

CONCEPT DOCUMENT – CANDIDATE FOR THE TEACHERS’ CHAMBER OF AS FAMU

Petr Marek

I am a teacher at the Department of Directing. I am also a member of the Academic Senate, and have been its Chair since last year. During my tenure at school, I experienced several different guises of the school and its developments with several different Deans at the helm. I am convinced that the standard of instruction and the quality (and quantity) of our films is growing year by year, slowly but certainly. And for that I give credit to ALL the Deans who I have met to date, and obviously of many teachers and students as well. I have seen a lot of diligent and careful work on transforming the individual programmes’ curricula, and most of this work has been going in the right direction in my opinion.

If there is anything that truly annoys me, it is the mysterious negative external image of our school as a place where “the craft is gone” and where “they no longer actually teach film”. I do not know of any craft-oriented subjects being discontinued – our Department of Directing alone has added seven purely practical, “technical” exercises in a matter of few years. So, I assume that you will believe, as I do, that this “art versus craft” myth is more of a tabloid topic. Still, its flames are fuelled by the disputes that we in school are engaged in. I think that the disputes look more serious than they actually are. In fact, I do not know any teacher or student who would claim that either craft or art has no place in this school. One does not exist without the other. Mainstream pop and underground complement each other.

I love *Alien* just as much as I do *Ocean’s Eleven* and the most mysterious Godard or a multimedia installation. All these forms share intersecting points that are cinematographic quality. This is the viewpoint that I take in my lectures while trying to offer an open dialogue in matters of school policy. That is where differences and trench wars escalate. I believe I have demonstrated many times that I can side with someone of a different opinion if their statement is being distorted unfairly or if they simply convince me about their truth. Guests to Senate meetings saw me eventually disagree with myself many times. For example, with regard to the tendering procedure for a CAS teacher, I voted against my own motion that “the Senate respects the Dean’s decision”. I try to be impartial. Maybe this is not as easy to grasp as when you have one “concrete” opinion and stick to it all the time. I think this is crucial, though. So, let us speak together!

What do I do in the Senate? What lies ahead, and what do I have in the works? Obviously, we address a lot of relatively “boring” affairs related to school regulations, their observance and adjusting them for a more functional form reflecting the real world in the 21st century. For example, when approving the requirements for admission exams, I try to make sure that they comply with regulations *and* that they reflect certain crucial ethical standards such as equal opportunities. Many times, I encountered the opinion that this is just “philosophical blabbering”. I don’t think it is. I also focus on the issues of justice as a member of the Disciplinary Committee.

By the same token, I believe that we should address inequality, chicanery and sexism as something that has no place in school. This is why I am happy that the ombudsperson position has finally been made reality. At the same time, I am not exactly a supporter of the Rectorate’s proposal for setting up an ‘anti-discrimination

platform' in the proposed form: I think that if a student needs to resolve a sensitive issue, discussing it with a panel where their teachers sit cannot be pleasant by definition. This is why I prefer the idea of an independent ombudsperson.

I really appreciate the “Ne(!)musíš to vydržet” initiative and I offered it assistance with communication as the Chair of the Senate immediately after its formation at DAMU. Based on the DAMU model, I promote the idea of amending the Statutes of FAMU at Senate meetings with a view to being able to restrict the maximum number of terms of office of the Heads of Departments. I believe that this will contribute towards improving the democratic spirit of the school. Rather than battlefields for positions, the tenders for the Heads of Departments will become a standard necessity – having to replace the captain every now and then. I think this will allow the school to have a breath of fresh air. This brings up the necessary (and somewhat “legislatively boring”) work on amending the Rules for Tendering Procedures, which are currently so unclear that they give rise of trench wars between legal opinions. Also, I have been working on (and have already submitted) a proposal for a change in the Senate’s Rules of Procedure to provide clearer rules for the culture of our meetings. You can find all of this among the attachments to our meetings and in the minutes.

I am convinced that we should address broader social responsibility issues such as the principles of sustainable filmmaking, which is why I am grateful for the existence of the FAMU For Climate environmental panel.

I believe the Senate and the school should voice opinions on other societal topics as well (such as the symbolic support of Tibet during the visit of Chinese diplomats to the Czech Republic or the current developments in Ukraine). Of course, this points out a completely obvious idea: FAMU’s international students are equal to other FAMU students! This is also why we have been trying to improve at least the basic communication standards during the past terms of office of the Senate – for example, making sure that crucial documents are either automatically translated into English, or that the right to ask for an English translation is officially declared. It is interesting to note that this – the bare minimum – was far from standard once!

The crisis experience of the past two years has allowed us to discover certain new avenues that could help the school function. I mean the possibility of organising certain meetings and discussions in an online environment. I think this has proven beneficial for the meetings of the Senate because it contributes to better attendance in meetings on the part of not only senators but also guests from the entire academic community, which fits the spirit of the public nature of the Senate meetings. Earlier, the members of the academic community had to find the time on the day of the meeting and, more importantly, they had to be present at the place of the meeting. Today, all they have to do is find the time. They might as well be in the Antarctica. Isn’t this beautifully democratic?

As far as teaching is concerned, I am careful about using online methods. Human contact is indispensable. I am sure we all have been experiencing this during our lectures. Then again, this year, technology has allowed me to lecture for 80 students at a time and examine just as many of them – a record-breaking figure. That could not happen otherwise. It could also help our school building where space is scarce. And teachers will probably no longer be able to excuse themselves just because they

happen to be in a different town. Ultimately, it is necessary to carefully weigh the pros and cons in terms of the quality and quantity of meetings.

In conclusion, I would like to say that one of the tasks for the new Senate will be to elect the new Dean. Hence, I consider it fitting to address this issue. As I wrote in introduction, I believe that both the former and the current Deans have pushed the school in the right direction in terms of the development of programmes.

Controversies occurred in terms of communication and human resources policy. I am one of those senators who voted for the new Dean. And I am really happy for many steps she has taken. I am also aware that – just as her predecessors did to varying extent – she has made some mistakes and missteps that I am not happy about or disagree with. The most important thing about this is, however, that in most of those missteps, mistakes or simply errors, she was able to quickly remedy matters and either admit a mistake or at least take the affair all the way to a de facto consensual solution. Many times, this involved communication issues and, sadly, exacerbated certain lingering ailments of the school. However, from my viewpoint, the principal direction the Dean has set is correct, and I highly appreciate her efforts geared towards socially responsible conduct of the school, support of equal opportunities and fostering the global aspect of the school (e.g., with the mentoring programme). So, I can imagine giving my vote to Andrea Slováková again in the next election of the Dean. I would not do this at all costs, though: should I find that her involvement in the school is going against the “sense of what is good for the institution”, as a senator I am prepared to oppose such actions.

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