

RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Senate

As President Hogan's September 27, 2010 Transmittal to the University Senates Conference and his October 15, 2010 "FAQ" acknowledge, this is a challenging time for the University of Illinois. Several years of budget cuts, uncertain state funding, faculty and staff furloughs, key faculty losses, and a growing uncertainty about the future, have combined to damage the morale of faculty, students, and staff. As participants in shared governance and partners committed to protecting and serving this institution, we are prepared to have serious discussions about reorganizing, restructuring, and rethinking the University to adapt to this "new normal." But such reforms must be formulated and carried forth in a way that understands the sources of faculty, staff, and student uncertainty and concern.

We cannot accept these proposals in their current form, for three primary reasons. First, while quoting selectively from the Statutes and General Rules to support a vision of a single, unitary University of Illinois, the proposals neglect, and in important respects contravene, statutory language specifying the degree of independence that the campuses actually do have, and must have, within our system.

Second, the proposals lack sufficient detail about implementation and costs to fairly evaluate their implications for the institution. In several instances, the proposals and their rationale contain internal contradictions, further exacerbating faculty, staff, and student concerns about just what is being proposed, and why.

Third, without questioning the intentions of the Board of Trustees and President Hogan – who, we believe, certainly have the very best interests of the institution in mind in putting forth these proposals – we conclude that some of these proposals will have questionable, and in some cases harmful, effects on the quality of the campuses, and therefore also upon the University as a whole. Because we do assume the good intent of all parties concerned, we hope that raising these concerns will slow down the process of implementation, and open up a further conversation about what we are trying to accomplish and how it can be achieved more effectively.

The rationale for these positions, and more detailed reactions to the proposals to revise the Statutes and General Rules on the Vice Presidents and other matters, are contained within the full report endorsed by the UIUC Senate Executive Committee (SEC).

We share nearly all the aims described in the proposals coming from President Hogan and the Board. It would be foolish to argue against the virtues of saving costs through shared services, achieving greater administrative efficiencies, and encouraging more cross-campus cooperation. Where we differ with the proposals is whether these particular changes are necessary for achieving these aims, and whether these proposed

changes entail other unintended consequences that will be harmful to the institution we all care about and support.

We see in the Statutes and General Rules a careful “both/and” balance between centralization and decentralization; between the proper scope of Presidential and Chancellorial authority; and between the unified character of the University as a whole and the distinct missions, identities, and qualities of the three campuses. We do not think that these proposals, presented as a package and judged overall, maintain this balance adequately. On the contrary, we believe they would be counterproductive, reducing the flexibility and discretion of the campuses to pursue excellence, each in its own way.

While it is certainly true that there is no contradiction between distinct identities and excellence across the three university campuses *and* greater collaboration and interaction among them, there *is* a contradiction between the strongly integrative vision of the university as a single “organic whole” presented in some of these proposals and a vision that accords with three premier campus universities maintaining distinct brands and identities. We believe that the commitment to maintaining the distinct identities and excellence of the three university campuses must be prioritized *above* the discourse of “one university.”

This is probably the area that is causing the greatest consternation among faculty, staff, and students. Here is the crucial fact: the faculty and students who have come to each of these three campus universities did so *not* because of the identity or quality of some larger “organic whole.” They came to each university campus because of its distinctive strengths and reputation. They see themselves within a distinct tradition of excellence, not just as pieces of a whole that is “greater than the sum of its parts.” And many of them see these changes as fundamentally threatening the quality and distinctness of the campus of which they feel part.

It is not necessary to implement a strongly integrative “one university” vision to promote efforts of synergy and collaboration that truly could lift all boats. Nor are most of the proposed changes to the Statutes and General Rules necessary for this to happen.

The proposed changes are continually justified in terms of cost savings, but curiously the supporting documents offer no detail about their costs, let alone hypothetical future savings. These proposals involve creating one new VP and two new Executive Directors, while conducting national searches for, and expanding the operations of, two other VPs. What would this cost in terms of salaries for the four or five positions being filled? If other recent UA hires are any indication, the salaries for these positions would be set at levels well above current levels. What would be the size and costs of office staff needed to take on the new duties entailed by these new positions and/or their added responsibilities? What accommodations would need to be made to provide office space for these new administrative officers and their staff? How will these changes be achieved on top of the Board of Trustees’ demand to see a reduction of 5-10% in administrative costs? We are not told.

Instead, we are told that key positions will “more than pay for themselves” in the long run; or will be paid for by cuts (at the campus level) of unspecified size or consequences to campus operations. This lack of specificity for a proposal of this magnitude and consequence is inexplicable. We are being asked to provide our advice on a plan to spend unspecified but considerable amounts of money up front, with no indication of where the initial funding would come from. Questions about how these changes will be funded in the long term are met only with assurances that new revenues and unspecified cuts further down the road will make up for these expenses.

Finally, we must ask: If we do need, as President Hogan contends, a “cultural transformation” across the institution, is this the way to achieve it? The lack of consultation in developing the proposals themselves and the tone with which they have sometimes been presented and justified to faculty, staff, and students, have so far achieved the opposite of a “cultural transformation.” They have increased anxieties and suspicions about what is intended, and have exacerbated the very difficult morale issues that the campuses already face.

A true “cultural transformation” model would take the time to engage relevant actors, explain and modify proposals in light of legitimate concerns, and pursue formal organizational changes as the *last* stage of implementation, not the first. We fully recognize the severity of the challenges we face and the need for prompt action, but there simply is no benefit in making even sensible changes if they are done in a counterproductive way. This is the situation in which we currently find ourselves.

We believe that the way in which these proposals have been rolled out and justified to the campuses has exacerbated uncertainty and a loss of morale at what is already a very vulnerable time. The lack of detail, lack of explanation and rationale, lack of time for a deliberative consultative process, and lack of information on financial matters, all signify to us a proposal that is too rushed, insufficiently considered and discussed, and therefore underdeveloped.

We are not saying no to any changes, or even to some of these changes, developed and implemented in a different way. But we are saying no to them in this form and at this time. We believe truly and with good reasons that they will do harm to this institution, and to the campuses, at a time when external forces are already working to their detriment.

We strongly encourage an expedited process to revise these proposals, clarify some of their key details, and better explain their implementation and consequences, in response to the questions and concerns raised here and elaborated in the full SEC Response. Such revisions and clarifications would greatly assist us in making a final recommendation on the possible merits of those proposals.