

The
UMKC
Faculty
Senate

Report

The Voice of the U.M.K.C. Faculty

August 13, 2002

THE SBS AFFAIR: A REPORT TO THE FACULTY

Note: The issues had certainly been contentious, and nearly 50 people visited the Faculty Senate when we met during the summer to discuss the recent events surrounding the School for Biological Sciences (SBS). In your Secretary's experience, that is unheard-of; on occasion we have had ten visitors. No Senate action was on the Agenda - the meeting was to gather information from the various participants in the process and communicate the differing perspectives to the faculty. Feelings were intense, and there were some sharp disputes and exchanges, but people were generally civil and friendly. Riot police were not needed. :-)

By August 13th Frank Horton had been appointed as an interim dean at SBS. The appointment came after a period of turmoil. There were bitter disputes over what SBS was doing, what they were supposed to do, and how well they were doing it. SBS claimed that the charges against them were vague and false, and often based on incorrect information, while the administration claimed complaints were ubiquitous and needed to be dealt with. Undoubtedly, the previous dean (Bill Morgan) had left the position, and the search for a new permanent dean had broken down. SBS wanted the new interim dean to be an internal person that was nominated by the faculty, while the administration thought an external appointment was needed. There had been several angry confrontations about the appropriate level of faculty participation in the search and appointment of the interim dean, and the SBS faculty sometimes balked at participating in an appointment process that it thought was unfair. Finally, the SBS faculty wanted mediation of the issues before a new interim dean was appointed.

As the dispute rolled on various faculty and administrative groups were involved. The Senate Executive Committee (Kathleen Schweitzer, Library and Senate Chair; Ellen Suni, Law and Senate Vice Chair; and Harris Mirkin, A&S and Senate Secretary) had served as "witnesses" and consultants at many of the meetings. A group called the UMKC Cabinet (dominantly staff and administration) discussed the issue and passed a resolution calling on the SBS faculty to cooperate in the administration's plans and ending with the statement that "if the School of Biological Sciences does not support the interim leadership plan, the Cabinet recommends the immediate reorganization of the School of Biological Sciences consistent with the mission, vision, and values of UMKC."¹ Many of the SBS faculty questioned Horton's credentials

¹ The Cabinet resolution was often attacked in the Senate discussion. Here, fyi, is the complete resolution:

"It is the position of the UMKC Cabinet that the Chancellor and Provost have followed and exceeded the requirements of due process in their efforts to collaborate with the faculty of the School of Biological Sciences in designing an integrated life sciences initiative aligned with the mission, vision, and values of UMKC. As a Cabinet, 1. We endorse the immediate implementation of the interim leadership plan for the School of Biological Sciences announced by Chancellor Gilliland on July 31, 2002. 2. We invite the faculty and staff of the School of Biological Sciences to join their colleagues across the campus in supporting the life sciences initiative. 3. We further endorse the formation of the Life Sciences Task Force chaired by Dr. Danforth. 4. We further support the necessary administrative structure and processes that will assure excellence in integrated life sciences research and broad-based life sciences education. In the event that the School of Biological Sciences does not support the interim leadership plan, the Cabinet recommends the immediate reorganization of the School of Biological Sciences consistent with the mission, vision, and values of UMKC."

and the method of hiring. The campus chapter of the AAUP thought Horton was being paid too much and strongly disagreed with the procedures involved in his hiring.

The meeting opened with a statement by the Chancellor. She said she believed in a collaborative, transforming leadership and wanted to move away from hierarchy towards an engaged constituency model. Specifically, in the Life Sciences, she thought it imperative that UMKC be an anchor for the Life Sciences initiative, and a key player with Stowers and the health sciences. She said that federal research money was available in this area, and that the funding was growing rapidly - much more quickly than in physical sciences. There was a Life Sciences Institute in the city that didn't have much money, but had a lot of political clout. She argued that there was a window of opportunity that UMKC could not afford to miss. We were Kansas City's university, and we needed to take a leading or dominant role.

Gilliland implicitly agreed that the appointment of Horton was hierarchal, but insisted that since she worked closely with the Senate Executive Committee that a process of shared governance was involved. In any case, she said that, though there was often tension between faculty and administration, they shouldn't automatically disagree, and that it was important to work our way through this extremely difficult issue.

In answer to a question, Gilliland agreed Horton's salary was high, but said he will only be here for a short time. (The Chancellor envisioned about 6 months, and said she hoped it would not go beyond that.) She argued that if we wanted good people we needed to pay for them. He will be paid from the SBS school budget. She said Horton had two basic tasks:

- * He would be the chair of the Millennium Committee (the local Life Sciences Committee) that has faculty from 6 schools and is the official interface with the Danforth Committee (a national committee that is going to make recommendations for the direction of the life sciences in Kansas City). The Millennium committee will study where UMKC needs to focus in the life sciences area, what key hires need to be made, how many people need to be hired, and how we can raise the money needed to do this. It would also examine structural issues about the organization of the Life Sciences at UMKC.

- * Horton's other task was to develop a leadership core at SBS, and the Chancellor said he would be advised by a team of faculty within the school in doing this. He would need to work with all faculty to achieve this goal.

In response to a question about Horton's qualifications (he is an Urban Geographer, not a Biologist) Gilliland said they had hired a University President who was an accomplished leader, and that he had presided over universities with Medical Schools and schools similar to SBS. She said that they would have liked a Biologist, but they didn't find any as qualified as Horton. It wasn't a perfect world, but Horton would work closely with a leadership team from SBS that could advise him about Biology's specific issues.²

When there were no more questions the Chancellor left. The meeting continued, and several groups/people made statements.

* **SBS FACULTY:** Several spokespeople for the SBS faculty questioned whether the Senate or the Senate Executive Committee had been co-opted by the administration. There was special anger that the Chair of the Senate is one of two faculty members who sit in the Cabinet (the other is Max Skidmore,

² Assistant Dean Bibie Chronwall (SBS), Associate Dean Jakob Waterborg (SBS) and Graduate Dean Ron MacQuarrie were asked by Horton to advise him. They have staff meetings to discuss various issues and develop strategies, though only Horton has direct authority and responsibility for any decision. Some SBS faculty members argue that their own elected/appointed leadership team (The Faculty Advisory Council) has been bypassed by this process.

A&S) and that she supported the Cabinet resolution. They also thought the Executive Committee should have worked more diligently to find out the views of the SBS faculty, and expressed disappointment that the Committee met privately with the administration but didn't meet with the SBS faculty. [The Executive Committee claimed that it had sat in on about 5 meetings and had often spoken with faculty members, so they knew the faculty position.]

That said, SBS faculty requested that the Senate support SBS in its attempt to get mediation. They thought the charges against SBS were vague and undocumented, and they thought the expected outcomes were undefined. It was a moving target, and the faculty felt that every time they met one set of demands the bar was raised. They thought they were working well with various faculty and research groups, and it was hard to respond to general charges of non-cooperation. The faculty was not afraid of mediation and wanted to find solutions. If SBS was really stubborn and uncooperative that would come out in mediation. [The Senate will consider a resolution on this at its next meeting. Some Senators thought a general call for mediation was too vague, but that mediation around specific issues might be helpful. Members of the Senate Executive Committee had also noted the lack of specific detail in many of the administrative statements, and said they had urged that the charges be made more specific.]

The SBS faculty also had strong reservations about Horton. He was not a biologist, and they had not had a chance to play a significant role in his choice. They felt that he would be accountable to the administration rather than to the faculty.

* **THE FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** gave its report. It had been involved as witnesses at the request of SBS and then of the administration, and had negotiated/consulted with the administration about some issues. It originally had urged the Chancellor to appoint an interim dean from the SBS faculty, but it was clear that an internal interim dean was not acceptable to the administration. Gilliland and Ballard felt that they had tried that, and thought it had failed. Both clearly liked Horton; the Senate Executive Committee argued that the SBS faculty needed to be consulted about him. At the end the administration decided that, though they didn't want a formal vote, the faculty should meet with Horton prior to his appointment. The structure of the meetings was to be decided by the SBS faculty, and the administration would seek their opinions and feedback before making the appointment. During the meetings Horton would also have a chance to meet with the SBS faculty and hear their version of the dispute. Horton would be part of a leadership team that would come from the SBS faculty. Committees would be set up to iron out the disputes between SBS and the other health sciences schools and Stowers, and these committees would include both faculty and administration.³

The issue of the Cabinet resolution came up. Since the Senate Chair was a part of the Cabinet, and the vote was unanimous, could it be taken that the Executive Committee supported the resolution? Two of the Executive Committee members distanced themselves from the resolution, both questioning the legitimacy of the Cabinet and expressing strong concerns about the resolution. They did not support it and thought it was unfortunate. The Senate Chair said that she supported the resolution because she thought it was imperative that the Life Science issues be solved. She said the resolution came from the Cabinet, not the administration, and was an expression of the feeling of the Cabinet members.

The Senate Executive Committee said that it thought that, in the circumstances that existed, the procedures for the appointment of the Interim Dean were acceptable. It was time to move on and try to resolve some of the problems rather than endlessly revisiting old disputes. In the near future the rules for

³ The details of the dispute with Stowers are not clear and, in a phone call to your Secretary, some members of the SBS faculty disputed the notion that there was a dispute with Stowers. They claimed that neither Stowers nor the administration had ever released any details to support the notion of a dispute, and said that they did not know what the supposed conflict was about.

appointment of interim deans needed to be clarified, since there really were no rules or guidelines, and the role, legitimacy and composition of the Cabinet needed to be examined.

* **THE AAUP** strongly disputed the salary that was being paid to Horton, since there were so many university needs that were not being met. It also questioned the appointment process, saying that it did not meet even minimal AAUP standards for shared governance. They thought that faculty had a primary responsibility for choosing administrators, and that a person should not be chosen over the reasoned opposition of the faculty. Though the AAUP didn't openly condemn the Senate Executive Committee's endorsement of the appointment process, they clearly felt that the Executive Committee had leaned too far in the direction of the administration. The AAUP also argued that the faculty should play a fundamental role in any decision that would change the structure of SBS and the university. They had 5 recommendations: that all plans for restructuring or disbursing SBS be left to the SBS faculty, that the interim dean be selected from an SBS list of internal candidates, that the search for a permanent dean be reopened and that faculty have the primary voice in that search, that there should be a commitment to meaningful participation by faculty in budget decisions, and that the funds of SBS and the campus be unfrozen. The full AAUP statement is at <http://www.umkc.edu/senate/pdf/X020813.pdf>

* **SENATORS:** Mostly Senators just listened to the various sides of the dispute, and asked questions. One Senator gave an impassioned speech about the cabinet resolution, questioning how an important body of the university could support an attempt to quell free speech. The Senator said that honest people could disagree, but that the resolution said that the Administrative initiative should be supported or that SBS is history. The Senator thought it was important that the Senate conveyed to the Cabinet its opposition to the statement since it violated the basic spirit of the university.

Several people called for an all-faculty meeting on this issue. Kathleen Schweitzberg (Senate Chair) and Ellen Suni (Senate Vice Chair) have been working on it and said that there would be an all faculty meeting in late September or early October.

Respectfully submitted,

Harris Mirkin,
Faculty Secretary

UMKC Faculty Senate: Roster and Attendance, Fall 2002

Special Meeting

Aug. 13

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