

Call for a University-wide Summit on Organization and Governance

Recent discussions over institutional governance issues have been mired in conflicting interpretations of the Statutes and General Rules, or over the meaning of ambiguous slogans like “One university, three campuses,” whose concrete implications for organization are unclear.

Myles Brand, President of Indiana University in the 1990’s, expressed reservations about IU’s own version of this slogan:

Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is a nasty nuisance when we are talking about the connections between IU’s campuses. Previous efforts to capture the concept in a metaphor have occasionally met with criticism. Remember “one university with eight front doors”?

The Diehl report shows that comparable universities to ours rely on a variety of models, but that generally these fall into multi-campus and multi-site models. The first are more system-like. The latter tend to revolve around a single central campus, usually with the President at its helm, and a variety of smaller regional branches. We believe that the “One university, three campuses” slogan obscures these fundamentally different models. The University of Illinois is clearly more of the first type; the Chicago and Springfield campuses rightly do not consider themselves regional branches of the Urbana campus.

Rather than continuing to debate differing interpretations of this slogan, which appears nowhere in the Statutes or General Rules, we seek a wider university discussion over the following principles, all of which either derive from the Statutes and General Rules, or are at least consistent with them. Each is, we believe, essential to a properly functioning organization.

We urge our fellow Senates and University Senates Conference to add their endorsement.

We are not proposing any specific membership for this summit meeting, and details would need to be arranged. But the discussion ought to include representatives of faculty governance, student governance, all three campus Chancellors, the President, and representatives of the Board of Trustees.

In keeping with our governing documents and with the information presented in the Diehl Report, we propose that the following principles should support planning for the future of our University:

1. The General Rules affirm that the University of Illinois is not “a system of *totally* independent units.” It is, however a system of *largely* independent units, each possessing “a high degree of delegated authority.” Each university campus is a constitutionally self-governing entity, each with its own Senate. At the same time, the campuses should work together to “achieve intercampus cooperation,” and “to avoid unnecessary duplication” through shared services organized through the university-level administration.
2. The campuses are not simply local or regional branches of a single institutional entity. Each is an independently accredited university campus, with distinct identities, functions, constituencies, and national/international reputations.

3. The Chancellor of each campus is its Chief Executive Officer – the leader, chief decision maker, and the public face of the campus. While properly reporting to the President, and having additional responsibilities that may be delegated by the President, the powers and responsibilities inherent in the role of Chief Executive are not delegated and may not be withdrawn or compromised.
4. One of the inherent responsibilities of each Chancellor as Chief Executive is representing his/her campus in wider organizations of which the campus is the constituent member.
5. Another key principle is chain of command. If this is a principle in the relation of President to Chancellor, as has been asserted, then it must equally be a principle from the Chancellor flowing down through the campus.
6. Specific to that principle, all campus-level staff should report to the Chancellor. Any additional reporting or consultative lines to university administration must be secondary to those campus reporting lines.
7. Also specific to that principle is that formal meetings that the President initiates with campus-level officers, faculty, or students should occur only after the President has consulted with the Chancellor about doing so; and in many cases the Chancellor will properly expect to be included in such meetings. This is not only a gesture of collegial respect to the Chancellor; it avoids giving the message that campus officials, faculty, or students can or should circumvent the Chancellor in taking issues directly to the President.
8. Following up on another central conclusion of the Diehl report, academic policy matters are generally best left to decision-making closer to the level at which academic initiatives, including research initiatives, are actually developed and managed. Centralization of these matters is usually counterproductive, and inconsistent with the distinct roles and identities of the campuses.
9. Finally, as the Statutes specify, any proposals for organizational restructuring that bear upon academic policy matters must be submitted as formal proposals for faculty review through the University Senates Conference and/or the individual Senates.

We believe that the time has come for a University-wide discussion of the implications of these principles for planned administrative restructuring and for the progressive implementation of changes already approved. We hope that the results of a smaller-group summit, along the lines proposed here, can then stimulate and inform a wider university conversation about the kind of institution we want to be.