

Stony Brook University Senate Bulletin

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While the astronomical summer will linger until September 22, the academic summer has ended. Classes are back in session. And so is the Senate.

Despite my intentions to have this bulletin out a week prior to the general Senate meetings, I'm late again. But this time I claim an excuse. On August 14 the brightest nova¹ since 2007 appeared in the constellation *Delphinus*. I have been observing it ever since, trying to ferret out the kinematics of the explosion, and eagerly awaiting our first glimpse of the million degree heart of the system as the detritus of the explosion expands and becomes transparent. I am part of an international team planning multiwavelength studies before the nova fades back into oblivion among the billions of faint stars of the Milky Way. The pursuit of knowledge is often inconvenient: nature does not wait for us to be ready.

But the work of the Senate does not wait either, and the first Senate meeting of the year is upon us.

This meeting will be mainly informational.

- Barbara Chernow, Sr. Vice President for Administration, will bring us up to date on the state of construction on campus, and on the state of mainenance of campus infrastructure.
- Elaine Crosson, Vice President for External Relations, will tell about on-going efforts to find more funding, for routine and deferred maintenance and other desperate needs.
- Former Senator Chuck Taber has been appointed Dean of the Graduate School, following a nationwide search. He will present his vision for the future of the Graduate School.
- Sr. Vice President for Health Sciences Ken Kaushansky will present the proposal to create a Department of Biomedical Informatics.

Over the summer the Campus Pet Policy, which was discussed in our May meeting, went into effect. While the Senate did not act on the policy, and the administration argued that this was not within our jurisdiction, the administration did consult with and listen to us. This policy was not simply foisted upon us. Discussions, both in the University Environment Committee and in the full Senate, contributed to a policy that is much improved over the original draft. This episode is an example of how the administration can and must cooperate with faculty/staff/students, through the auspices of the Senate.

As you will hear in the reports from the Provost and the President, the business of the University continued over the summer. Among the highlights:

- A new round of cluster proposals were evaluated.
- Finalists for the Dean of Libraries were interviewed.
- A new Associate Provost for Online Education has been appointed.

¹shorthand for *nova stellarum*, or new star. Novae are not really new stars, but rather thermonuclear runaways on the surfaces of white dwarf stars. The explosion increases the brightness of the star by about a factor of 10,000, raising a previously faint and obscure system to prominence for a short time.

- The Football program has stepped up to the Colonial Athletic Association.
- The Senate's Administrative Review Committee has started to analyze the results of its biennial survey of administrators - stay tuned for the results later in the Fall.
- The State of New York continues to seek ways to put the SUNY system to use for the economic good.
- The SUNY system continues to look for ways to expand "systemness" - now through Seamless Transfer.
- The smoke-free campus seems still to be a pipe dream.
- And a new cohort of freshmen and transfer students now roam the campus.

Through all this, the Senate Exec remains vigilant.

Change that is truly important in the grand scheme of things comes slowly. Those who have been at Stony Brook for decades have become inured to a system wherein support for research was an alien concept, and that sometimes seems to be dedicated to making academic life as difficult as possible. I am encouraged that things may be changing. Over the last two years the Vice President for Research has started embedding budget specialists/business managers in departments, where they can get to know and work with PIs. Over the summer I chatted with David Ecker, director of the Research Technologies division of DoIT. He asked what DoIT could do to help facilitate faculty research. I had not heard such a question asked of the faculty by the University Administration in 25 years!. And the finalists for the Dean of Library position all spoke of how the role of the librarian has changed, and how they should be helping us both academically and with our research. Are attitudes changing? I am cautiously optimistic. But permanent and fundamental change is slow.

With politics as usual at state and national levels, and with threats of war in the wind, it is comforting to be able to take notice of something so extraordinary, so impermanent, as an exploding star. It promises to be another lively year. Stay well.

Fred

Contacts

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