Dear Colleagues,

I hope you’ve all had a chance to refresh over the summer, whether that entailed climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, taking in some Cardinals baseball games, or catching up on your recreational reading. We’re only about a month into the new academic year, and it’s shaping up to be quite a busy one. I write now to bring you up to date on the Senate’s activity over the summer and preview some of what lies ahead for 2008-2009.

Updated and Revised Faculty Senate Web Site  < http://www.slu.edu/organizations/fs/ >
The Senate Web site’s design now resembles that of most other SLU units. The regular features, including the Senate’s meeting calendar, rosters of senators and Senate committee members, and Senate meeting minutes, all have been updated. You’ll also find this academic year’s committee charges as well as the 2007-2008 committee reports. The Governance Table, compiled by the Senate’s Governance Committee to provide a snapshot of the University’s college/school/library governance structures, has been updated to reflect the separation of the School of Nursing from the Doisy College of Health Sciences. The Resources page now includes a link to SLU’s handy Emergency Response Guide, issued by the SLU Department of Public Safety. We’ll be sharing more information about the University’s efforts regarding public safety and emergency preparedness as the year progresses. The link to the Provost’s Policies Web page remains. And the Travel Issues Form continues to be available for your use; the EC checks for new submissions periodically.

A new page features the John A. Slosar Shared Governance Award. I’m pleased to report that at last week’s Faculty Senate Kickoff Dinner, the latest recipients of this award were announced: Gerrie Meyer (School of Nursing) and John Griesbach (School of Law). Both have a history of involvement in the governance of their respective schools and they also have been significant contributors to the progress of shared governance at the University level. Gerrie has served on the Senate’s Governance Committee for a number of years and is in her third year as chair; the Senate’s new Shared Governance Initiative is a direct result of work done under her leadership. John, of course, was my predecessor as Senate president. He’s also served as chair of the Senate’s Professional Relations Committee and an ad hoc University Development Committee, and was instrumental in the 2006 Faculty Manual revision. We know there are many other faculty who deserve recognition for their contributions to shared governance at SLU and encourage you to consider nominating a colleague next spring for the 2009 Slosar Award.

Several other new pages have been added. One was created to bring together information about the Shared Governance Initiative. It’s a work in progress and I’ll say more about its contents later in this message. There’s now a page that lists and links to the text of Senate Presidents’ communications to the faculty, a practice begun by Rick Breslin (term 2003-2005). These messages themselves provide great summaries of the Senate’s activities and accomplishments and nicely complement the Senate’s meeting minutes. And, in response to inquiries about Senate history, we’ve posted a time line listing the names, affiliations, and terms of the Senate’s presidents.

Finally, the Web page for the Faculty Manual has been modified. As I reported in my May message to you, the amendments proposed in 2007-2008 went into effect on May 3, 2008. The text of the 2006 edition of the Manual has been updated to incorporate these amendments; click on the “Currently in Effect” link to see the current Manual text. The original 2006 edition remains online for reference purposes; view it by clicking on the link “Original Version (2006).” Lastly, to aid in tracking amendments to this important document, there’s a section titled “Amendments” in which a given year’s amendments will be listed following their approval and adoption.
Faculty Salary Letters

As many of you have observed, the Faculty Manual states that “…continued employment is by letter of appointment or memorandum of agreement, normally tendered by May 1…” Following receipt of my own letter on July 12th, I wrote to President Biondi and Provost Weixlmann on behalf of the faculty, citing the Manual and expressing our collective sentiment about the lateness of the letters this year, and noting the trend of “date creep” in recent years. I asked that faculty letters be issued next year in accord with the Manual and that there be timely communication about the delay if the Manual provision cannot be met for some reason. I’ve received assurances that efforts will be made to issue the letters in a much more timely fashion and that, should a delay of some magnitude occur next year, the administration will communicate that fact to the faculty. Some form of electronic distribution of salary letters is under discussion for next year; that alone may alleviate this problem considerably.

Faculty Senate and Other University Committees

As mentioned earlier, the Senate’s Committees Web page links to rosters for the Senate’s standing committees and their respective 2007-2008 activity reports. We will gradually add senators’ photos to the roster to, literally, make your representatives more visible. A link to the committees’ 2008-2009 charges is at the bottom of the page. Perusal of these charges will give you an idea of the breadth and depth of the Senate’s work. I hope the charges convey, at least to some small degree, the myriad of partnerships the Senate has developed and nurtured with other University entities. These relationships enrich our understanding of the University and are crucial to the accomplishment of our work. In my role as Senate president, I frequently contact other campus leaders to explore potential collaborations. Likewise, I am contacted by others who recognize that faculty expertise and insight can benefit the initiatives in which they are engaged.

Changes in Faculty Senate Meeting Structure and Expectations of Senators

The EC is implementing changes to the structure of Senate meetings to reduce “reporting out” at the meetings and increase time for discussion among the senators. The Report of the President and EC that has, for many years, been made at the meetings now will be emailed to senators in advance and the meetings will feature a Q&A segment during which the Report’s topics can be addressed. The Report will be incorporated into the meeting minutes by reference and attached to the minutes published on the Web.

The EC also expects senators to become more active liaisons between their constituents and the Senate, thus improving two-way communication between the Senate and college/school/library faculty assemblies (or comparable structures). Senate meetings will include time for senators to briefly share information about current “happenings” and hot issues in their respective units. This will help give all senators a broader perspective about the University as well as a better sense of common concerns. It also will guide the EC in its dialogues with University administrators, especially the Provost. Further, senators are expected to share information about Senate meetings and activities with their unit colleagues through regular reports at their respective assembly meetings. We’ve determined that it’s not universal practice among the assemblies to include senators’ reports on their meeting agenda – we’d like to see this change!

Communication is but one element of successful shared governance. At the very least, we hope that even the relatively minor changes described above will move us forward. But we’re not stopping there!

Faculty Senate Shared Governance Initiative

My May 14, 2008, message provided a summary of the results of the Senate Governance Committee’s Report on the Shared Governance Survey, presented at the March Senate meeting, and stated that a Core Planning Team had been formed “to develop and present to the full EC a preliminary action plan to address the Governance Committee’s recommendations and specific topics that emerged from the survey.” The team members are Joanne Langan (Senate President-Elect; langanjc@slu.edu), Gerrie Meyer (meyerga@slu.edu), Jane Turner (Senate Secretary; turnerjw@slu.edu), and me.
(josephme@slu.edu). We met throughout the summer to address this charge. The full EC had opportunities for input during this period and devoted a morning retreat to the subject just prior to the Fall semester’s start. We’ve retained the three-point focus of communication, education, and engagement that I related to you in my May message. The result of the summer’s work is a fairly detailed draft Action Plan, accessible via the new Shared Governance page on the Senate’s Web site. The elements of the plan, for each of the three foci, are the topic; the relevant Faculty Manual provision(s); the responsible party for the action; the goal(s); time line; descriptive notes; and references to the current SLU strategic plan’s Strategic Directions and University Goals. Linking to the University’s strategic plan provides the broader context for the Senate’s initiative.

The Core Planning Team and EC envision refining this plan through conversations with the Senate’s various stakeholders over the course of this semester. We invite you, individually as well as in conjunction with your own faculty assembly, to provide feedback to us about it. Please contact any one or more of us, or do it through the blog that soon will be accessible via the Shared Governance page. Or...share your thoughts with your Senate representatives who, in turn, will convey them to us via the Senate.

**Faculty Input Requested**

**Student Recruitment and Retention** – At the Senate Kickoff last week, Fr. Biondi specifically asked for ideas as to how the University might better attract students, particularly new freshmen. Vice Provost for Enrollment Management Boyd Bradshaw and his team, including new Dean of Undergraduate Admissions Jean Gilman, are working hard to improve the coordination of existing efforts in place around SLU and recently unveiled the new Be a Billiken initiative. It’s recognized that many faculty already do a lot to help actively with student recruitment. Those of you who are so involved may have suggestions about still other mechanisms we might employ. Or, from another perspective...do any of you, as parents of students selecting/attending/recently graduated from college, have thoughts to convey based upon your personal experiences in that context? Of course, student retention is critical as well. SLU has greatly expanded its retention activities in recent years and further strategic planning in this arena is ahead. Let’s look at Fr. Biondi’s invitation as an opportunity to contribute ideas, whether they are about new approaches or tweaks of existing ones. Please share your thoughts with your senators or any EC member.

**Convocation** – On August 22nd, the new student convocation was held at the Chaifetz Arena for the very first time. There was a good crowd overall, with many parents of new freshmen in attendance. Fr. Biondi and the executive staff are considering ways to make this function more of a University-wide event and one that doesn’t focus entirely on new students but involves the entire SLU community in celebrating the start of the new academic year. Once again, it would be helpful to have your suggestions.

**And Finally...**

Some of you may have observed that this communication is a bit shorter than my past missives. Indeed, it is...but that’s because I will write more frequently (every 4-6 weeks) so that these messages are more timely. I’ll end this one by welcoming to SLU those of you who are new to our faculty and asking you to get involved, at some level, in the governance of this – our – distinguished institution, 190 years old this year. Life isn’t perfect but there have been and continue to be many opportunities and successes. Good things happen here – be a part of it!

With best wishes for a productive and successful semester --

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam E. Joseph
Faculty Senate President