

May 13, 2010

Dr. Linda Mabbs
Chair, University Senate
1100 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

Dear Dr. Mabbs:

I am writing on behalf of my colleague on the Senate Executive Committee, Jonathan Sachs, and the Graduate Student Government Executive Committee to ask for your assistance with a set of related issues that are of the utmost importance to the Senate, and affect the health and strength of the entire University community. These concerns relate to University procedures regarding the creation, merger, consolidation, or reorganization of colleges, schools, departments, and other academic units (hereafter “units”).

As you know, the Senate recently approved the merger of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies and the Department of Dance. Both the process and product of this merger reveal deficiencies and lacunae in current University procedures, and have resulted in an unfortunate diminution of shared governance in the new school’s plan of organization.¹ In regard to the process, we are concerned that:

- The individuals who drafted the structure and plan of organization were not elected, and represented a single constituency (faculty);
- Students in the affected programs were not informed of the merger or shown a draft of the new structure until approximately one week before an APAC forum where feedback on the merger was to be accepted;
- When student concerns were expressed to the Chair of Theatre (Dan Wagner, now Director of the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies), he responded that the plan would not be modified, given such a process would require a re-vote by the faculty of each department;
- It was only after a concerted effort directed at the Dean of the Graduate School, the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, and the SEC, that Wagner agreed to create an ad hoc committee to re-consider graduate student representation on the new school’s committee structure;

¹ While both Dean Harris and Dan Wagner have characterized it as a preservation of the degree of involvement mandated by the previous structure, their assessment is based not on the most recent, faculty-approved version of Theatre’s Plan of Organization (dated 5/12/2008), but on changes in practice that have taken place in the last two years, changes that have led to a reduction of student involvement. For example, the previous plan of organization of Theatre included elected student membership on the Season Selection Committee (the committee selects which plays or performances will take place in a given academic year). The new plan excludes students from the committee entirely, and any proposals from students must be channeled through a faculty committee member. Additionally, a committee in the former Department of Theatre (Off Center Selection Committee) with elected undergraduate student membership and a graduate student chair, has been eliminated in the new plan, and there is no indication where those functions fall in the new committee structure.

- In speaking before the SEC, Wagner refused to ask the ad hoc committee to consider undergraduate or staff representation on the committee structure.²

In regard to the Plan of Organization that was ultimately approved by the Senate, we are concerned that:

- The committee structure includes only four students – one graduate and one undergraduate from each of the former departments – on a single committee (the Committee of the Whole);
- Those student serve in a non-voting capacity, and are not elected by their respective constituencies, as is recommended by University System of Maryland policy;
- None of the remaining 16 committees permit student membership;
- Staff are not permitted to vote on the Committee of the Whole;
- Of the 15 committees (the APT committee has 4 subcommittees, though it is generally treated as one committee) proposed in the new structure, only 2 of them have a membership that is directly elected, while membership on the other 13 committees is either ex officio, or appointed by the Director of the new school (in consultation with various entities).

Both the shortcomings in the process and the lack of effective shared governance in the product of this merger could easily have been avoided by relying a more transparent, inclusive approach that involved (or at least consulted with) all the constituencies in the new school.

The Theatre/Dance merger is only the most recent manifestation of what we see as an unfortunate trend that requires prompt attention by the Senate. Earlier this year, a reorganization of the College of Education was under consideration (it is our understanding that those plans are currently on hold, though we understand the reorganization will proceed in the future). At the request of the Provost, members of the GSG and SGA agreed to serve as liaisons to APAC, and were tasked with gathering student feedback on the proposed reorganization.³ We found that a similar, and similarly disheartening, disregard for student input characterized the process by which the plan was drafted and considered. Not only had students not been involved in the planning, those in all but one of the affected programs had not even seen a draft of the proposal. While the process seems to have been far more inclusive of faculty, a recent Diamondback article suggests that there are still significant concerns with how the reorganization was considered and pursued.

Conversations with the Provost and Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs have confirmed that there is no standard template for programs interested in merging/consolidating/reorganizing, and no clear set of procedures for them to follow, given the rarity and specificity of such substantial changes. While the Senate's Plan of Organization establishes a process whereby either the creation or revision of a unit plan of organization is to be reviewed by appropriate Senate committees, there is ambiguity in interpreting precisely which

² Dean Harris indicated at the 29 April Senate meeting that the ad hoc committee would, indeed, investigate graduate, undergraduate, and staff representation on the school's committee structure.

³ As the GSG's Vice President for Academic Affairs, I participated in this process. The report we produced is available upon request.

committees that entails (in the case of the Theatre/Dance merger, for example, only the Senate PCC Committee approved the merger; the ERG Committee, which is charged with reviewing plans of organization, was not involved). We feel this is untenable, and – particularly given the imminent changes to CMPS and CLFS, and the likelihood of additional mergers as the goals of the Strategic Plan are pursued – that it warrants investigation by the Senate. As the formal organ of shared governance at this University, the Senate is uniquely situated and empowered to ensure that best practices in shared governance are followed, and that the traditions of shared governance that are such an important part of this institution’s success are not only maintained, but strengthened.

As such, we respectfully request that the SEC consider charging the 2010-2011 ERG Committee with the following tasks:

- Investigate current practices and procedures related to the consideration, planning, and execution of mergers, consolidations, and reorganizations of existing units; should those practices or procedures be found deficient, specific recommendations regarding the creation or revision of Senate or Academic Affairs policies should be made.
- Investigate current and historical Senate practice regarding the creation or review of unit plans of organization, and report on whether that practice accords with current policy, and whether revisions to Senate procedures are necessary to ensure adequate oversight.
- Assess the resources (both formal and informal) available to units considering mergers, consolidations, or reorganizations, and recommend whether the Senate can and/or should play a role in assisting units in creating plans of organization that respect and strengthen shared governance.
- Create a list of best practices for designing committee structures that balance efficiency with respect for the opinions and participation of all constituencies, and that ensure USM policies on shared governance are followed.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Aaron Tobiason
University Senator, College of ARHU, 2008-2010
Vice President for Academic Affairs, GSG