



July 16, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC AND SURFACE MAIL

John C. von Lehe Jr., Esq.  
Chairman  
Board of Trustees  
Osborne Administration Building  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, South Carolina 29208

Dear Mr. von Lehe:

The faculty senate at the University of South Carolina has urged the American Association of University Professors to take an official interest in the issues of academic governance raised by reports in the press that the process of selecting the next president of the University of South Carolina is being unduly influenced by Governor Henry McMaster in order to bring about the selection of General Robert Caslen, a candidate for the presidency whom the board had previously declined to appoint. On July 11, the faculty senate adopted a resolution expressing concern that the actions of the governor have damaged the integrity of the search, a concern that we share. On the same day, the faculty senate also voted unanimously that it had “no confidence in General Caslen as a candidate for president of this university.”

The Association’s interest in the integrity of presidential searches and in the role of the faculty in such searches stems from our longstanding commitment to sound academic governance, the principles of which are enunciated in the enclosed *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.”

Mr. John C. von Lehe Jr.

July 16, 2019

Page 2

As one corollary 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 a cooperative search by the governing board and faculty.” In emphasizing the shared responsibility of faculty and board in the selection of a president, the statement envisions the faculty’s playing a meaningful role in the decision-making process. Genuine faculty participation in the selection of a university president is likely to enhance confidence in the final selection and thus offer greater promise of a successful administration.

In response to similar concerns raised by faculty at the University of Iowa about the integrity of the presidential search conducted at that institution in 2015, the Association undertook an investigation of the issues of academic governance posed by the case. On the basis of the published report of the investigating committee, our Committee on College and University Governance concluded that the process had been “at best an illusion of an open, honest search.” As a result, in 2016 the University of Iowa was added to the AAUP’s list of institutions sanctioned for infringement of normative standards of academic governance, where it remained for two years.

We understand that, consistent with AAUP-supported standards, faculty representatives served on the University of South Carolina’s presidential search committee and the evaluation of four finalists, which included General Caslen, by the board of trustees took into account comments received from the faculty at-large following open fora on campus. The board’s evaluation resulted in a decision last April not to appoint any of the four finalists and instead to reopen the search. For the board to change course at this time and appoint General Caslen suggests that the faculty’s participation in the search process was merely for appearance’s sake and calls into question whether the search itself was conducted in good faith. Moreover, recent reports in the press raise the possibility that the board may instead appoint as president a candidate who was not among the four finalists, which would raise even more serious concerns, as such a selection would disregard the faculty’s appropriate role in the process entirely.

The information in our possession has come to us from representatives of the faculty senate, members of faculty, and the press. We appreciate that you may have other information that would contribute to our understanding of what has occurred. We would accordingly welcome your comments. If the facts recounted above are essentially correct, we join the faculty senate in urging the board of trustees “to cancel the current presidential search and begin an open and

Mr. John C. von Lehe Jr.

July 16, 2019

Page 3

legitimate search process as described in its bylaws and as recommended by the American Association of University Professors.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. J. Tiede". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "H" and "J".

Hans-Joerg Tiede  
Associate Secretary

Enclosures by electronic mail

cc: President Harris Pastides  
Professor Marco Valtorta, Faculty Senate Chair  
Professor Mark Cooper, Faculty Senate Chair-Elect  
Professor J. Mark Blackwell, President, South Carolina Conference of the AAUP