

**Subject:** Follow-Up to Senate Panel

**Date:** Monday, November 16, 2015 at 9:15:14 AM Mountain Standard Time

**From:** Dean Saitta

**To:** Arthur Jones

Hi Art<

May I ask you to send this message out to all Faculty Senators? Thanks!

Kudos to Art Jones and the Senate Executive Committee for putting last Friday's panel together. I hope that we can have more of them!

Assuming that we want to keep the conversation going, I'd like to follow up on a few points related to our discussion of the "Public Good." I really appreciated Nancy Wadsworth's provocative questioning of the public/private distinction at the heart of DU's vision statement. The 2025 draft plan takes this vision statement for granted, so it's good to have a fresh look at it. Here are some additional thoughts:

First, I think what separates DU's slogan or tagline from those produced by other university branding exercises is that it has actually led to substantive improvement in the 15 years that we've trumpeted it. It produced a brand new grant line explicitly aimed at supporting community-engaged research. It provided a conceptual foundation upon which our very active CCESL operation rests. Perhaps most importantly, it forced us to rethink and apply tenure and promotion criteria in ways that benefit faculty committed to taking a broader view of what counts as "scholarship" here at DU. I don't think that conventional university branding exercises typically achieve such positive outcomes.

Second, I mentioned that the public good tagline was an extension of former Chancellor Dan Ritchie's "Great Private University in Denver" ambition. At least as important, however, was the interest that some of us had in connecting Dan's particular vision to the idea that higher education is very much a common good, as well as to the cause of social justice. There was certainly disagreement within our planning group about how explicit the social justice orientation should be, and if it should be there at all. We didn't want to diminish the importance of "basic research" and we also wanted to let academic units make up their own minds about what "serving the public good" means. The 2025 draft plan suggests a stronger social justice orientation than we've seen in the past. In his panel presentation Tom Romero showed how environmental and social justice are intimately linked and how both can be accommodated by a broader notion of "sustainability." I think it would better satisfy a great many people if the draft plan was revised with this broader notion in mind.

Finally, the neoliberal environment in which higher education finds itself is very much<as Nancy pointed out<eroding its value as a common good as well as threatening the future of the entire enterprise. Which might be one excellent reason for DU to continue to promote a public good vision even if it reproduces a problematic distinction. Colorado's public colleges and universities have been capitulating to neoliberalism left and right, and thus abdicating their historical responsibility to serve the common good. This is especially evident in their treatment of faculty<the only set of campus "stakeholders" who, in my view, add substantive value to the educational enterprise. As I mentioned in Senate, sharing the stage with Rebecca at her inauguration were leaders of three Colorado public institutions that are notorious for violating faculty rights and freedoms and that, by so doing, undermine the faculty's ability to serve the common good. CU-Boulder is a serial violator of academic

freedom and due process rights for professors, having produced casualties in Ethnic Studies, Sociology, and Philosophy. Colorado Mesa University is legendary for its nearly complete absence of shared governance and iron-fisted, top-down rule. The Colorado Community College System is sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars in reserves while its adjunct faculty survive on food stamps and suffer administrative retaliation for calling public attention to this inconvenient fact. Although we have significant inclusion, equity, and shared governance issues at DU we are, by comparison, a beacon of light in the current environment. We might want to be proud of that while we work to make ourselves even better.

Cheers,

Dean

Dean J. Saitta  
Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology  
University of Denver  
Sturm Hall 146-S  
2000 East Asbury Street  
Denver, CO 80208  
Phone: 303-871-2680  
Blogs: [Intercultural Urbanism](#), [Planetizen](#)