

Berkman Candidate Statement May 29, 2019

I'm Elliot Berkman, and I'm an Associate Professor of Psychology and sitting senator. I'm running for Senate Vice President and then President because I want to amplify the senate's voice in shared governance. I want the senate to have more power not only over academic matters as they are commonly understood but also over academic matters broadly construed, such as the University budget, oversight of athletic advising, and academic administrative hiring.

My vision for the senate is that it becomes the place where hard decisions are made through a process of faculty, OAs, classified staff, and student deliberation. I want the senate to be the first place the administration goes (and not the last) when it wants to cut the budget, change the terms of how our GEs work, or hire a new Provost. I want the senate, not the administration, to be the body responsible for creating and managing the committees that do this hard, important work.

How do we get there if not by staying the course we're on? If my candidacy had a slogan, it would be: There Is Another Way. What is this other way? I can point to examples where faculty and administration worked together to produce good outcomes. The CAS Reorganization Task Force, in which I and several other senators took part, is a great model of what can happen when faculty, students, classified staff, OAs, and academic administrators sit down and give something careful, judicious, and deliberate reflection. This was a case where the administration wanted to make a change and they decided to give faculty some authority in what do to. The key - and as a psychologist I'll say this really is the key - is that the *process we followed to arrive at our decision was rational and transparent*. The quality of this process and our mutual respect for slow deliberation (we do work at a liberal arts institution, after all) renders the recommendations unimpeachable.

The CAS Task Force created a fine outcome, to be sure, but most importantly it did so through a transparent, reasoned, and fair process. Why could that not have been a Senate committee? It could only if we prove that we can manage a process like that one. Getting there will take three things: we need the trust of the people who can delegate this authority to us; we need strong managerial and communication skills; and we need a sustained commitment to this goal.

Am I the right person to get the senate to this place, to lead the senate through this shift in the power structure? You might know that I'm a two-term senator, but you might not know that I've been extensively and consistently involved in University service. I've served on the IRB since 2014. I've been elected to the Psychology Executive Committee twice. I worked in the College of Arts and Sciences as a Deans Fellow under Andrew Marcus, and I chaired the VPRI's Research Advisory Board for the past two years, where I shaped the ways the VPRI supports research centers and institutes and transformed the structure of research development services. I've done work in the Provost's office and served on the Executive Vice Provost Search Committee, and I was on the President and Provost's CAS Reorganization Task Force. I know a lot about the way decisions are made here and, critically, I have earned the trust of people at all levels of leadership. I will be able to sit at that table and make requests that will be considered in good faith and taken seriously.

In my "spare" time I run a research lab studying human motivation and behavior change in the Center for Translational Science. My lab conducts studies on health behavior change (cigarette smoking cessation, physical activity) with federal research grant and private foundation support. My other line of work relates to health messaging and persuasive communication – how to best

craft and tailor messages so they have maximal effect. In the course of my research, I supervise 4-6 grad students and 2-3 research staff. I collaborate with dozens of people across campus and around the world, and I spend most of my time reviewing, writing, and revising documents and managing or otherwise motivating people - not all that different from the role of the Senate President.

I'm also under no illusions that this will be easy or happen quickly. Three to five years, perhaps. It'll be a slog with many inevitable setbacks, but we can get there with the right leadership. I'm no stranger to laborious, thankless tasks. (I mentioned I've been on the IRB for 5 years, right?) I also serve as Associate Editor on two top Psychology journals (roles that I will eagerly relinquish should I get elected!), and I am a standing member of an NIH study section, which reviews grant proposals three times each year. I have co-organized the annual meetings of several large international psychology societies. All of this is just to say that I have a track record of foolishly agreeing to do hard, complex, tedious things for the benefit of a larger group of people.

I want to take a moment to draw a contrast between my approach to leadership and that advocated by others on campus. Though I have no doubt we senators all share the same broad goal of increasing the senate's power, there are many possible paths to take toward that goal. I posit that the way I would go about it is quite different than the one we have been on and likely to be far more effective.

Others on campus take an approach that I'll call "reactionary" because it primarily involves reacting to issues after they've become problematic. This approach can be effective to a point. On academic matters, the senate has won a number of successes the last few terms using this strategy: the course evaluation process, for example, and the Academic Continuity Plan are substantial, valuable academic accomplishments.

The limitations of the "reactionary" approach emerge outside of these areas, where there is debate about their status as academic matters and when our reactions are perceived as derisive. Here, I'm talking about things like the budget, administrative hires, and athletics. Big, thorny, important issues that we all care deeply about. In these areas, the "reactionary" approach can backfire, and it does. It has become counter-productive and hurts the interests of the senate. For example, we in the senate have expressed concern about changes to fundraising on campus – what our fundraising priorities are, how development officers are distributed across units, and what information is shared with the campus on conversations and agreements with donors. Our complaints on this have not been met with any change in action by the administration, in large part because we haven't been in the room when these kinds of decisions are being made. We haven't been invited in.

Our current approach backfires because of a fact that we rarely speak about here, and directing our attention away from it doesn't make it any less true. The constitution and the Board of Trustees simply do not give the senate power over these areas. The administration's position trumps ours when we disagree. So, the important fact that we must acknowledge - and with which we have yet to fully reckon - is that senate influence over these areas must be ceded to us by the administration. If we want a say in the budget, for example, we first need to be invited to speak.

Now, I do not like this status quo, and I'm sure you don't either. But we need to accept its reality. In fact, we have begun to do so in small ways. In adopting the "reactionary" stance we are implicitly granting that we are the underdogs here; that we do not influence policy before it is made because we are (relatively) powerless, and that our power derives from our moral

authority in judging policies made by others. But I'm not ready to give up and say that our power *only* comes from the moral authority; we haven't yet made a real, concerted, good-faith attempt to gain *structural* power to add to our moral force. For me, the pressing question is: what is the best way to change the current power structure? How does the senate get the administration to give us more power?

And this is where we reach the hard limit of the “reactionary” approach. Even when you're right, perhaps especially when you're right, attacking the people on the other side of the table does not help. They're people, so it makes them upset, and it makes them less generous and less likely to want to deal with us earnestly – or deal with you at all - in the future. This is all the more true when the attacks are based on incomplete or outright false information. And posting personal attacks in a public forum not only yields our moral authority but also puts us at substantial tactical disadvantage in negotiations where we need every advantage we can get. Leadership experience is a liability among people who adopt this approach.

It amounts to a tremendous loss of power for the Senate when a senate president is no longer invited into high-level leadership conversations. These meetings are perhaps the places on campus where it is most likely that academic policy ideas are transformed into actions. In my arguments with administrators – and there have been a few - I was surprised to learn that they often do welcome counter opinions. In fact, administrators don't resent hard questions, even when presented somewhat aggressively, as long as those questions serve to improve policy and decision making and are not simply vehicles to attack the people on the other side of the table. In the instances when administrators invite shared governance that recognizes the important role the senate at the university, as they did in appointing several senators to the search committee for the interim Provost including our Senate Vice President, we need to applaud and reward that behavior and not undermine it and foster unfounded paranoia. Effective collaborations are grounded in mutual assumptions of good faith and even provisional trust, not default antagonism.

We need to find another way. I hope I've convinced you that another way is possible and that I have the institutional knowledge, personal goodwill, sustained focus, and management experience to get us there. But, in case I haven't, I want to close by simply asking you one more time to envision what kind of authority we want to have and whether the actions the senate takes brings that vision into sharper focus or obscures them even more. I sincerely hope the senate and its leaders will keep that in mind next year, whoever they might be.