

Received on April 17, 2024: UK Emeriti Faculty Association position on the abolition of the University Senate. Emeritus Professor Thomas Janoski, President of UKAEF, Former Director of the Quantitative Initiative in Policy and Social Research (QIPSR), Sociology Department

The UK Association of Emeriti Faculty Addresses the President's Plan to Abolish the University Senate

Recommendation of The UK Association of Emeriti Faculty to the Board of Trustees, the University President, and the University Senate

The UKAEF, based on over 200 emeriti faculty with thousands of years of experience at the University, supports the University Senate position on future institutional change. We are a group that is knowledgeable about university affairs, but since we are Emeriti, we are more objective because we neither gain benefits nor suffer losses from policy decisions. We believe the University Senate should retain its current role in educational policy with some modifications. We make three recommendations:

1-The Board and President should consider the alternatives that the University Senate has proposed:

- (a) Expand representation of various groups on the University Senate for staff and students;
- (b) Create better mechanisms for collaboration with administration and staff;
- (c) Expand the membership in the University Senate's Senate Council to include voting administrators and staff; and
- (d) Move a limited number of aspects of educational policy from the University Senate to the colleges while clearly maintaining the University Senate's role in avoiding duplication and handling student and faculty appeals.

2-The emphasis on a quick and speedy decision is not warranted in the case of this significant institutional change.

3-Future Presidential and Board working groups concerning the University Senate should have more faculty representation in translating Board decisions into actual policy recommendations.

The current balance of powers, interests, and expertise should be observed between the President, faculty, staff, and students. This is essential to Madisonian and democratic principles embedded in the US Constitution and the basic operations of public and Land Grant Universities throughout the country. Changes can be made in the composition of the University Senate, and reforms can improve its operations. The lure of a single person making University decisions certainly seems more efficient; however, it will only lead to more administrators and a rigid bureaucracy that will leave deliberation behind. We trust that the Board of Trustees, who has ultimate authority over university policy, will recognize that the necessary balance provided by the University Senate will benefit the University as a whole in its future service to the Commonwealth.

Concerns:

1-Moving from a Representative to a Hierarchical Model of Governance: Reducing the University Senate to the status of a faculty senate in both status and authority reorients academic decision-making in the UK from shared governance (i.e., a democratic process) to an authoritarian process. The plan appears to be to make the President of the university the only decision-maker supported by a hand-picked "representative" advisory group. Given the conception of higher education as an academic, knowledge-based institution protected from the political whims of external forces, this university needs to build on a solid academic and shared governance system rather than a centralized decision-making model with an enlarged bureaucracy.

2-What Else is Lost if the Senate becomes Advisory: The University Senate does much more than has been portrayed by the President. It does at least three things:

a-Courses and Curriculum: The University Senate with its extensive and direct experience reviews academic curriculum matters concerning courses and curriculum.

b-Appeals Processes: The University Senate conducts appeals processes for students and faculty. The President's proposal seems to erase these appeals processes.

c-Range of Actions: The University Senate has 13 direct report standing committees that, through their work or the work of ad hoc committees, are the academic lifeblood of the University.

d-A Major Site of Deliberation: The University Senate has regular meetings where they discuss important matters and take votes. However, deliberation is not just voting. Deliberation considers many different alternatives and discovers new ones based on reasoned and open inquiry.

e-Other Duties: The University Senate conducts ceremonial duties, such as approving graduation lists, which also involve careful attention to detail in determining who gets a degree and who does not.

Who is going to do the work of the University Senate and their various committees? And will they do it in a reasoned, representative, and thoughtful manner? The University may have to hire a large set of new administrators to do the job that the University Senate already does. Then, this bureaucracy will have to do extensive consulting with the faculty to get the knowledge it needs. The plan underlying Project Accelerate seems purposefully vague about shutting down the academic decision-making role of the University Senate. Expediency will overlook many aspects of responsible decision-making and increase the size of the bureaucracy.

Some of this uncertainty comes from the different definitions of shared governance. The Board of Trustees says the faculty should have a "substantive role" in making educational policy, while the President only allows an "advisory role." We believe that the University Senate should continue its deliberative role as delegated by the Board of Trustees to make a focused array of curriculum, course, faculty, and student policy decisions.

3-Representativeness of the University Senate: The University Senate is already composed of all the groups that the President and Chairman of the Board, Britt Brockman, indicate the need to be more representative. Currently, there are 94 faculty, 30 administrators, 19 students, and one emeriti faculty representative.

- a. 94 elected full-time faculty members,
- b. 19 student representatives identified by the student government association,
- c. 1 President,
- d. 1 Provost,
- e. 19 College Deans,
- f. 6 (or 10, depending on who counts) Vice Presidents,
- g. 1 Academic ombud,

- h. 1 Chair of the Staff Senate, and
- i. 1 Representative of the Emeritus Faculty Association.

One clear proposal is that the number of students, especially staff, could be increased in the present University Senate since faculty and administrators are already strongly represented.

4-Uncertain Findings on the Operation of the University Senate: The Deloitte Consulting Report has not been made available to the University Senate, and the University Senate Officers were not consulted by the Deloitte Group when researching and then making their recommendations.

There are three issues involved here:

a-Efficiency: It is unclear how efficient the University Senate happens to be. They rely on a committee system with expertise from faculty, administrators, students, and staff. The efficiency and quality of decisions remain unassessed, and proposals for improving efficiency have not been considered in the President's proposal or discussions.

b-Speed vs. Quality: The University Senate can take one to two years to make many decisions on educational policy. Whether this is faster or slower than benchmarks is not clear. The quality of decisions is also essential. Would decisions be better if colleges made them? Part of the University Senate's role is to balance conflicts between colleges. Without the Senate, those conflicts might go unrecognized or unsolved. In his *Forbes* article (see item 7 below), former UK Provost Michael Nietzel contends that the deliberation in the Senate may be a clear advantage in avoiding costly mistakes and confusion.

c-Providing Information and Shared Governance: The Deloitte report is kept secret from the faculty and the public. Project Accelerate needs to be more transparent in sharing information. If the President wants to improve the academic mission of the UK, he could have engaged in a productive collaboration with the University Senate. Ironically, he is both the President of the University Senate and the President of the University.

5-Unrepresentativeness of Working Group 5: Working Group 5 was tasked to make recommendations about the Senate, but it needed to be more representative. Working Group 5 consists of nine or ten administrators (depending on whether you count the recorder), one faculty representative, and one student representative. The President claims that the University Senate is unrepresentative; however, a very unrepresentative Working Group was ironically created to change it.

6-Expertise on Educational Policy and Curriculum: The Board of Trustees has ultimate authority on educational policy; however, it is the most removed from actual University operations. The President is more familiar with educational policy than the Board but is far removed from the details of all the colleges and departments. The University Senate has the closest relationship to the colleges and departments, plus experience designing policies in many fields. As a result, the Board of Trustees has delegated specific authority to the president and specific authority to organized faculty such as the University Senate.

7-Public and Group Opinion on the President's Proposal is Currently Negative:

The president has made news in local newspapers and major magazines in the last two months. These articles and letters largely oppose his proposal.

Lexington Herald-Leader:

Monica Kast “Capilouto Announces Changes to the Faculty Senate: What it Means to You.”
Michael Kennedy (Former Faculty Trustee) “Accelerating – But in what Direction.”
Carol Mason. “President Capilouto is Pecking Away at Shared Governance and Student Futures.”

William Taylor and Kamryn Lin (UK undergraduate students)

“Capilouto’s Assault on Shared Governance is an Attack on Democracy.”

Forbes Magazine (national business publication):

Michael T. Nietzel (former UK provost and a retired university President)

“Dispute Over Academic Governance Simmering at University of Kentucky.”

Inside Higher Education

Ryan Quinn “University of Kentucky President Proposes to Strip Faculty Body’s Power.”

United Campus Workers

The letter “Protect Faculty Governance at UK” with 331 signatures.

American Association of University Professors

The letter in Support of the University Senate.

The History of Proposals for Changing the University Senate:

The current issue involves proposals by three groups: the Board of Trustees, the President, and the University Senate. In October 2023, the UK Board of Trustees asked the University to make “significant progress” in five areas. Area 5 concerned a review of university governing and administrative regulations that would ensure accelerating the UK’s progress and growth. They recommended:

- 1-“Define a clear and appropriate distinction between the education policy-making function of the board and the respective responsibilities of the President and faculty to administer and implement the Board’s educational policy.
- 2-“Reaffirm that faculty members assume responsibility for determining good educational practice and, therefore should have a substantive role in the development and review of Academic policies
- 3-Be consistent with the Kentucky government, federal law, and principles of accreditation associations (SACSCOC).
- 4-“Recommend changes to the University’s Governing Regulations that define and clearly articulate a shared governance structure that is in greater alignment with institutional benchmarks and clearly recognizes the boards’ primary role as the institution’s policy-making body.
- 5-“Outline additional changes as may be necessary and appropriate to governing regulations that are consistent with, and supportive of the substantive changes outlined above.”

In February, the UK Board of Trustees Chair Britt Brockman said that the UK does not have a form of shared governance that gives everyone a voice. Their Project Accelerate then called for the president to recommend streamlining institutional rules and regulations while ensuring faculty have a substantive role in developing and reviewing academic policies. The board then hired Deloitte Consulting to do a benchmarking study that reported that the UK should align its shared governance structure to be in greater alignment with institutional benchmarks and recognize the board's ultimate control of university policymaking.

On March 27, President Capiluto presented his Final Draft of Principles for Campus Review, where he outlined four principles for new governance regulations:

1-The Board of Trustees is the ultimate authority for all policy matters and should no longer be delegated to the University Senate.

2-The University Senate is to be replaced by a Faculty Senate, a Staff Senate, and The Student Government Association. These three entities would not have their current authority to regulate educational policy. Instead, they would be “advisory” to the president. Currently, the University Senate is composed of 94 elected full-time faculty members; student representatives identified by the student government association; the President; the Provost; the 19 college deans; all vice presidents; the academic ombud; the chair of the staff senate; and a representative of the emeritus faculty president.

3-A president’s council — composed of three students, three staff, three faculty, and three senior administrators — would also be created to advise the President on the most critical issues.

4-Colleges and departments should be given greater responsibility for developing and deciding educational policy and practice at the college and unit levels.

In late March, the University Senate made a Counter proposal that states:

1-The University Senate recognizes the Board of Trustees as the ultimate authority for all policy matters, though they have and may continue to delegate this authority as they see fit.

2-The University senate should expand representation of various groups on the University Senate;

3-The President, Board of Trustees, and University Senate should create better mechanisms for cooperation with administration and staff and expand membership in the University Senate’s Senate Council to include voting administrators and staff; and

4-Some aspects of educational policy should be moved from the University Senate to the Colleges.

The University Senate also concluded that the negative campus fallout over the proposal was swift and extensive.