- Meet with students to truly understand what they want and need from our institution.
- Talk with the staff who help students with everything from registering for courses to getting financial aid
- Meet with faculty, chairs, and deans to understand academic and professional goals; to understand how your policies impact the work that gets done; AND to determine what departmental and college academic structures are in place – **NOT** the President.

While not an easy process, it is a worthy process. And, if you need it, my department offers an "education in a democracy" course, taught by amazing full-time faculty democracy – think of it as professional development to improve your effectiveness as a trustee.

If we are to survive and thrive, it is essential that trustees appreciate, respect, and invest in the unique culture of higher education and our goals, rather than attempting to corporatize it. Any trustee who is not willing to support us this endeavor should reconsider your place on the board – perhaps your contributions to the community would be better suited elsewhere

Thank you.