

**The Better Part of Valor:
Faculty Senate's Elective Inaction on a No-Confidence Vote**

UT-Knoxville Faculty,

Members of the Faculty Senate and its Executive Committee have received inquiries from faculty members asking why the Senate has not moved ahead with a vote on a resolution of no-confidence in President Petersen, given the very limited confidence and support expressed for the President in the faculty survey conducted in January 2008. This e-mail is to inform you of the events that have transpired since the January survey, as well as the current strategy of the Senate's leadership with respect to relations with UT-System administration.

As you may recall, on January 22, 2008, a specially called Senate meeting was held with President Petersen, during which he answered questions from members of the Senate, as well as other faculty members in the audience. The minutes and video of that meeting are available on the Faculty Senate Web site (<http://web.utk.edu/~senate/reports.shtml>). At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Faculty Senate held the following Monday on January 28, a wide-ranging discussion was held of the possibility of conducting a vote of no-confidence in President Petersen. At that time it was decided that a small group from the Senate leadership would attempt to arrange a meeting with the President to express the gravity of faculty concerns, as well as to seek answers and action on a number of matters.

On February 12, I met with faculty and staff of Institute of Agriculture. There was a spirited but collegial exchange. Faculty and staff said they did not agree with many of the publicly expressed views of the Faculty Senate leadership. Moreover, some believed aspects of the public debate regarding President Petersen's actions were having deleterious effects on the perceptions of donors and those using their services. A summary of that meeting was presented to the Faculty Senate at the February 25 meeting.

On February 22, the Senate leadership group composed of Senate President-Elect John Nolt, Past Senate President Lou Gross, former Senate President and current Board of Trustees member Candace White, Senate Parliamentarian Otis Stephens, Nancy Howell from the Institute of Agriculture, Student Affairs Committee Chair John Lounsbury, as well as myself met with President Petersen and his Chief of Staff, Margie Nichols. Prior to the meeting, a list of questions was developed and provided to both Ms. Nichols and the President. Topics covered in the list of questions included: 1.) shared governance, 2.) UT/ORNL research funding structure, 3.) the proposed development of the Cherokee Campus, 4.) UT System leadership, and structure, 5.) information technology, 6.) financial transparency, 7.) UT Knoxville/System relations, 8.) communications, and 9.) system/campus performance evaluation. At the outset of the meeting, President Petersen announced the appointment of Dr. Jesse Poore as CIO and Vice President for Information Technology. He went on to say that he anticipated filling the position of Chief Human Resources Officer (Linda Hendricks was subsequently named to the position).

Following these announcements, we discussed the importance of shared governance with the President. The faculty participants took the position that much of the conflict of late might have been avoided had the system administrators sought Faculty input on decisions regarding both the “mission of the university statement” and decisions regarding the Cherokee Campus. The President asserted that Faculty input on the development of Cherokee Campus would come through the UT Knoxville strategic planning process. The President additionally agreed to speak to the Faculty Senate twice a year, and he expressed willingness to meet with faculty and campus administrators.

The faculty participants generally agreed that the President had not clearly and directly addressed all of the questions presented. We did agree, however, that some progress had been made in improving communications, and we noted positive system actions on a number of matters.

The results of this meeting were subsequently reported to the Faculty Senate at the February 25 meeting. There was discussion at that time of the relative pros and cons that would result if of a vote of no-confidence were instituted. It was my recommendation during the meeting that we continue to monitor the actions of the UT System administrators, and hold in abeyance any action on a no-confidence vote. Minutes of the February 22 meeting with President Petersen and the subsequent February 25 meeting of the Faculty Senate will soon be posted to be Senate Web site.

On March 11, the University Faculty Council, which is composed of the Faculty Senate Presidents of all four UT campuses, various other elected representatives from each campus, and the two faculty members who serve on the board of trustees, met in Chattanooga with President Petersen for 90 minutes prior to the UT Board of Trustees meeting, during which a wide range of matters was discussed. A summary of that meeting was sent to the Faculty in an earlier e-mail, dated March 24 2008. One point of contention that arose during this meeting is that the President views the University Faculty Council as a means of communication with the Faculty, rather than an instrument of shared governance. The University Faculty Council will likely again address this issue in future meetings with the President.

During the Board of Trustees meeting later that day, the Board, without any public discussion or debate, approved a motion affirming the structure of the University articulated in President Petersen's August “mission of the university statement.” This organizational structure gives management control of both the Cherokee Campus and ORNL to the President, and reaffirms his control over UT-Knoxville athletics and the Institute of Agriculture. That said, the Board's public support of President Petersen perhaps should not come as a surprise.

It was, however, noted by several in attendance that several members of the Board challenged the President and his staff on the notable absence of Board representatives on the UT Research Foundation Board. Apparently, Board representation on the UT Research was previously promised. Members of the Board also made note of the UT

System's flat organizational structure, as well as the large number of individuals reporting directly to the President. Finally, the recommended change to the Board's bylaws, which would remove the direct relationship between campus chancellors and the Board, was not passed. In sum, the Board of Trustees offered public support for the President, but at the same time it demonstrated a willingness to raise questions regarding various administrative decisions.

From my perspective, there are a number of positive developments that have occurred since the faculty survey was taken in January, including but not limited to:

1. Appointment of a CIO;
2. Progression towards the construction of The Joint Institute for Advanced Materials building, which had previously been held up by system inaction;
3. Initiation of construction on the Min Kao engineering building, again previously held up by its system inaction;
4. Increased communication with the President;
5. Commencement of the Chancellor search, with significant faculty representation on the search committee;
6. Appointment of a vice president for human resources;
7. Clarification of the issue of UT/ORNL F&A.

There remain concerns about:

1. The President's understanding of and support for shared governance of the campus and university;
2. The ongoing lack of faculty input into the planning and development of Cherokee Campus; and
3. The lack of clarification regarding the President's views on diversity in hiring practices. More specifically, three attempts have now been made by the UT Knoxville Commission for LGBT People to seek clarification from the President and his staff regarding the President's stated views in the January 22 open Senate meeting on diversity and nondiscrimination. Thus far there has been no response.

While I am sympathetic to the outrage felt by faculty members in response to the words and deeds of the President earlier this year, there appears, at least from my perspective, to be little to gain at the present time with a vote of no-confidence. The Board of Trustees has expressed strong public support for the President. Moreover, a vote of no-confidence would likely harm UT Knoxville's standing with the legislature during a time of significant fiscal constraint in the state. Further, it is currently the sense of the Executive Committee that there is not an overwhelming level of support among the Faculty or in the Senate to pass such a resolution with a strong enough majority to alter either public perception or the Board of Trustees' opinion of the President. At present, a vote of no-confidence would likely result only in a self-inflicted wound.

However, it must be noted that this is not to suggest that the Faculty Senate should eschew option of a resolution of no-confidence in the future. The UT-Knoxville Faculty and the Faculty Senate must monitor the selection process for the next Chancellor, the planning for development of the Cherokee Campus, the UT-System administration's

support for the efforts of the CIO to address our major information-technology issues, the President's respect for and support of the shared governance of this university, and the President's actions in support of nondiscrimination and diversity.

That said, it is also important to recognize the positive developments, listed above, that were achieved by the Senate's public expression of discontent. The last meeting of the Faculty Senate is April 21. I encourage you to contact your senators with any reactions or questions about this report. Please feel free to contact me as well.

All the best,

David

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“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.”

Rumi