

45 Minutes

In the 45 minutes between 12:15 pm and 1:00 pm, the six new faculty in the Department of Economics, Finance and International Business got their first lesson in the CoB *modus operandi* and in how EFIB chair George Carter executes the administrative script.

During the EFIB departmental governance vote, new economics faculty Sami Dakhli and Akbar Marvasti wished to discuss the three governance options: a committee of three (chair excluded), committee of three (chair included), and committee of one (chair only). Questions were raised regarding historical outcomes, pros and cons, and all the while Carter and other longtime USM faculty looked uneasy. Younger faculty, the ones not new to USM, looked uneasy as well – the boat was being rocked, and the old guys didn't like it one bit – surely this couldn't bode well for the young guys either.

Conspicuous in their absence from the meeting were CoB associate dean Farhang Niroomand, former CoB dean Bill Gunther, and new finance assistant professor Stephen Haggard. Questions were answered and discussion was brief and uneasy. Then, like a gunshot in the night, new finance assistant professor Matthew Hood asked a perfectly reasonable question. Could one abstain from voting? The question is perfectly rational; a new faculty who has only been on campus for a few weeks wished to abstain, perhaps in deference to colleagues more experienced at USM and perhaps in what would, anywhere besides USM, be considered a deft political move.

Hood's question was met with a short answer from Carter, whose response cut Hood off at the knees. Yes, abstinence was possible, but to abstain is not a good way for an assistant professor to start off his career, shirking his departmental responsibilities. Hood choked this answer down and let it lie. There was Lesson Number One: George Carter, known for his ubiquitous "Happy Day" greeting is referred to privately as the Smiling Assassin, shaking your hand with his right while his left buries a stiletto between your shoulder blades. Robotic and not to be trusted, Carter works for the dean, and don't ever forget it. Hood's lesson wasn't as painful as it could have been, but it was a hell of an introduction for a rookie.

Subsequently Carter called for a vote on the issue, and the results of that vote rocked EFIB and the CoB. For the first time in many years, a CoB department would have a committee structure for personnel issues as outlined in the USM faculty handbook. Shock registered on the faces of the old timers as they realized that Carter would not have the only say in the 2006 annual evaluations for EFIB faculty – governance option number two had won. Shock was quickly replaced by thinly veiled anger, but the old timers knew what to do.

Carter called for nominations to round out the committee and suggested that, in addition to the requisites specified in the USM faculty handbook, the members be tenured full professors. Someone suggested that the names of all tenured full professors be slated and that those unwilling to serve could decline nomination, a suggestion that drew visible wincing from professor of economics Charles Sawyer. Carter ignored the suggestion, but all tenured full professors were eventually nominated explicitly by professor of economics Frank Mixon, so Carter wrote the names of all eligible full professors on the board. Almost immediately, Sawyer and professor of economics Ed Nissan declined to be nominated. Carter's response was simply, "That's their right." Lesson Number Two: while untenured assistant professors are expected to toe the line, do the work, shut their mouths, and not complain when given the short end of the rewards stick, old timers get to shirk responsibility that accompanies advanced rank, all the while reaping benefits of someone who actually does work. Sawyer is the king of shirking, having spent a career avoiding conflict for fear that principle might cost him a nickel or two. Maybe he learned at the feet of Nissan, who has been avoiding any responsibility since the 1970's. The old timers had a plan, however.

Working in silent concert, the old timers moved to block the election of anyone who might rock the boat. Like using a sixth sense, old timers gravitated to the names of Bill Gunther (former dean who was not even present at the meeting) and Mark Klinedinst (former EFIB chair), placing them among the top four vote getters to join Carter on the three person committee. However, professor of finance Tom Lindley beat Gunther out for the right to join Klinedinst and Carter as the EFIB Personnel Committee. Here was Lesson Number Three: the old timers naturally gravitate to the least threatening, best outcome for their rent seeking behavior. In this case, several old timers voted for Gunther and Klinedinst, two former CoB administrators who certainly would not rock the boat. Boat rockers are unwelcome in the CoB.

Old timers were now reeling. Tom Lindley on the committee? How would the traditional manipulation of the Cob evaluation and raise system continue with a vocal outsider involved? Heads were visibly shaking. Sawyer's head dropped into his hands. It was beautiful. Carter kept his composure, but he was seething behind his affected smile. EFIB tenure and promotion representatives still had to be chosen, but tenure and promotion are small potatoes for tenured faculty who are all very close to retirement when compared to potential raise money.

In 45 minutes, new faculty in EFIB learned three very valuable lessons. In 45 minutes, they had an opportunity to see some of senior faculty for who they really are. In 45 minutes, the groundwork for change in EFIB was laid. Had those 45 minutes gone true to form, business as usual would reign in EFIB, as it does in the CoB. Maybe the next 45 minutes will change the CoB.