

Dear Faculty Senators,

Thank you for participating in the information sessions this week. We had a great turnout with almost 70 senators participating on Monday and almost 40 participating on Wednesday. I apologize to those who could not attend. I originally thought we might have an open meeting, but there were concerns that people might not feel comfortable speaking freely, and thus the EC voted to have it be a private closed meeting.

This letter serves as a brief update for those who could not attend. Herein are some of the concerns that were presented during the meeting. It also serves as a document that you may share with your constituents so that you may be able to get their feedback.

The issues we're dealing with are large. The primary issue at hand is whether or not we would like to advocate for faculty participation in presidential searches, and what that would look like. I can provide some context on what searches looked like in the past...

The system policy for presidential searches has decayed over the past 20 or so years. In 1999 the policy specified that four faculty should be part of the search advisory committee. The current system policy states that the Board of Regents may include faculty at their discretion. The history of system policies is here: [31.02.01 - Administration of Employee Benefits Programs \(tamus.edu\)](#)

There are three main questions that I suppose may come up for a vote on the floor on Monday.

Should we do a full national search right now for a permanent president?

The context for this is as follows:

1. The university's reputation is not great right now. The recent national search for the dean of the College of Arts of Sciences did not yield a single external candidate in the final pool, which says something about the university's current ability to attract external top talent.
2. There is a general sentiment that General Welsh is doing a good job. He is supportive of a national search but, because of his commitment to fairness, is concerned about putting his name in the hat as interim for fear that the search may appear rigged.
3. There is a general sentiment that it would be good to have a permanent president so that they may be able to make the substantive changes the university currently needs.
4. General Welsh participated in the last search and was one of four finalists, and was fully vetted by a presidential search process containing 7 faculty on the committee.

If we don't do a full search right now, should the faculty be able to vet the candidate and provide transparent faculty feedback on the candidate?

If we vote that we should not do a full national search right now, should faculty be able to provide input as per their opinion on whether General Welsh should be appointed? What would this input consist of? What should the process be for gathering feedback?

The context of this is as follows:

1. The Chancellor is supportive of a Faculty Senate-led process for vetting the process. This would mean that the Faculty Senate could define the process.
2. My opinion for what a Faculty Senate-led vetting process would look like includes the following (each of these items may constitute a separate vote and may require additional meetings and discussion):
 - a. An oversight committee that is co-chaired by the Speaker of the Faculty Senate and another person committed to shared governance that is not on the Faculty Senate (nor in Engineering, since I am in Engineering). The oversight committee would consist of at least one person from each college/school and one person from each rank including Librarian (hopefully these two groups will largely overlap). It would be my preference that these people be elected. (An alternative might be that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee serves as that oversight committee. This is not my preference.)
 - b. A listening tour or forum with appropriate constituent groups. The appropriate groups, number, and process would be determined by the oversight committee and the interim president. (Options might include a) just one big forum, b) three different forums for APT, pre-tenure, and tenured, c) the groups from the quick look, or d) something else.
 - c. A visionary/strategic plan talk by the President. This could happen before or after the listening tour. My preference would be that this occurs on November 29th, during the State of the University address.
 - d. A survey where all faculty have the opportunity to provide feedback to General Welsh on a) his overall fitness as the next permanent President through a quantitative Likert scale, and b) one or more qualitative questions where faculty may provide feedback on his vision, what he might be missing, and what they valued in his strategic plan. The oversight committee might help design the questions and the survey.
 - e. A summary of the Faculty survey data. The purpose of this would be to ensure that the narrative effectively represents the voice of the faculty. Otherwise, it would be tempting for people and the media to select comments and create their own narrative not representative of the voice of the faculty. I believe the oversight committee would be particularly valuable in this instance.
3. The context behind this is that the Chancellor has already approved the Faculty Senate to lead a vetting process. The Chancellor has also stated (several weeks ago) that he intends to wait for our feedback before committing to the next step of either recommending placing General Welsh in the permanent presidency or opting for a national search and he believes that the Board of Regents has the same intention. So far that has held true. The Board of Regents did NOT nominate General Welsh as the sole finalist as permanent President at this week's Board of Regents meeting even

though they certainly had the right to. For those people who may worry that the next Board of Regents meeting in February might be too far off for a decision regarding whether General Welsh is the permanent President, you should know that the Board of Regents can make an in-person or phone meeting to do this at any time provided they give three days' notice. The Chancellor has stated that he will seriously consider our input. He also stated a valid outcome might be that based on our feedback, the Regents might opt to do a full national search if the Faculty does not determine that General Welsh is appropriate for the position. The Chancellor also stated at this week's meeting with the Executive Committee that an open search is possible, including having finalists interview publicly in College Station, but that would most certainly preclude many of the best candidates considering if they were not selected here, their Boards of Regents would consider demoting them as they had documented interest in interviewing elsewhere. Thus, a truly open search at this time might likely be a failed search, one that would potentially further damage our current national reputation. The Executive Committee will be meeting in person with the Chair of the Board of Regents on Monday, and he has said he is interested in meeting with the full Senate soon. This has not occurred in several years.

4. General Welsh has also said that he is supportive of this process. He wants to talk with the Faculty. He wants to make sure that he has the voice of the faculty to help him make and follow through with an effective strategic plan.

Should we urge for an update of the current system policy on presidential searches?

As mentioned above, the system policy for presidential searches has decayed over the past 20 or so years. I believe that the Faculty Senate should urge the Board of Regents and the Chancellor to create a task force consisting of at least half faculty (less than 50% administrative appointment) to examine and advise the Board of Regents on the system policies related to presidential searches to improve the presidential search process so that it is in the best interest of improving shared governance and collaboration between Board of Regents, the Chancellor, the university administrators, and the Faculty.

The last presidential search had 7 faculty members on the search advisory committee, which is great but doesn't guarantee any faculty voice in the next presidential search, especially if years down the road there is a change in the makeup of the Board of Regents or the System office. I believe that the Chancellor and the Board of Regents would be open to such a task force; I think it will support further shared governance. There is already recent evidence of their working to support shared governance in the updating of system policies regarding academic freedom.

My personal overall visionary goal for my term as Speaker of the Faculty Senate is to improve shared governance. I believe we have made several positive strides in this direction. Nonetheless, I also believe there is further to go and that a process similar to that above would help us move further in that direction. Notice that the overall goal of the vetting process is to ensure that every single faculty member has the opportunity to have their voice heard. This hasn't happened in over twenty years.

Nothing here is set in stone. And this in no way represents all of the possible options that might occur. These are things that we are discussing and will continue to discuss, and any future motion will be decided by the Faculty Senate. And all of these don't have to be decided on Monday. We can also vote to have another meeting to give the Faculty more time to digest the myriad of choices.

Note that one option that might come out of this is that we do nothing. More than one Senator has voiced this preference. The rationale behind this is that if we vet the President and then it goes wrong, the blame would fall on us. That is always a risk, but I would prefer the Faculty to have a voice rather than not have a voice any day of the week. And yes, with power comes responsibility. If we truly want shared governance, if we truly want the faculty to have a voice, we have to accept the responsibility that comes with it.

Also, I must state that this letter included several opinions, and I want to emphasize that those opinions listed here are my opinions and not the opinions of the Faculty, the Faculty Senate, or even the Faculty Senate Executive Committee.

Okay. Thank you for listening. If anyone wants more information, please send me an email and I will send you my cell phone so I can attempt to answer any questions you might have and also attempt to understand your perspective in this matter.

I very much look forward to a lively discussion this coming Monday.

Yours always,

Tracy

Tracy Hammond, Speaker of the Faculty Senate