

The
U.M.K.C.
Faculty
Senate

Report

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

July 17, 2001

Special Summer Meeting:

Dean Removal/Interim Dean Appointments & Faculty Consultation

New appointment procedure for deans and interim deans?

In a meeting with the Senate Executive Committee (Interim Chair Kathleen Schweitzberger, Secretary Harris Mirkin and IFC Reps Max Skidmore and Jakob Waterborg) Provost Steve Ballard said that in the future he intended to consult with the faculty of a unit before removing a dean, and that he would work with them on appointing an Interim Dean and would normally select him/her from a list submitted by the unit. He also expected that faculty from the unit would normally be a majority of any search committee for a permanent dean, and said he expected to consult with the faculty about outside members.

All of this was tentative, and the Provost still wanted to think the procedures through. The Senate Executive Committee thought the plans were good and addressed the faculty's issues.

Note: The Senate usually doesn't convene during the summer, but the situation involving the SBS was a catalyst. There were several important issues, and Kathleen Schweitzberger (Interim Senate Chair) and the Senate Executive Committee thought a meeting was necessary. Many Senators at the meeting expressed frustration with the direction of the University.

I didn't distribute the Senate Report, since by the time I had it written most people had left the campus. It was a fortuitous decision since, subsequent to the meeting, there were two developments that would soften the concerns expressed at the meeting, and perhaps make them moot.

1. The Senate Executive Committee met with Provost Steve Ballard. The Provost addressed (and appeared to resolve) the central issues that arose in the Senate meeting. [See box on left.]

2. Several new interim deans were appointed, and the appointments and process seemed to satisfy the faculties involved. The processes put in place to search for permanent deans also appear to be satisfactory.

It seems quite possible, to your Secretary, that the July 17th Senate meeting represented a low point in the relationship

between the administration and the faculty, and that things are now improving. Discussions of budget issues, and of other problems central in defining the direction of the university, will certainly test the new paradigm.

The Chancellor has the legal right to remove deans, and does not need to consult faculty before doing so. However, several Senators argued, there is a difference between following the law and using good judgement. They were concerned with the latter issue. Several deans had been removed, and interim deans appointed, without much (or any) discussion with the faculties of the schools involved. Did the circumstances warrant this? The pattern was especially noticeable given the theoretical commitment to consultation and collaboration.

In the SBS the dean was removed about one year prior to the time that he had planned to resign. The faculty had planned to search for a new dean during that period, and the precipitous forced resignation led to the necessity of appointing an interim dean. In a special meeting at the school (held several weeks prior to the Faculty Senate meeting) the SBS faculty, unsure of the circumstances that led to the demand for an immediate resignation, and worried about the dismantling and redirection of what they believed to be a successful unit, submitted a list of 11 items they wanted the Chancellor and the new Provost to affirm.¹ After a discussion Steve Ballard, the new Provost, said that he thought the faculty requests seemed reasonable but needed some modification to protect the university in case circumstances changed. He suggested that the SBS faculty appoint a committee to meet with him on the next day to discuss the 11 points and other issues.

The SBS meeting did not involve the Senate (though some Senators were invited to witness the meeting) and neither the Chancellor nor the Provost was asked to attend the Senate discussion. The issues raised in the Senate involved shared governance. Faculty in the SBS was not involved in any discussion prior to the dean being removed. Since both the COPE review and the faculty review of the dean had been outstanding, faculty members thought they should have been involved in policy discussions before any action was taken. Perhaps, if that had been done, problems could have been avoided. Following the Chancellor's decision to remove the dean the faculty asked why she had done it. She asserted that it was her right to appoint senior leadership (a right the faculty did not dispute) but was not willing to give reasons or engage in a discussion. Was it because of policy disagreements? The university is supposed to be a place where diverse ideas can coexist, and there can be dialog. The SBS faculty thought that the Chancellor was honor bound not to simply let considerations of personal loyalty determine her decisions. They wanted to know whether the Chancellor really meant it when she said that she wanted to work with the faculty, or was the cooperative rhetoric merely a cover for authoritarian actions?

¹These included statements supporting the continuing independence of the School, a promise to honor the commitments that the dean had made to faculty, and a promise that the new interim dean would be chosen from among the tenured members of the SBS and that the permanent dean selection committee would include a majority of members of the regular SBS faculty chosen from a slate submitted by the faculty. There were also declarations that the graduate and undergraduate programs and curricula would remain under the supervision and administrative control of the SBS faculty, and several statements that previous budgetary commitments would be honored.

Some Senators argued that the Chancellor had a right to pick her executive team and thought it was fruitless for the Senate to discuss the issue. It was clear the dean would not be reinstated, they said, so the issue was moot. Other Senators said that private, personnel issues were often involved in the removal of deans and said that the Chancellor might not feel free to discuss these with the faculty. Most Senators, however, thought the problems were important and the discussion continued. They thought crucial issues were raised by the Chancellor's apparent indifference to faculty, and of the functioning of an effective unit. Why wasn't there any discussion with the SBS faculty on matters of leadership and policy about which they felt strongly?

A quick survey of various units seemed to demonstrate a fairly consistent pattern of behavior. Though the Senate had not discussed the issue at the time, the A&S dean was removed without any discussion with faculty or chairs. The new Interim Dean was also appointed without any discussion with either group. It appeared to be mostly a matter of luck that the appointment turned out well. In the Education School many faculty members claimed that the Chancellor did not seem concerned with discussing issues, and was more inclined to scold the faculty for their failures. There was no faculty review in the Interim Dean's appointment. Senators claimed that the interim dean appointment process in the Medical School was similar. Though the person finally appointed was a popular choice, some faculty members said the Chancellor did not discuss the appointment prior to its being made. Rather, it was claimed, she lectured about how the vision of the school had to change before a regular dean could be appointed.²

On the other hand, the interim dean appointment process in the Conservatory seemed to be working well. Though some resolutions were offered, at the end the Senate thought it would be best to discuss these issues with the Chancellor and Provost. People said role of deans was ambiguous, since they both represented the units and were part of the Chancellor's management team. Senators argued that the faculty should, at a minimum, understand why a dean is removed and should know whether policy issues that endanger academic programs are involved. Sometimes the faculty can supply information and perspectives that the upper administration isn't aware of. Senators asserted the issues raised in the removal of deans, and the interim appointments were fundamental to the role of the faculty. If the Chancellor were trying to revision what the university should be, the faculty should be directly involved, not lectured to or diverted. There was a general belief that if the faculty didn't go along with the Chancellor they were viewed as recalcitrant, and some thought there was a distrust of faculty in the BluePrint process -- faculty was viewed as conservative and reluctant to change. They feared that the only discussions valued were those that ended up at the pre-ordained conclusions. There seemed to be little real dialogue. Others were more hopeful, or thought that the Chancellor or Provost might change the process. The Provost seemed to be off to a good start with the SBS, which was working with him on appointing the interim and permanent dean and on the 11 points.

² In a subsequent conversation your Secretary had with the Chancellor she seemed surprised when she heard of this comment. She agreed that she had not spoken about the interim dean appointment at the meeting, but said she had asked for e-mail feedback and had received a copious amount. She said that she read and paid attention to the letters, and believed there had actually been extensive consultation.

An additional problem was brought into the discussion at various times. Many faculty (especially untenured people) in various units felt they were being pressured into participating in the BluePrint process. Wasn't this a variation on Rousseau's interesting (but dangerous) argument that people could be "forced to be free"? Didn't it involve a contradiction? Was it simply an inappropriate application of the BluePrint process at the unit level? At least the issue had to be discussed in future Senate meetings.

Sabbatical/research/development leave policy

The policy for Sabbatical leaves was under review, and then the three types of leave mysteriously became melded into one. The sabbatical policy was improved somewhat, but Senators thought that the flexibility of the other two policies had been compromised. The Chancellor has endorsed the new policy and promulgated it in Chancellor's Memorandum #100, but Senators thought she had possibly been misled and was not fully aware of the issues and of the possible consequences. The Chancellor is now aware of the problem and is currently reviewing her endorsement of the proposed policy.

The Senate agreed to have members get feedback about the policy from their constituents, and to report back to the Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

Harris Mirkin,
Faculty Secretary