October 10, 2016

VIA ELECTRONIC AND SURFACE MAIL

Mr. Kessel Stelling, Jr.
Chair
Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Mr. Stelling:

Members of the faculty at Kennesaw State University have urged the American Association of University Presidents to take an official interest in the issues of academic governance raised by the recommendation of the board of regents’ Executive and Compensation Committee to appoint Georgia attorney general Samuel Olens as president of Kennesaw State University. These faculty members have expressed concern that the apparent decision to forego a national search for the Kennesaw State presidency is at odds with widely observed principles of academic governance, a concern that we share.

The Association’s interest in the role of the faculty in such matters as presidential searches stems from our longstanding commitment to sound academic governance, the principles of which are enunciated in the attached Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, originally formulated in conjunction with the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The Statement on Government rests on the premise of appropriately shared responsibility and cooperative action among governing board, administration, and faculty. It refers to “an inescapable interdependence” requiring “adequate communication among these components and full opportunity for joint planning and effort.” While the statement recognizes that “[t]he governing board of an institution of higher education in the United States operates, with few exceptions, as the final institutional authority,” it also recognizes that “the interests of all are coordinate and related and [that] unilateral effort can lead to confusion or conflict.”

As one facet of the “interdependence” called for in the Statement on Government, the document provides that “[j]oint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an
institution chooses a new president. The selection of a chief administrative officer should follow upon cooperative search by the governing board and faculty.” The statement, in emphasizing the shared responsibility of faculty and board in the selection of a president, envisions the faculty’s playing an active role in the decision-making process. Genuine faculty participation in the selection of a college president is likely to enhance confidence in the final selection and thus offer greater promise of a successful administration.

The AAUP’s derivative statement on Faculty Participation in the Selection, Evaluation, and Retention of Administrators (also attached) adds the following procedural recommendations:

The Statement on Government emphasizes the primary role of faculty and board in the search for a president. The search may be initiated either by separate committees of the faculty and board or by a joint committee of the faculty and board or of faculty, board, students, and others, and separate committees may subsequently be joined. In a joint committee, the numbers from each constituency should reflect both the primacy of faculty concern and the range of other groups, including students, that have a legitimate claim to some involvement. Each major group should elect its own members to serve on the committee, and the rules governing the search should be arrived at jointly. A joint committee should determine the size of the majority which will be controlling in making an appointment. When separate committees are used, the board, with which the legal power of appointment rests, should either select a name from among those submitted by the faculty committee or should agree that no person will be chosen over the objections of the faculty committee.

In a letter to the board of regents, dated May 23, 2016, Professor Humayun Zafar, chair of the faculty senate, and Professor Andrew Pieper, president of the local AAUP chapter, outlined a proposal on how to include faculty in a search committee for the new president. When reports began to surface in the news media indicating that Mr. Olens was to be appointed without a national search, the faculty senate adopted a resolution on August 29, 2016, calling upon Chancellor Henry M. Huckaby to advocate for the inclusion of the faculty in a presidential search committee. On October 4, Chancellor Huckaby announced the decision of the board committee to recommend Mr. Olens for the Kennesaw State presidency to the full board.
While the decision of the regents to forego a national search may be permissible under the applicable University System of Georgia policies, the decision is at odds with widely observed principles of academic governance, as it deprives the faculty of its appropriate role in the process. We urge the board of regents not to remove the faculty from the process and instead to conduct a national search with full participation from the faculty.

Sincerely,

Hans-Joerg Tiede, PhD
Associate Secretary
Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Enclosures (by electronic mail only)

Cc: Chancellor Henry M. Huckaby, University System of Georgia
    Interim President Houston D. Davis, Kennesaw State University
    Professor Humayun Zafar, President, Kennesaw State University Faculty Senate
    Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
    Professor Andrew Pieper, President, Kennesaw State University Chapter of the AAUP
    Professor Robert Scott, President, Georgia Conference of the AAUP