

Case trustees must talk to the faculty, use its expertise

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Case Western Reserve University is a wonderful institution with a rich history and significant human resources in faculty, staff and students. Students receive a fine education, and it is a collegial environment for faculty. Over the 12 years that I have been privileged to be a part of the faculty, my colleagues and I have made a determined effort to both raise the profile and level of research and scholarship at the university. Many exciting developments have taken place, and new relationships have been built between formerly divergent parts of the institution. I have little doubt that whatever its current administrative and budgetary turmoil, Case will survive and eventually thrive.

Nevertheless, two weeks ago the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest faculty body associated with undergraduate teaching at Case, handed down decisive votes of no confidence in the president and in the provost.

The issues that led to this drastic measure are more than budgetary. In a series of missteps, the current administration alienated many donors, alumni and local business and cultural leaders; it appears to have squandered resources so that significant opportunities were missed.

Important initiatives that had been in the works or recommended long before the current administration arrived have been poorly managed, including developing a retail "University Town" in University Circle, recruiting tuition-paying undergraduates, developing a more powerful infrastructure to support research, establishing a well-defined and mutually beneficial affiliation agreement with our local hospitals, and providing resources for new undergraduate initiatives.

All of this is water under the bridge. The pressing question is: Where do we go from here? A healthy future depends on a coordinated effort by faculty, trustees and the administration to address the issues that have been raised. For many people associated with the university, a change of administration seems necessary and inevitable. Seeking interim leadership, and proper timing, are important issues that the board of trustees will have to deal with. But focusing on this issue alone will not solve our problems.

To move forward, we must remember that the root of many of the current problems involves the lack of information flow, or a flow of misinformation. Had previously requested budgetary information - that has only now come to light - been available a year ago, it is possible that the faculty could have assisted the president, provost and the trustees in ensuring a less drastic budgetary response.

It is essential that the faculty work with the administration and the trustees to ensure that we no longer continue with business as usual. Groups of faculty are working to help make this happen. We must make short-term and long-term plans to reach out to the local community, to repair our relationship with alumni and to initiate budget planning that has a rational basis in the realities of the university.

The trustees, of course, must present a strong face during this period, but they must also reach out to the faculty and the community. The time for defensive "spin" has long since passed. A recognition of the issues and a spirit of cooperation are required.

The trustees ultimately have fiduciary responsibility for the university, which they must appropriately discharge. They also have an obligation to use their accumulated wisdom and experience to help guide the leadership they chose, especially when difficult decisions are necessary. The faculty, however, comprise a great reservoir of experience in issues that are central to the university, and the trustees should use us as a resource.

In this way, Case can ensure that our wonderful students and our superb faculty will be able to continue a tradition of excellence, and have the positive impact on the region, the nation and the world that we all seek to maintain and develop.

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