

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY

The report, prepared by the Association's staff, concerns the action by the Idaho State Board of Education to suspend the faculty senate at Idaho State University, upon the recommendation of the university's president. The state board (which governs public higher education in Idaho) also directed the president to "implement an interim faculty advisory structure" and to bring back to the board a plan for reconstituting the senate and a new senate constitution and bylaws. This action, taken in February 2011, followed several years of conflict between the administration and the faculty senate, culminating in a faculty vote of no confidence in the president one week prior to the meeting at which the board voted to dissolve the senate.

Among the major sources of conflict was an administratively designed proposal, introduced during the 2009-10 academic year, to restructure the university's colleges. Faculty members reported that the administration and governing board imposed the plan following a process that employed administratively appointed task forces rather than existing faculty governance bodies and did not provide for meaningful consideration of the faculty's views. Even though the faculty (in two senate-sponsored referendums) voted to reject the proposal and to express no confidence in the provost who had championed it, the administration forwarded the reorganization plan to the state board for adoption.

As a consequence of adopting the restructuring plan, the state board directed the president to "institute a review of the faculty governance structure . . . and report back to the Board all findings." In summer 2010, the president appointed a governance review committee consisting mainly of administrative officers, whose members were required to sign an agreement to conduct their discussions "under conditions of strict confidentiality." The committee's brief report, which was issued five weeks later, emphasized the president's authority, expressed concerns about the

senate's structure and composition, and recommended a new faculty governance structure that would have largely replaced the senate with administratively appointed bodies. The president sent the proposal to the state board for inclusion on its agenda despite the senate's request for additional time for the faculty to review and vote on it. As a result, hostility between the senate and the administration increased steadily into November 2010, with the president publicly characterizing the senate as "dysfunctional" and senators preparing for a vote of no confidence in the president based on a lengthy bill of particulars. That vote was held in January after a tentative agreement for mediated discussions fell apart. Eighty percent of faculty members who participated in the ballot (fifty-five percent of the faculty) registered no confidence in the president's leadership.

At the state board of education meeting the following week, board members voted unanimously to adopt a previously prepared motion suspending the operation and bylaws of the faculty senate, authorizing the president to "implement an interim faculty advisory structure," and directing him to complete his review of faculty governance and to bring to the board no later than June 2011 a "final proposal for a reconstituted Faculty Senate," which was to include "a new senate constitution and bylaws."

The administration did not conduct faculty elections for delegates to a provisional faculty senate until late April. Of the eighteen provisional senators elected, thirteen had been members of the suspended senate. The previous senate chair was elected chair of the provisional senate at its first meeting in early May. The new senators also adopted sections of a provisional constitution as well as a resolution honoring the faculty for its support of shared governance. The administration, however, declined to recognize the initial actions of the provisional senate and refused to grant it access to its office, its website, or the university's e-mail system. An

administrative officer informed the provisional senate's new leaders that the administration would convene the senate in the fall and provide it with guidelines on how to conduct its business. In the absence of a faculty senate, what the administration has characterized as academic governance is being undertaken by a number of administratively appointed and administratively dominated task forces, committees, and ad hoc bodies which report to the administration, not to the faculty.

The AAUP report, approved by the Committee on College and University Governance, found that no justification existed for the decision to suspend the Idaho State faculty senate. The report concludes that the administration acted in direct violation of widely accepted principles and standards of academic governance by severely restricting the faculty's decision-making role, by suppressing faculty dissent, and by recommending the abolition of the faculty senate and, with it, the remnants of shared governance at Idaho State University.

While the recent election of a provisional faculty senate had initially provided some grounds for hope of an acceptable resolution, the administration's reaction to the provisional senate's initial actions confirms faculty assertions of the administration's consistently acting at odds with principles of shared governance.

The Committee on College and University Governance recommends to the Ninety-seventh Annual Meeting that Idaho State University be placed on the Association's list of institutions sanctioned for substantial non-compliance with generally accepted standards of academic government.