



Charles Van Loan

Biography

I have been a faculty member in the Department of Computer Science for 41 years and have served as Chair (7 years), Director of Graduate Studies (5 years), Director of Undergraduate Studies (8 years), and Director of Masters Studies (3 years). I will become an emeritus faculty member on July 1, 2016. I have served on two Dean Search Committees, President Lehman's Council on Mental Health and Welfare, the Committee on Athletics and Physical Education, the Research Advisory Committee, and the University Faculty Committee (UFC). I have been a Senator (off and on) for many years.

I studied at the University of Michigan and focused on computational mathematics from start to finish: BS (1969), MS (1970), PhD (1973). My research area is numerical linear algebra, a field that figures out how to use the computer to solve complicated versions of the matrix problems introduced in courses like Math 2940 and StatSci 4030. Matrix computations are central to the simulation side of both science and engineering. I co-authored the most widely cited research-level textbook in the field and am a Fellow of the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics.

Statement

The next Dean of Faculty (DoF) must be a force in three directions.

First, the DoF must promote shared governance by changing mindsets. "Thinking out loud" in front of the faculty needs to be routine, productive, and intellectually driven. To create a climate for this to happen, the Trustees, the Administration, and the Senate must each dial back their strict constructionist views of who-can-do-what under the University Bylaws. The Faculty needs to "flip" the Senate so that the ratio of dialog to Powerpoint is five-to-one and not the other way around. The Faculty Trustees must serve as two-way conduits of information. The UFC needs to be more transparent and more proactive in its dealings with various committees. As DoF I will make it a priority to communicate the diversity of faculty thought by using (as appropriate) the Sun, the Chronicle, and various Web-based technologies.

The next DoF must advance the cause of liberal education and basic research on behalf of the faculty. New forms of practical education and commercially driven research have to be framed in the context of Cornell's traditions. My participation in the roll out of the CS Major in 1978, the CIS initiative in 1999, and now Cornell Tech has taught me a lot about the associated challenges. I have tried to find answers by writing about such topics as what liberal education means in the digital age and how basic research connects to entrepreneurship. I am convinced that we can find our way if we are vigilant and collegial as a faculty.

Finally, the next DoF must contribute to the faculty renewal discussion by elevating the overall status of the emeritus rank. By being an emeritus faculty member myself, I will be in a unique position to advocate for this 600-strong group in front of Trustees and administrators. Together, we must discover new ways to increase the pool of tenure-track assistant professorships, our most treasured resource.