

Louisiana State University Chapter
American Association of University Professors
Academic Freedom for a Free Society

LSU – AAUP CHAPTER STATEMENT
ON THE PROPOSED REALIGNMENT OF ACADEMIC UNITS

June 3, 2009

The AAUP supports shared governance as one of its primary missions.

Positive benefits of shared governance. The AAUP commitment to shared governance, which entails that the Faculty Senate, the proper governance unit of the faculty, be included in any significant decision-making process, is not simply a negative position, seeking only to preserve faculty rights, but is also a positive position. Simply put, LSU is a better university when it benefits from the enormous resource that is the collective intelligence of the faculty.

Time constraints can make shared governance difficult – it is still unclear what role the current budget crisis played in the origin and pace of the realignment plan – but the faculty and the LSU administrators can use various means of electronic communication (for example, internet surveys, which are already in common use by the administration), in combination with the existing departmental and Faculty Senate structure, to solicit faculty input along the way and so take advantage of both our collective expertise and our desire to help.

For in the end, shared governance rests on a positive outlook: shared governance will help the university become better. Faculty members do not want to be included in decisions in order to protect turf; we want to be included to help the administration advance the institution to which we are devoting our careers; and by extension we want to continue to serve the people of the state of Louisiana, whose community project LSU is.

The proposed realignment plan. In this context, the recent announcement by the administration of a completed plan to reorganize the academic units at LSU is troubling on two counts. First, no cost-benefit analysis was supplied to support the move, so the faculty is unable to judge the plan in any meaningful way, and second, and most troubling, the faculty was excluded in any meaningful way from the development of the plan.

No cost-benefit analysis. First, we note that there has been no cost-benefit analysis provided with the plan, as would be expected for shared governance. To have the faculty truly involved in judging this plan we need to know how much the reorganization is going to cost to implement. We also need to see estimates on how long it will take to break even on those costs by putative savings and/or increased revenues. We also need to see the method by which the cost-benefit analysis was conducted. Shared governance has been ignored in this case, as we are not able to judge the completed plan due to the lack of a standard cost-benefit analysis.

Lack of meaningful faculty involvement in the development of the plan. Second, and much more troubling, is the exclusion of meaningful faculty involvement in the development of the plan. The Chancellor's informational memo to the Board of Supervisors contains the following paragraph purporting to describe the process by which the plan was developed:

We propose the following changes to LSU's organizational structure (Tables 1 and 2). These changes were developed in discussions with the University Planning Council, shared with both the Faculty and Staff senates for feedback and presented at a campus-wide forum. The Provost has met with the faculty and / or chairs of all the affected units to elicit comments. We are available to offer further clarity and justification as needed and look forward to the Flagship Committee's and the Board's concurrence in what is an internal realignment and selective renaming of several academic units.

This narrative raises several issues:

1. Claiming that the "changes were developed in discussions with the University Planning Council" (UPC) is no doubt true, but overlooks the fact that the UPC is not an organ of faculty governance; that task, as determined by the Board of Supervisors, is the responsibility of the Faculty Senate. The UPC is a mixed group of administrators and faculty members selected by administrators; the faculty members of the UPC serve at the pleasure of the administration and are not elected by the faculty. Furthermore, the Chair of the UPC is Provost Merget. Thus discussions behind the closed doors of the UPC cannot be held to constitute shared governance.
2. Claiming that the plan was "shared" with the Faculty Senate for "feedback" is slightly misleading as it was only "shared" after the plan was fully formulated. Shared governance is meaningless unless the proper governance organ, the Faculty Senate, is involved in the development of plans.
3. Claiming that the plan was "presented at a campus-wide forum" ignores the fact that it was presented as an already completed plan set to go into effect shortly.
4. Claiming that the Provost has met with "affected units to elicit comments" is misleading; in one sense, every unit on campus is affected by this plan and hence the Faculty Senate, as the governance unit for the entire faculty, should have been involved in the development of the plan. Beyond that, "eliciting comments" on an already completed plan set to go into effect shortly is not consistent with shared governance.

The evasion of shared governance continues with the so-called transition and implementation process. The next paragraph of the Chancellor's memo reads:

The Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost has established a participatory transition/implementation process. Through this process, we will assess the academic and administrative changes associated with realignment. Based on the outcomes of this process, we will phase in realignment implementation.

There are several issues here. First, having an administration-appointed committee is not consistent with shared governance. The Faculty Senate is the elected faculty representatives at LSU and should be the organ for all shared governance decisions. Secondly, this paragraph

shows that the secretly developed realignment plan is now the default setting, so that the administration need not justify the plan by a standard cost-benefit analysis. Finally, it seems the only thing "participatory transition/implementation process" can possibly affect is timing; the realignment will occur no matter what the transition team comes up with.

In conclusion. In our role as advocates for shared governance, we urge the Board to remember that the Faculty Senate should have been involved in the development of this plan from its inception and to take its exclusion from the development of this plan into consideration when and if it ever comes to the Board for action.

On behalf of the LSU AAUP Chapter,

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Brooks B. Ellwood, Vice-President

And other members of the Executive Committee