
Report of the Committee on College and University Governance, 2017–18

With respect to academic governance, the 2017–18 academic year began on a positive note. This past October, the Board of Directors of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) published a statement on shared governance. The following month, the Committee on College and University Governance issued a formal commendation of the statement to the AAUP’s members. Among other positive aspects of the AGB statement were its emphasis on the importance of institutions making “specific reference” in their governing documents to the AAUP’s *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* and its recognition of “the value added to institutions, their decision making, and their culture when shared governance is broadly understood, affirmed, and nurtured.”

In February, however, the committee found itself in the position of having to issue a very different kind of statement—namely, a formal denunciation of derisive remarks made by University of Wisconsin system president Ray Cross in an email message to a system regent. President Cross’s comments, sent the day after his announcement of a unilateral and controversial decision to merge the system’s two- and four-year institutions, read in their entirety: “Getting hammered by the ‘shared governance’ leaders because they weren’t involved in the process; however, had they been involved we wouldn’t be doing anything!!” Following the condemnation of President Cross’s comments by the UW–Madison AAUP chapter and by the lone student representative on the “restructuring committee,” the Committee on College and University Governance publicly called on the president to explain his remarks and “to actively work with faculty, staff, and students on developing policies and practices that will restore a meaningful and productive system of shared governance.” To inform the latter effort, the committee recommended the AAUP’s *Statement on Government of Colleges and*

Universities and a 2017 AGB white paper on shared governance, which concludes that “shared governance is an essential component of America’s higher education institutions that needs to be preserved and enhanced.”

Finally, the committee discussed and voted by email on the removal of the governance sanction at the University of Iowa. The committee adopted the following statement regarding the case, the Council concurred, and the 2018 annual meeting voted to remove the sanction.

University of Iowa. The report of the investigating committee concerns departures from AAUP-recommended standards of academic governance that marked the process leading to the selection of a new president, appointed in September 2015 by the state board of regents despite overwhelming faculty objections. The investigation found that, in contrast to historical practice at the university, which had been to involve the faculty fully in presidential searches, the board designed this search process specifically to prevent any meaningful faculty role in the selection of the final candidate.

Immediately following the imposition of the sanction, the faculty senate voted to create an ad hoc committee “to work toward a way to lift the sanction” and also directed its leadership and the faculty council to cooperate with the university’s president and the governing board “to work toward removal of the sanction.” Both a member of the board of regents and a member of the regents’ staff worked closely with the committee, which authored a best-practices document on presidential searches addressing key concerns noted in the investigating committee’s report. The board of regents subsequently stated that this document “will help guide the planning of future presidential transitions as the Board of Regents forms search committees and conducts searches.”

An Association representative visited the University of Iowa in April to assess the institutional climate for academic governance. After meeting with the ad hoc committee, the officers of the senate, and the AAUP chapter leadership, he observed, “There was unanimous agreement among those I spoke to that the climate for governance at UI has improved dramatically since the sanction removal committee began its work in fall 2016. The committee, by virtue of its composition, has brought the faculty and the board of regents together, and both sides have taken advantage of the arrangement in order to rebuild trust. Multiple faculty members described the current state of faculty-board relations as the best in the past 20 years or more.” The report concluded, “The available evidence suggests that there is a genuine commitment to shared governance at UI, and it is reasonable to expect that the institution’s next presidential search will mark a return to the tradition of a strong faculty role.”

The Committee on College and University Governance recommends to the 104th Annual Meeting that the University of Iowa be removed from the Association’s list of sanctioned institutions.

I thank the members of the Committee on College and University Governance for their dedicated work in behalf of the principles of academic governance. I also thank the national staff—especially the members of the Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance—for their unwavering and enthusiastic support and promotion of the committee’s work. ■

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