

Is USM an Institution Lost in the Academic Sea?

Faculty Senate President's Remarks Say It's So

In his opening remarks at the 4-Nov-2011 USM faculty senate meeting, faculty senate president Timothy Rehner painted the picture of an academic institution that is seemingly without a compass. USMNEWS.net reporters have transcribed Rehner's comments for USMNEWS.net readers to consider:

"A few observations first. I think, the more time I spend with [USM] administration, I'm impressed that people seem to have different agendas that they're pushing, and not everybody seems to know what they are. So, I'll talk to the provost, [and] it'll be 'this' framing. You talk to the president, and it'll be a different 'one.' Up here, for example, if we're seeking more [faculty] positions, requests for positions are coming through the PAC committee. There's also been invitations from the associate deans to departments to put in requests for faculty needs. So, it seems like there's an approach, on the one hand, that we use the PAC for positions coming out of the provost's office, and then there's a different request coming out for positions some place else. Just inconsistencies. Second observation, and we've talked about it before – it came up at the [faculty senate] retreat – but just what's . . . how does the governance structure in the university work? After the UPC process, we had questions about the extent to which recommendations that came out of UPC were really folded into what were the decisions that got made in the end. I think now there's . . . at least I'm asking some questions about how the recommendations that came out of PAC were really integrated into the decision about 'College of Nursing' or 'School of Nursing' . . . Questions about how does the voice of the governance committees really affect . . . how does it contribute to the decisions that are being made? And I think as a faculty, we need to be real concerned about what is the process, and how our governance structures get used, and then if we spend the time working in these [governance] committees, our work should count for something . . . And, the third thing that keeps coming up for me is how do we get our direction? I mentioned it last month, in terms of strategic direction for the university, how do we decide where we're going? [I'm] beginning to think that some kind of a university council that has a perspective across the university may not be a bad idea to think about. So, I'm just more sharing some observations . . . But, what would such a committee do? One is, I think, they could press for a strategic direction – things like issues of salary compression, recruitment of minority faculty – give some direction to whether we're going to be a 'teaching university' or a 'research university.' Right now, talking to [administration] earlier, those two agendas, I think, are running head on to one another. We keep recruiting. We end up with more enrollment. Everybody has to teach more. We have to get more instructors . . . And, there's pressure from the VP of research to generate more external [grants] funding. The faculty have to do more research, but we can't hire those kind of people to do the research. I mean, 'we can't do everything,' and I think some decisions need to be made about . . . what kind of things do we need to invest in?"

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that one can't analyze Rehner's remarks without sensing that the Martha Saunders administration is either asleep at the helm, or absent from it altogether. Saunders is in halfway through the first year of her second term (i.e., her fifth year) as USM's president, and yet the institution appears to be rudderless amidst rough academic seas. The economy is still floundering. USM's tuition has been climbing consistently. Yet, if one tracks Saunders' activities in recent weeks, one almost certainly concludes that the surprising fortunes of USM's football team, which is currently 8-1 on the 2011 season and seemingly headed to the C-USA championship game, is an all-consuming enterprise in her life.

Fortunately for USM faculty, Rehner appears as though he might just be the right person for the faculty senate's highest position at just the right time. Though some of his conclusions might be off base – the idea of a campus wide faculty council to press for accountability in faculty governances seems more like a request for a second faculty senate – at least he's bringing such issues to the

forefront for USM faculty to consider. Sources remind USMNEWS.net readers that it was Rehner, at a recent faculty senate meeting, who “[outed](#)” what appears to have been a racial segregation of sorts in USM’s student housing division – a situation that Saunders retorted was purely accidental. Still, sources point out, any push for a publicly articulated “strategic vision” for USM will most likely result in only another large contract for Mona Amodeo, Saunders’ public relations [guru friend](#) from Pensacola, [who also](#) put together [the slick](#) break-out panels/sessions and fancy pamphlets for Saunders/USM back during Saunders’ early days atop the institution.