

Do You Agree?

“Rare is the trustee who would dare question the judgment of the faculty on matters of teaching or research, on details of course development or the criteria for the promotion of faculty, on whether or not a professor’s publications were relevant or important. Generally speaking, trustees are terrified of the faculties they oversee. The faculty know this, delight in it, and largely ignore these wealthy, distinguished ‘overseers.’”

Martin Anderson, *Impostors in the Temple*

The goal of this newsletter from the Pope Center is to help university trustees and governors to be more effective leaders in higher education.

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Governance

HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS FOR UNIVERSITY GOVERNORS AND TRUSTEES

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What’s the Proper Policy on Politics?

Early this year, the UNC Board of Governors will reexamine its policies on political activity by faculty and staff of University of North Carolina schools. The goal: ensuring that university resources are not used for political purposes.

That’s a good start.

But it is not enough to bar political partisans from using university resources. The Pope Center believes that there is a larger issue beyond legal requirements.

We believe that the university—its faculty, administrators, and governors—should recognize that using the university’s name for political commentary is not good policy.

UNC has a lot of political capital. Its opinion matters. Signing a political missive as the head of a UNC school or department gives the impression that the school or department shares that opinion. It is unseemly and reflects poorly on the university. That is particularly true when faculty members’ political statements veer from academic observation into shrill partisanship and when it comments on state government, of which the university is a part.

The resource cost to the university is negligible compared with the cost in reputation. ■



Wisconsin senators Scott Fitzgerald and Mike Ellis listen as University of Wisconsin system president Kevin Reilly speaks at a hearing last April.

John Hart - Wisconsin State Journal

Who Runs the University?

Jenna Ashley Robinson

(Editor’s note: Some state universities are going through major changes, even turmoil. The University of Wisconsin is one.)

The University of Wisconsin is one of several state universities affected by shifts in state political power from Democratic to Republican. Its experience, at times tumultuous, may offer some lessons for North Carolina.

Last spring, a state audit revealed that the university system had hoarded cash reserves of \$648 million, about a quarter of its annual appropriation—even as it was increasing tuition on the grounds that higher tuition was needed to stave off academic decline. “UW chancellors continue to make tough choices and tighten their belts,” UW system president Kevin P. Reilly had said in a June 2012 news release.

The discovery of hundreds of millions of unused dollars caused howls among legislators. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (May 1, 2013) quoted

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Mike Ellis, president of the Wisconsin Senate, “We all thought they were damn near broke... This number is staggering, and it absolutely begs the question: Did they or did they not intentionally mislead us?”

Embarrassed by their failure to either know about or—if they did know—to inform the legislature about the funds, the board called for a conference in September to foster better communication between state legislators and the board. “As a governing board, we must be attentive to the shifting landscape and better understand the challenges faced by public higher education,” said regent vice president Regina Millner at the conference.

But that led to new tumult.

At a panel discussion on board governance at that meeting, legislators started to question the role of the faculty in decision-making. As reported by Inside Higher Ed, Assembly speaker Robin Vos, a Republican, said governance changes within the system are a matter of “when, not if.” He specified that universities should be more “nimble” and that campus chancellors

should be empowered to “truly be the chief executive officer.”

Historically, Wisconsin faculty have played a large role in university governance. By state statute, professors are guaranteed active participation in institutional policy matters and responsibility for academic and personnel decisions, *Inside Higher Ed* noted.

Some legislators at the meeting were cautious, warning that the legislature should not get too involved in the details of university management. Rep. Janet Bewley, D-Ashland, said that while she agrees on the need for more cooperation and collaboration between the legislature and the UW system, legislators should refrain from interfering in how universities operate.

“What I want to prevent is a whole new set of cooks going into your kitchen, people who are not academics trying to run your campuses,” she said.

University boards in other states will watch carefully as governance changes take shape in Wisconsin. ■

UNC Board of Governors Takes a Few Steps in the Right Direction

Jane S. Shaw

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, says a familiar Chinese proverb. Since the current UNC Board of Governors began deliberations in August 2013, it has taken at least three steps on its long journey toward exerting its full authority in representing the citizens of North Carolina.

Those actions are:

- Restricting the freedom of the president to enter into long leases without dollar limits on the rent;
- Overturning an inappropriate policy, gender-neutral housing; and
- Proposing greater transparency of information about proposed academic degrees.

Restricting Leasing Authority

In September, the university’s General Administration issued a regulation authorizing the president to approve leases (acquiring or disposing of property) for up to ten years regardless of the size of the rent (described in the regulation as “\$1,000,000 or more”).

This broad authority upset some members of the board, who felt that putting no limits on the amount of rent was wrong. They took action, and the board restored an earlier regulation: any annual lease of \$500,000 and above requires the approval of the Board of Governors.

Gender-neutral Housing

In August, the Board of Governors voted unanimously to ban gender-neutral housing on the system’s 16 campuses. The decision overturned a UNC-Chapel Hill plan to offer gender-neutral housing options in the 2013-14 academic year.

Gender-neutral housing allows individuals of different sexes to room together. It is usually presented as a way for gay students and transgendered students to find a comfortable residence and feel “safe.” However,

because of non-discrimination policies, it would have required the university to allow heterosexual students to room together as well.

Although some schools in other states have gender-neutral housing, the plan—approved by the UNC-Chapel Hill board in November 2012—aroused opposition in a conservative state like North Carolina. The legislature was about to act. “Our board felt it was important to maintain autonomy over housing policy,” said Peter Hans, chairman of the board of Governors. The decision may not have won many friends at Chapel Hill, but it was probably a wise one.

Transparency in Adding Degree Programs

One of the most worrisome issues in a time of economic stringency is whether or not the university is creating too many degree programs. The Board of Governors must approve all new degree programs, but has its scrutiny been stringent? Some members have wondered, so the Education Planning, Policies, and Programs Committee formed a subcommittee to consider the process.

A specific list of criteria (laid out in the UNC policy manual) must be met for the board to decide on any new degree program. However, a memo from the chairman of the subcommittee suggests that those criteria get short shrift in the specific document that universities must fill out.

For example, the General Administration is supposed to report on “the demand for the program in the locality, region, or State as a whole.” However, according to the memo, no actual documentation is required other than enrollment in the program at other campuses.

It will be interesting to see if the Board requires the university to be more transparent when it seeks new programs. Scrutinizing the process is a step in that direction. ■

AMERICA’S PRIORITIES FOR HIGHER ED REFORM

- ✓ Just 13% of engaged voters surveyed by Hart Research Associates say the American higher education system is working “pretty well” right now. Nearly half say that major changes (41%) or a complete overhaul (8%) is needed.
- ✓ Among engaged voters who believe change is needed, 47% say the top priority is for the system to reduce costs for students, including their debt load, tuition, fees, and books.
- ✓ A majority (64%) of engaged voters say we should increase the number of students in America who get a college degree or credential and have the *knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the job market* (emphasis added).
- ✓ Most engaged voters (84%) say we should require colleges to make information on graduation rates, loan repayment, and job placement rates easily accessible to students and parents



Source: Hart Research Associates. *College Is Worth It: A Report on Beliefs about the Importance of College, Impressions of the Financial Aid System, Priorities for Reform, and Reactions to Potential Reform Approaches*. January 2013.