

November 21, 2014

The following is an email from President Mroz to Tami Olson, Chair of the Senate Administrative Policy Committee, commenting on the upcoming annual Presidential evaluation.

Tami

Thanks for offering me the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the draft evaluation proposal. First, a couple of broad issue comments:

As you probably know, the Senate is not prevented from conducting the survey in any way it wishes under the current procedures. And as you might suspect, changing the Senate document to make it more prescriptive may be fraught with more difficulties than it's worth to change it.

My suggestion last year was that we could all benefit from 1) an improved survey instrument and 2) better reporting since the survey does not really evaluate individual performance as much as it reports what people think of the current state of affairs on campus. That information is surely helpful, but it could be even more helpful if we were able to learn more from the responses so that we can refine programs to appropriately serve the needs of employees. This draft seems to take a fairly complex approach to address those issues, creating separate instruments for different groups of employees. The use of more sampling expertise in the development of the survey and analysis is good and is not prevented by the current process.

A second more basic issue the Senate may want to seriously consider is whether it is wise to have the responsibility for the survey rest with a University level committee, rather than the Senate. As proposed, this University level committee would report to the Senate. However, University level committees do not report to the Senate, so if approved, the Senate would in effect be giving up their authority to someone else. Given that this is an evaluation of the president, and the Board essentially supervises the president, it could be argued that the authority for a University level committee evaluating the President would ultimately rest with the Board of Control. Frankly, I think moving the survey to a University level committee outside the Senate would defeat the purpose of the Senate as an independent voice on campus. The Board already has a standing Leadership Committee that is charged with the evaluation of the President with their own procedures, and the input from the Senate has been considered in that process. The proposed changes could result in diminished influence of the Senate.

Here are some more detailed comments on the draft:

It's not clear who is actually being evaluated with the proposal. "University Leadership" can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. For example, there's the President, Vice President, Associate Vice Presidents, Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Center Directors, Executive Directors etc. When we started this in 2004, it was a evaluation of the president. Last year it included those at the Vice President level, but not all of them (e.g it included the Chief Financial Officer but not the Chief Information Officer). Working out these inconsistencies would be good whatever the fate of this proposal.

Related to this, there are some internal conflicts in the document. For example, it indicates that "All Michigan Tech's non student employees who are not part of the executive team or in their office directly reporting to them will be surveyed." If this is to be used for vice presidents (as in some past years), the Deans report directly to the Provost so would seem to be excluded from the survey, yet

Deans are proposed to be represented on the committee. Similarly, there are around 16 Center Directors who report directly to the VP for Research for that part of their responsibilities who presumably would be excluded. The proposal as written seems designed to exclude the input from these administrators and faculty altogether. It is not clear why this would be helpful. The difficulty in excluding staff who report to the president and VP's could be handled in any evaluation by reporting results by employment group, rather than excluding (and possibly alienating) them altogether.

The courtesy of including union members (who are not Senate constituents) in those surveyed has been helpful with tangible results like the current education programs for represented staff. However, the Unions (UAW, AFSCME and POA) have their own officers and would be the more appropriate people to contact regarding their representatives, rather than Staff Council.

Reporting sample verbatim comments would expose the University and those on the committee to possible litigation. This is why student class evaluation comments are not published verbatim and in fact, are not even shared with Deans, Chairs or anyone else for that matter. They are instead given directly to the individual faculty member for their information only. This has been a repeated difficulty with past surveys.

These are just a few of the more critical issues. In summary, the inclusion of professionals in the design of the survey instrument is good, as is the inclusion of demographic information (gender, age, years of service etc.). But stating that the new proposal is more inclusive, while potentially excluding large numbers of employees is problematic. The Senate of course, can do what it wants, but I think a great deal could be accomplished with better wording of questions and attention to demographics and employee classification in the reporting of results. This does not require a change to the current Senate procedure.

If you do go ahead with changes, an additional suggestion would be that the Senate consider conducting the evaluation on a calendar similar to the Deans (4 years), and Chairs (3 years).

Thanks again for giving me an opportunity to comment.

g