

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, February 27, 1996 (Part II)
1:30 - 4:30
Room 300 Morrill Hall

Present: Virginia Gray (chair), Carl Adams, Carole Bland, Victor Bloomfield, W. Andrew Collins, Gary Davis, Sara Evans, Russell Hobbie, Michael Korth, Fred Morrison, Harvey Peterson, Michael Steffes, Craig Swan

Absent: Dan Feeney, Laura Coffin Koch, Matthew Tirrell

Guests: Senior Vice President Marvin Marshak, Vice President Mark Brenner, Regent Michael O'Keefe

Others: Martha Kvanbeck (University Senate), Maureen Smith (University Relations)

[In these minutes: Discussion with Regent O'Keefe]

Professor Gray welcomed Regent Michael O'Keefe to the meeting and congratulated him on being re-elected to the Board. Following introductions around the table, she explained the role of the Committee and how it is selected. She then inquired if he wished to say anything to the Committee, or if there were topics he wished to hear about from the faculty.

Regent O'Keefe thanked the Committee for providing him the opportunity to meet with it, and congratulated the Committee on timing the meeting immediately after the regental elections. He also thanked the Committee for the support he received from faculty during the process; he found it encouraging and an important indicator of support from within the institution.

Regent O'Keefe said he enjoyed the opportunity to get to know at least a handful of legislators, and to learn their views about the University. It is fascinating that there is such emotion and dedication to the institution, but also such a wide range of views on how it should be managed and what the issues are. Learning that first-hand is very valuable for a regent. He also reported that he had been invited to serve on the board of trustees of the University of Erewhon, but was hesitant to accept given the strong opinions of the faculty of that institution.

Regent O'Keefe said he had asked for the opportunity to meet with the Committee, in order to be able to attach names to faces, in order for the Committee to meet with him and learn that he is accessible, and to talk with him about whatever the faculty believe important; it is a joint agenda.

Professor Swan asked Regent O'Keefe about the role the faculty might play in regent orientation, and recalled Regent Kim's reported comment that one of her regrets was that no one ever talked with her

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about the meaning of shared governance when she joined the Board. He noted that Regent O'Keefe was a relatively new member of the Board, that the Board was a significant responsibility, and that people come to the job of regent with different levels of knowledge about the University; what are his thoughts about what might help him as regent, what role the faculty might play; the Committee might generalize the issues to policy recommendations.

Regent O'Keefe said he had the advantage of coming to the position having worked at a similar institution, the University of Illinois; he has had the opportunity to understand the democratic system as it operates in the academic context. He said he thought someone without that experience needs immediately to understand the culture of these institutions. In the course of conversations at the legislature about his election, he repeatedly pointed out that these are hybrid institutions, ones that have an academic culture that arises from a community of scholars who have a responsibility to each other to govern the institution melded with a 1.5 billion-per-year enterprise that must keep buildings heated and students fed and get everyone to class on time. These are two very different cultures.

One of the conflicts that emerged with the Board of Regents in the last few years was that people who were looking at inefficiencies and challenges on the one side did not realize that there is another side. The challenge to executive and Board leadership in these kinds of institutions is to reconcile those often nearly irreconcilable sets of values these two different cultures have. Where he has come out, Regent O'Keefe told the C, is that there is a careful and precise sorting of issues and policies that can be dealt with in the academic system of governance and on the administrative side. The academic governance system, and the topics that belong in it, must be respected; at the same time, the leadership of the institution has an obligation to be sure the rest of the University supports the academic enterprise and runs efficiently and effectively.

There are areas of the University, he said, that are not serving the core activities of the institution; he has encountered several instances both as a regent and as a foundation member in the community. One obligation they have as a B--and must push the new administration and president--is to systematically examine the support structures and services to ensure that who they serve and why they are is clarified for everyone, so it is clear to everyone how they facilitate the core work of the enterprise.

Those on the academic governance side have a similar obligation to take a continuing look at the efficiency and effectiveness, from an educational and research point of view, of the parts of the institution they are most responsible. There are serious issues there as well, and he would be happy to identify some of them. Everyone has their hands full, in this respect.

The other big task everyone faces is what the institution will be in 15 or 20 years, and whether it will be one of the outstanding research universities. Everyone wants it to be. What does that look like? What is the profile of such an institution? There are some outlines of it in U2000 and other work that has been done, but the issue needs to be clarified. It needs to be shown that in setting the vision, the University can make some tough decisions. Then the leadership--including the regents, President, and faculty--has the tough task of communicating that vision to the state, and to the people who make decisions for the state, to convince them to make the investment that will be necessary. That investment, over the next five to seven years, will be an increment over the current budget of a billion or more dollars. It is not small change to take the institution to the world it needs to be in, especially in terms of technology.

There are three sets of tasks: the administration and management support sets of tasks, the academic program and its tasks, and putting them into the vision that everyone shares in selling to the people of the state so they will make the investment needed.

Professor Collins asked Regent O'Keefe to elaborate on his views of the issues that should be examined further on the academic side of the house.

Regent O'Keefe said that in terms of undergraduate education, the University must continue to grapple with the quality of life and experience that undergraduates have. The progress that has been made has been astonishing, in terms of the number of residential students, sense of community, and so on. The institution must figure out how to deal with thousands of students, yet make it the intimate, academic experience of Mark Hopkins on one end of the log and the student on the other.

Another issue, a continuing challenge for higher education, is the slow evolution or drift of the curriculum into fragmented parts. The question is whether a college education is something generic, that everybody who has one has something they share--or is it a set of individualistic, targeted, narrow experiences? If it is something that everyone shares, what is that? Is it the accumulation of a body of knowledge in a selected number of fields? Or is it something more than that, something that cuts across fields? A set of skills that goes beyond sets of knowledge?

Those are big issues in higher education that also have echoes in elementary and secondary education, Regent O'Keefe said. Faculty deal with the problems that arise because K-12 education did not deal with the issues, but the K-12 people can look at the University and say it is responsible for some of the problems, because it is higher education's entrance requirements that they respond to. There is a symbiosis up and down the education system.

In graduate education and research, Regent O'Keefe said, the defining challenge to institutions such as Minnesota will be the corporate role. In many areas already, there is more cutting edge research being done, and vastly more resources available, in the corporate sector. What is the relationship to be? For faculty, who are moonlighting part-time in the corporations? For graduate students, for whom the better training and research experience might be in part at the corporation rather than the University? Who owns the intellectual product that comes out of the collaborations? What is the University to do in the case of disciplines where there is no competitive corporate marketplace to provide that experience and support? Will the University be left with the high-cost, low-value (low value to the economic system, in the crude sense) areas of instruction and research, and to shrink back into a corner? Or will there be interaction, and what are the dangers of that interaction?

There is a similar set of issues in the service area. In a state where 5% of the economy is agriculture, what does the land-grant mission mean? What is the nature of outreach? This is a pressing question when the world is evolving to a situation where people want little chunks of education, at the time they want them, where they want them, in the package they want--and they don't want 3 credit hours, they want the package. Later they want another package. That is a challenge to how the University organizes itself.

The biggest challenge to higher education across the country is the potential, now looming on the

horizon, of the for-profit community discovering higher education in a huge way, Regent O'Keefe said. If one put together Bill Gates, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and one of the big media companies (which have enormous capital), they could create technology and a capacity to educate in ways that the University is not now doing. Further, they can cherry-pick--they can choose areas of instruction and training that are most cost-effective and provide the greatest income. That leaves in traditional higher education the higher cost programs with lower immediate return.

This is a start on a set of issues that all must grapple with, Regent O'Keefe concluded.

Professor Steffes said he was delighted to hear Regent O'Keefe speak about support services and the need to manage them so they support the educational and research mission, and expressed appreciation for the insight Regent O'Keefe brought to the issue. Has he seen models where this has been accomplished successfully? They cannot be divorced from the academic side, but they can be run much more efficiently to serve the academic side.

Regent O'Keefe said he could not respond to the first part of the question because he was not familiar with current practices and good examples; he said he had somewhat lost touch with higher education since he came to the McKnight Foundation eight years ago and because he had done no writing on the subject in the intervening period. But he has had almost a lifetime of interaction with and engagement with higher education in the country, including in policy at the state and federal levels, in academic administration, and has also written on broader policy issues. He also co-directs the program of the Aspen Institute on education, which regularly visits the topic of higher education. It is for these reasons he is probably more familiar with higher education than most incoming regents.

In terms of some of the things that have to be done, he said he would speak abstractly. There are an endless number of things that occur at the University to support the work of faculty and students. One example is facilities; imagine they need to be expanded in Department X. He recalled that he has had experience with the University as a funder; they made a grant to the University in 1991 for building improvement for a department; it has not yet been improved. There are years of benefits of an approved facility that have gone by. Regent O'Keefe said he does not know what happened in that case, but the new president and board can take it as an example, to trace what happens when an academic department or program needs space. Who has to be consulted, where do things happen, what is the flow chart? He said he would allege--only by looking at the results, and acknowledged he was admittedly on thin ice--that the process needs to be fixed. There is SOMETHING WRONG with that process. What a manager must do is look at the process, look at what happened, why something had to be approved by multiple different bodies in the University? It must be examined, and the necessity for involving various constituencies respected, but at the same time move things along so a timetable can be set. Say, for example, that a capital project will take X period.

Regent O'Keefe noted that virtually everyone who sends a request to his foundation receives a response within 10 working days (only 18-24 per year out of 1200 requests do not). This is NOT mindless management, it is IMPORTANT management; it facilitates the ability of other people to do their work. It is that kind of approach that the University needs to take, across the board.

Another example is the computing systems, which are being examined across the institution, Regent O'Keefe said. There will be millions of dollars spent. The effort is to be applauded, but it must

serve the users. The people who define the effort must be the ones who use it. If it is administrative computing that is doing accounting for department chairs, it must respond to their needs and be useful to them. Regent O'Keefe related that he has been told that administrators now keep three sets of books, just like the Mafia: a set on the old system, a set on the new system, and a real set to make sure the other two systems are not siphoning off their money. Does this make sense? As much sense as taking six years to approve a building project, he said in response to his own question.

These are the things people have to roll up their sleeves and slog their way through, Regent O'Keefe said. They must ask who the client here is, what needs must be met, if the process/procedure/individual/office meet those needs, and if not, how does one get it to act?

That is very responsive, Professor Steffes said, but there is a question of finding the necessary administrative talent to carry it through. The question, Regent O'Keefe said, is how to run an organization. One keeps one's eyes always on the mission of the organization, structure the tasks around the mission, identify how one can tell if the tasks are being accomplished, and set people to work doing them. If they are not doing the job, they get fired. There is procedure in between, but in the end, there must be action.

There was discussion with President-elect Yudof along these lines, Regent O'Keefe related. He spoke with the Board about how he would be measured and what was being accomplished, and that if he falls short in serious ways, he will expect the Board to take him to task. Regent O'Keefe said President Yudof understands this and believes it is the way things must work.

Professor Bloomfield said that many have been thinking hard about shared governance recently, and how to make it work better. Over the past few months, he has been forced into concluding that if the University is going to work the way it ought to, faculty will have "to park themselves in Morrill Hall and do some of the things that the administration, the bureaucrats, have NOT been doing." Shared governance has broken down not only because the Regents were micro-managing, but also because the administration, in some ways, has not been managing well. The support systems needed for faculty to do their work are not working. The fiscal consequences of that, draining money away from the central academic enterprise, are so severe that they cannot be ignored. If the administration is maladroit, there is an impact on faculty. His general concern, Professor Bloomfield said, is that the fiscal and other stresses on the University, and the pace of change, are so great that it is almost inevitably becoming more bureaucratized. The administrative superstructure gets ever larger and has more power, and despite even well-intentioned efforts at consultation with the f, the real decisions are made in Morrill Hall. Without continued faculty presence at the table and in the corridors, they are likely to be out of the loop. They will be informed something will happen, or there will be a show of consultation, but the decisions will have been made. That is not an attractive picture, and one hopes the new president and regents will change it, but it may be a structural feature of the 21st century. Does he have any thoughts about this?

Regent O'Keefe said he had fewer firm answers to these questions than others that have been raised. He noted he has spent a large part of his professional life in dealing with many of the efforts to reform public education in this country. He has almost--almost, not certainly--come to the conclusion that it is the system that cannot be fixed. The set of incentives, the structures, the size, the politics, all make it difficult to change. He said he did not have the same thoughts about higher education, because he has not thought about it to the same extent and because such institutions have resisted that kind of

reform as strongly as they can. One of the great struggles of the age, in this civilization, is how people organize themselves in increasingly complex and high-speed organizational structures, and at the same time maintain a level of involvement and engagement in democracy in those structures. The corporate structure struggled with this issue first, because the bottom line required it; there are governments struggling with it and the school reform movement, for example, has been an effort to grapple with it. It is one of the defining challenges of the age: how do people organize themselves into complex structures, and at the same time not let the structure take over?

Regent O'Keefe said he did not know, but while he is fresh and optimistic to the job as regent, he hopes reasonable people in different parts of the University, who see different parts of the elephant, could engage in a conversation over a year or two about these very issues. How can the University govern itself in a way that works?

His fear is exactly what Professor Bloomfield said was his instinct, and exactly what was the instinct of the Board of Regents in the past year or so. People believed there was no way to deal with something other than to roll up their sleeves and start doing somebody else's business, or to sit in someone else's lap while they do their business to make sure they are not doing something that affects other business. The obnoxious characteristic of this, Regent O'Keefe observed, is that while one is doing all of that, one is not doing one's OWN business. One is going over to do somebody else's business, in order to protect one's own business--which one is now not doing. The irony is that everyone ends up doing everyone else's jobs, and getting in each other's way, and no one ends up doing the work of the institution at the level it should be performed. That is sad, Regent O'Keefe said, and everyone has an obligation to struggle together to work this out. This takes a willingness to put issues on the table, an enormous amount of integrity and honesty in the conversation, a willingness to compromise, and to abandon behaviors that give the term "academic politics" the dirty connotation it has in the broader world.

Regent O'Keefe said, however, he did not any secrets beyond having everyone sitting down to grapple with the problem, and when things do not work, be willing to admit it and committing to candidly and honesty trying to figure out why, and to trying to fix things. This should occur, rather than having subterfuges and parallel structures to compensate for the fact that something is not working.

Professor Bloomfield said the honest, engaged conversation to try to figure out how to make things work better is key. He asked Regent O'Keefe if that is one thing the regents and faculty and administration should make a high priority in the next year or so.

Regent O'Keefe said it absolutely should be--but pointed out he has only one of 12 votes on the Board. He recalled being asked by a reporter about his priorities and if he would help repair the institution that has been so battered; he responded that the battering was at a superficial level--there are thousands of students who continue to be educated very well, there is extraordinary research going on, the University is functioning. These places are like battleships: it is hard to do damage to them, but once damage has been done, it is equally hard to repair. There have been battles here, and while serious damage has not been done, there has been created the opportunity for erosion over time. It must be the highest priority to stand back and to ask what the core values and mission are and how the institution can be made to work best to accomplish them.

And the three entities Professor Bloomfield identified have to engage in the conversation. The conversation, moreover, will take a couple of years. Battleships move slowly, turn slowly; faculty come from a culture where they think about things very carefully and look at them from every angle. The conversation needs to occur.

Professor Swan now observed that one can make the case that the Board of Regents meets TOO often. When the situation is not going well, things are worse, but Board of Regents meetings take an inordinate amount of time from all kinds of people in Morrill Hall, in ways that do not help support the work of the University. If there were fewer meetings, it would force people to focus on the essential issues for the University and help to clarify the difference between the policy role of the Board and the management role of the ad. That is a particular proposal that he did not solicit Regent O'Keefe's views on.

Regent O'Keefe jokingly noted that the comment came from a body that meets several times a month. He reported that he had said, during the appointment process, that appointment to the Board of Regents ought not to require someone who serves to give up their other full-time employment. He has another job that is more than full-time, he said; he agreed that the question of frequency of meetings will be looked at.

Professor Bloomfield recalled that Regent O'Keefe had mentioned the need to communicate with the people of the state and political agencies the importance of the University. This co has appointed a Committee on Public Understanding, which hopes to involve a significant number of faculty in doing precisely that. It is their feeling that a more personal and concrete contact between the faculty and the people and legislature could make a big difference in the understanding of what faculty do and what the University does. The ad and regents' representations of the University are very good, but necessarily focus on macroeconomic concepts. This will take some resources, Professor Bloomfield said, and they have spoken with Institutional Relations about training and organizational efforts; there may be a need for additional resources in Institutional Relations. In addition, there will be developed personal contacts with Rotary Clubs and editorial boards and so on. Does this seem like a good use of faculty time and University resources, Professor Bloomfield asked? Does he have any insights to offer?

Regent O'Keefe said he thought it was a good use of University resources and of faculty time, the latter with caution. Again, faculty should be teaching, doing research, providing service. He said he applauded the effort to think about this, and to conceptualize a role for faculty to play. He said he hoped, however, this is an area where everyone would work together, and where, over a period of months, there would be a coherent strategy for getting the University into the community. He said he was told by at least three legislators that they are never visited by students from the UM, although they were sure there were young people from their districts who attend the University. That is simple, straightforward politicking, Regent O'Keefe said; it is easy to organize, but takes resources to do.

He said that if he as a regent were to meet half the time the Board now meets, and were expected the other half of the time to give 2-3 speeches a month about the University, he would be delighted to do so. What they need to decide is who should be reached, what the messages are, and how the burden of getting it across is to be shared. This strategy is terribly important now, with the politics of the state and the merger of the other three systems into one system; if a battle broke out between that sector of higher education and the University, the University is very handicapped in terms of the politics of the state.

MNSCU has institutions across the state and employees in every district, and students and parents of all educational levels and achievements. So does the University, and the University touches the state in many other ways, but building a political base that provides grassroots support is essential if it is to avoid disaster down the road. His own experience in politics suggests starting at the grassroots; the way to get a legislator's vote is when constituents say something is important. Some votes come from the University's own arguments and from the legislator's set of values, but the broad base of support comes from building at the grassroots.

One thing he has felt over the last couple of years, Professor Bloomfield said, is that faculty occasionally do a pretty good job of talking to legislators. But most of the people associated with the University are students or clerical staff or others who are not faculty--but who are voters in legislative districts. It has been frustrating that there has not been an effort to mobilize the ENTIRE University constituency. This is a class-oriented organization, and faculty are "different" from staff, and it is hard for faculty to adjust to the idea that they ought to work together with others. There have been inadequate databases about the location of University voters. There are political and mechanical things that could be done to build a stronger political base, at least in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Regent O'Keefe agreed. There is no choice, he said.

Professor Gray thanked Regent O'Keefe for joining the meeting; it was a good discussion, and the first of many, it is to be hoped.

That is a governance question that should be put on the table, Regent O'Keefe responded. What is the relationship of this body to individual regents? As an end-of-the-meeting question, was this or was this not a good conversation? In terms of the dynamics of the institution? He enjoyed it, and it provided him understandings of things, but the question of how to organize a group of thousands of human beings to achieve a complex mission, at the highest possible level of quality with the most efficient use of available resources requires a struggle.

Professor Hobbie said it has been an important conversation. Over the last several years, somehow the University community has become polarized and gotten at loggerheads. During his 12 years as Associate Dean of Students Affairs in IT, he worked hard at seeing, and did see, problems from a vantage point that he did not have as a faculty member. A year ago he returned to the faculty, got involved in teaching and scholarship--and found it easy to stop thinking about that other vantage point. Part of the reason the University has been at loggerheads is that each group has seen its own set of problems; "we have not talked to each other about what it is that is coming down the pike." It is hard work, he said, but if the faculty can be persuaded that the problem Regent O'Keefe initially talked about are really coming, they can be creative in coming up with solutions--rather than having solutions crafted by someone else and forced upon them. The only way to do that is to keep conversation open.

Regent O'Keefe thanked the Committee for inviting him.

Professor Gray adjourned the meeting at 4:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota