

Response to the editorial of Mr. Michael Gartner

From the Executive Committee, Iowa State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

In his recent *Register* editorial Michael Gartner makes a number of statements regarding the Regents institutions. We would like to offer a response to some of his points.

Shared Governance and Tenure

Even though the teaching, research, and extension programs that are the heart of the university would not exist without the professional expertise and hard work of faculty, it seems that every discussion of problems at the Regents institutions begins with proposals to make working conditions worse for faculty and to make it harder for the Regents institutions to attract and retain talented young faculty. Mr. Gartner's statement that shared governance should be discarded indicates a lack of understanding of what shared governance actually means.

Shared governance is an acknowledgement that faculty are not simply employees, but have significant responsibility for managing essential university functions. Teaching, research, and extension programs are created by faculty and to a considerable extent managed and supervised by faculty. For example, the work of creating, evaluating, and approving courses and majors is done by faculty working through faculty curriculum committees at the department, college, and university level. Only faculty have the professional expertise to do this. What is often not understood outside of the university is the large amount of time and effort faculty spend outside of their own teaching and research working on university business.

AAUP has worked for 100 years in support of a strong tenure system as a protector of academic freedom. Our society benefits greatly from having faculty free to pursue research and teaching without threat of reprisal from powerful special interests. Eliminating tenure would leave faculty vulnerable. Do the people of Iowa really want universities that teach only what the current party in power in Des Moines wants them to teach, or universities that do only research that the party in power deems appropriate? As a practical matter, if the Iowa Regents universities unilaterally eliminate tenure they would be giving themselves an enormous handicap in the national and global competition for top talent. Why would a top young faculty member take a job at an institution in Iowa that does not grant tenure when he or she could take a job at other institution that does?

The university system of shared governance with a strong tenure system to protect academic freedom has helped make the U.S. university system the envy of the world.

Academic administrators

Mr. Gartner seems especially concerned that faculty on search committees will choose "academics" as university presidents. Consider the current Presidents of the Regents institutions. Greg Geoffroy, Ben Allen, and Sally Mason are all "academics" who were successful faculty members, successful department chairs,

successful deans, and successful provosts before becoming presidents. Rather than being naïve and inexperienced, all three are accomplished professional administrators with many years of experience and long track records of success in administrating academic institutions. All were well aware of what the duties of a university president are before they sought such a position and were aware of the impact their decisions can have throughout their institution.

Search committees and open searches are important manifestations of a key university belief that all individuals are judged by merit and earn success through their efforts. Students are not granted admission to the Regents institutions because their family made large donations; they earn admission by their own efforts and earn their degree by their performance in class. Faculty and administrators are hired in open searches run by broadly representative search committees as a way of ensuring that the best candidate is hired from a large pool of applicants. President Geoffroy was chosen by a broadly representative search committee, and as part of the process presented himself publicly as a candidate and made his case as to why he should get the job. He earned his position by being the best candidate, and the open nature of the search gives him legitimacy.

Faculty workload

Mr. Gartner suggests faculty teaching loads should be increased, and comments on the classroom contact hours apparently to suggest that faculty are not working very hard. He should know better. The Board of Regents has taken numerous surveys that show faculty typically work an average of between 50 and 60 hours per week. Their time is divided between teaching, research, and service. All three are essential activities of the Regents Universities. If more time is to be spent on teaching, then what other activities should be cut back? Should the faculty do less research? At ISU research brought in more than \$342million last year and at the University of Iowa more than \$456 million, much more than either tuition or the state appropriation. How much of that funding does Mr. Gartner want these universities to give up? In addition to the dollar value, research advances knowledge in the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Engineering, Agriculture, and the Sciences, to the great benefit of Iowa and society at large. University research benefits businesses, especially small businesses that use university faculty research to solve their problems. Research also keeps faculty current in their fields. Who would Mr. Gartner rather have teaching the children of Iowa: faculty who read textbooks or faculty who write textbooks, faculty who read about advances in their field or faculty who make advances in their field?

Mr. Gartner complains about the use of teaching assistants. Teaching assistants are graduate students working toward higher degrees. Many go on to careers of teaching at 2-year or 4-year colleges. Learning to teach in their disciplines is an essential part of their education.

Politicization

The danger of allowing politicians to make decisions at the Regents institutions has long been known, but the answer is not for the Regents and top administrators to seek to run the institutions by top-down dictates. A key purpose of

the Regents system is to protect the faculty from political pressure that would compromise their ability to do unbiased research and teaching. This would destroy the university's reputation as an honest purveyor of information. This destruction could also be accomplished by micromanaging Regents or by a politically appointed president of the Board of Regents. The current system has several layers of protection to prevent that from happening, including: the role of the Board of Regents to insulate the system from the whims of elected officials, administrators who are selected by open searches and chosen by merit, and strong systems of faculty shared governance and academic freedom that protect the Regents institutions from pressures from special interest groups.

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