

THE PLAIN DEALER

Changes in board policies are first step to turnaround at Case

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Last week Edward Hundert stepped down as president of Case Western Reserve University and we welcomed Interim President Gregory Eastwood. He has already shown a refreshing new interest in openness and consultation.

Nevertheless, the same week brought a sad reminder of the difficulties created by three years of poor management and little oversight. Staff have been laid off, and faculty in many colleges are receiving no pay increase this year.

Hundert's departure won't solve Case's problems. While restoring faculty and alumni confidence is a key, reforming the operation of and interactions with Case's board of trustees will be of vital importance.

Many of us were surprised to learn that board chairman Frank Linsalata will accept a second term so he can help lead the board in the transition period as we search for a new president.

Linsalata and the board share responsibility for the mismanagement of the past few years, as demonstrated, at the very least, by the 2005 reports of Hundert's exorbitant pay and bonuses, which were claimed to be based in part on an affiliation agreement with University Hospitals that did not exist at the time. One wonders, if the leadership of one of Linsalata's companies performed as poorly as Case's had, whether either he or the shareholders would hold the board accountable in some way. At a time when faculty, alumni and the community are carefully watching for signs of change, it would make sense for new leadership during this transition.

Problems with Case's board have existed for some time and harken back, at least, to 2001 when President David Auston resigned over relations with the board - and 2002 when Peter B. Lewis made it clear that unless there were changes in the board he would not contribute further to the university.

If we are to not repeat the mistakes of the past, the board needs to consider changes in the way it operates. And faculty and administrators should assist the board in better understanding the nature and workings of the university. The board cannot properly perform its oversight and development responsibilities if it is out of touch with the institution.

Despite its unwieldy size, very few members of the board have ever worked in academia. By contrast, several universities, including Boston University and MIT, have set aside several slots on the board for faculty. Many universities have subgroups of the board assigned to interface with each department to perform periodic reviews. This policy increases interaction with faculty, improves understanding of the research and

scholarship at the institution, and improves appreciation for internal leadership opportunities.

The board also needs to openly recognize two key facts. The university cannot be run like a business. Its "products" are research, teaching and scholarship. The more successful these are, the more they tend to cost. The infrastructure that supports them is also fragile. Years of investment quickly can be squandered if adequate support is not maintained. The board must also be open about admitting the problems of the past several years, so that they can be honestly addressed. There were, and to some extent still are, serious management problems at the university, accompanied by alienation of both faculty and alumni.

The public line that the board seems to have conveyed was that Hundert was a "failed visionary," in part, because the faculty was not willing to go along with the expense of his vision. This is not true. The vision for a vast overhaul of undergraduate education at Case, for example, was proposed well before his arrival, through white papers and forums chaired by faculty and outside advisors. It was clear that such an overhaul would be expensive, costing hundreds of millions of dollars, and would require dramatic new development and hiring in order to begin to be feasible and not diminish the university's other strengths. This vision was appropriated in bits and pieces, and then implemented poorly and irresponsibly. For example, the seminar program that was rushed into place by the faculty as a "quick fix," after Hundert had publicly committed the university to undertaking it prior to any faculty vote, has been beset by pedagogical and financial problems. The faculty and administration must now address these problems.

Case is a research university. As chairman of a university-wide commission on graduate education and research, which produced its recommendations over two years ago, I can attest that the challenges we face in competing with our peer institutions are daunting. Little attention has been paid by those at the helm over the past three years to meeting these challenges. Had we spent some of the \$27 million - that was wasted on ineffectual development and marketing campaigns - on recruiting distinguished scholars and establishing research centers to build upon our strengths, we would be in a better position today to leverage outside funding. As we attempt to reduce deficits, we need to ensure that we are not crippling the research infrastructure that we need in order to maintain our strength and grow. New investments are desperately needed to maintain and enhance our base of research and scholarship, and the board must be prepared make such investments and to lead in developing the funds to support them.

We all look forward to working with President Eastwood. But he alone cannot turn the institution around. The board must show more responsiveness to the need for change and a willingness to work with faculty and the community so that we can rally around the true strengths of the university.

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