It is nearly time to vote on the proposal to reorganize shared governance at TU by creating an Academic (Faculty) Senate in the place of the current University Senate.

In part, this reorganization is compelled by the fact that we are not currently in compliance with USM standards of shared governance, having neither a faculty senate nor a true university senate (in terms of broad representation of students, staff, and faculty in one body). In addition, the formation of an Academic Senate provides the means for the faculty to participate more fully in shared governance, to speak together as faculty from the position of academic affairs and concerns. In other words, the proposed reorganization will allow for a more coherent and stronger faculty voice in the process of shared governance, allowing us to have a real impact upon decision-making at the university.

In order for the vote to be valid, two-thirds of the faculty electorate (all full-time faculty, including tenured, tenure-track, lecturers, and clinical faculty) must vote. So whether or not you are in support of the change (and I hope you will be!) we need for as many faculty as possible to vote on this initiative, in order to bring us into compliance with USM rules.

Voting on the reorganization and new Academic Senate Constitution will begin on March 1 and end on March 8, 2019. Please watch for the email providing the link to vote, and please encourage and remind your full-time faculty colleagues to vote as well.

Following is some background on the process that brought us to this point:

In response to concerns about the balance of shared governance here at TU, the University Senate moved in Spring 2018 to form a taskforce to examine the shape of shared governance at Towson and to make recommendations for improving its balance. This resolution emerged from a general concern about the effectiveness and balance of shared governance at Towson, dissatisfaction coming from faculty, students, and staff. On the part of the students and staff, many felt that the University Senate (which is what we currently have at Towson) had an unequal proportion of faculty representatives to staff or student representatives—a proportion not really reflective of a true “university” senate. Many faculty, for their part, were accustomed to view the University Senate as, for practical purposes, a faculty senate—which technically it isn’t. As the administration supported and put into practice with increasing frequency a view of the senate as a university-wide and university-representative governing body, this left the faculty without a dedicated voice in shared governance comparable to TUSC (Towson University Staff Council) or the SGA or SGA Senate. (The TU-Faculty Association/AAUP is an advocacy body for faculty, and as such must do its good work from the margins of TU’s regular system of shared governance.) So from faculty, student, and staff perspectives, though perhaps for different reasons, there was agreement that some changes needed to happen to the structure of shared governance at TU.

That taskforce, which was comprised of faculty, students, and staff, examined the problem and shared its report and recommendations with the University Senate at its March 6, 2017 meeting. The Senate voted overwhelmingly in favor of accepting those recommendations, which suggested exploring the creation of a faculty senate and creating a smaller University Steering Committee that would include a more balanced number of faculty, staff, and students—in lieu of the current University Senate structure.
The University Senate then formed a small subcommittee that met several times over the summer of 2017 to create a draft of a constitution for a faculty senate; this was followed by a larger subcommittee, with representatives from each of the colleges and the library, that met several times to review, edit, and produce multiple revisions of that draft. This careful process culminated in a draft constitution for a faculty senate (called the Academic Senate to reflect the central role of the academic enterprise in the university) that was distributed, in paper and electronic form, to the University Senate at its December 18, 2017, meeting and to the rest of the TU full-time faculty just after that meeting. Integrating feedback from across the campus community, and more review and editing, we ultimately came up with the final draft that is attached to this email. At its November 5, 2018 meeting this year, the University Senate voted to approve the final draft of the Academic Senate Constitution (by a vote of 18-1-0) and, in doing so, to support the reorganization of shared governance by creating the Academic Senate in the place of the University Senate.

The ultimate step in this process is a vote by the faculty electorate. Please do take part in this conversation, which can have a significant impact upon TU, and vote at the beginning of March.