September 14, 2018

Remarks at the September 14, 2018 Faculty Meeting – Prof. Susan P. Curnan, Senate President

Welcome to the first Faculty Meeting in the 70th year of Brandeis University. This particular Faculty Meeting also happens to be a favorite faculty meeting of the year for many as we welcome and introduce new faculty.

My name is Susan Curnan, I am on the faculty at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, direct the Center for Youth and Communities and preside at Faculty meetings as part of my responsibility (and joy) as President of the Brandeis University Faculty Senate.

Before we jump into the agenda, let’s look back in history to what was happening at the University’s founding 70 years ago. It was 1948, the State of Israel was established, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was negotiated by Eleanor Roosevelt and signed – propitious moments.

As a trustee, Albert Einstein, instrumental in founding Brandeis University, cautioned that we must “balance our commitment to science with a commitment to the arts” for excellence in education. And, we did....

Leonard Bernstein’s words early in his history with Brandeis included, “A work of art does not answer questions, it provokes them.” Stroll to the Rose Art Museum to see the provocative work of activist artist Tuesday Smillie and many other works of art and you will see just how right Leonard Bernstein was!

In 1952, the first commencement ceremony at Brandeis, Leonard Bernstein was in the pit conducting while Eleanor Roosevelt was at the podium giving the address. Imagine how uplifting that must have been during the Korean War.

It was Eleanor Roosevelt who famously asked:

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination...”

We are standing on the shoulders of giants – but no standing still allowed. In its early years, Brandeis was called “A young University in a hurry.” Looking back, of course, is instructive for
looking and moving forward. At 70, we are still young, and still in a hurry to continuously improve as a world class University. Welcome to this great place.

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About the Senate

• The Faculty Senate, your Senate, is actively engaged in moving forward, and has been described as a “proactive, activist” Senate. The first Senate meeting of the year was just a few days ago and I would say that is an apt characterization. Take a look at the Senate for this year. [Chart of Senators by division projected on screen – posted on the Senate web page.] Will the Senate members present please stand? [Present Senate members stood to be recognized.]

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• In my summer message to the faculty, circulated and posted on the Senate web page in July, I provided an update on faculty governance. I quoted Winston Churchill, “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” He wrote those words in 1941, referring to the rebuilding of the House of Commons following the WWII bombing. The architectural sensibility is useful today for governance structures more broadly as we consider reshaping faculty governance structures at Brandeis in the coming months.

• We will find that the faculty role in “shared governance” will change with greater opportunities to understand the depth and breadth of University achievements and challenges and participation in decision-making.

• While rebuilding is nothing like what was required in London, we have found cracks in our foundation and repair and renovation work to do. Some windowless rooms, bridges and hallways to nowhere, and I could go on...

• The Senate and the President’s Task Force on Faculty Governance have been engaged in a year of critical conversations and deliberations about how we want to live our mission at this place, and how we can be better organized. The President will be sharing his vision for the future soon. The Senate will be gathering info from the Faculty and initiating faculty discussions on numerous legislation and procedural matters along with big ideas and challenges confronting the University today.

• The Senate Council meets with the President and Provost frequently and the Senate President is ex officio member of the Board of Trustees. This structure enables us to share information, influence and decision making where appropriate.

• This year, the Senate will meet with the Deans of each school, our DEI leadership and others. The Senate will be in dialogue with BUSAC, the Staff equivalent of the Faculty Senate
– and with students and alumni government groups to coordinate and share information, along with the Task Forces on Governance, Dignity at Work, and more to come.

• To coordinate efforts will take all of us – the Brandeis community working together.

Fannie Lou Hamer gets the last word from history. A voting and women’s rights activist, community organizer and leader in the Civil Rights Movement in the 50s and 60s:

“Whether you have a PhD, a MD, DD or no D at all – we’re in this bag together. And, whether you’re from Morehouse or Nohouse, we’re... in this bag together.”

Not Faculty alone, not Staff alone, not Administrative Leadership or Trustees alone – together we are stronger.

Please reach out to your senators with any matters affecting education, research or overall quality of life. Engage with us at faculty meetings and in committees.

Let us all rise to the challenge presented by the President, the Provost, and the Senate.

Remarks at conclusion of meeting:

And from Maya Angelou:

“In moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just like hopes springing high,

Still. I rise.”

And now, the agenda review and approval of the minutes.