Resolution on Administrative Appointments

Two special meetings of the Faculty Senate, one on May 15 and one on June 9, were called in order to have first and second readings of a resolution concerning the process by means of which administrative appointments are made. The Campbell/Hessley motion reads:

Whereas, several recent appointments to administrative positions have been made without posting;
Whereas, they have been made without the use of search committees;
Whereas, qualified persons may have been denied the opportunity to apply for said positions;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Faculty Senate strongly urges that the President establish a policy for conducting an open search when filling all administrative positions and for arranging that applications for each position be reviewed by duly-appointed search committees.

Chair Evans read relevant portions of the Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Kentucky (1985), the Western Kentucky University Affirmative Action Plan, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. The gist of these selections is that faculty members should participate in University decision-making, that the Affirmative Action Officer should be involved in recruitment, screening, and selection of persons for faculty and management positions and should meet with a search committee before the recruitment process is initiated in order to acquaint the members with the mandatory provisions of the University's affirmative action program and equal employment obligations, and that the policy of promotions from within the University should insure that all employees have equal opportunity for advancement. He pointed out, however, that, at Western, there are 38 executive, administrative, and managerial positions, plus an additional 129 positions classified as professional, non-faculty positions, including such positions as curator, head athletic trainer, photojournalist in residence, secretary to the President, staff accountant, staff pharmacist, etc. The Chair questioned whether we really wanted to be involved in the selection process for all of these positions. He left it to the Senate to decide how many of these positions it wished to include in its recommendations.

Janet Palmer said that she believed very strongly in the principle that an organization which views itself as a facilitator of the development of its employees should post notices of job vacancies, with job descriptions, and the criteria that candidates for those positions must meet.

Rich Weigel said that the motion did not go far enough in expressing the outrage experienced by the faculty and staff, and that, in his years at Western, he had not witnessed any issue which aroused such anger and hostility against our administration as has this one. He charged that the appointments violated the spirit, if not the law, of affirmative action; that the high salaries assigned to these jobs are unconscionable when compared to the meagre increases in faculty and staff salaries over the past several years; that President Zacharias' policy of conducting open searches for administrative positions has been eradicated; and that the administration is practicing "good ole boy" politics, which belong to the past and have no place in the running of a fine University in this age.

Chair Evans said that business schools teach that a manager who does not have the right to make his own appointments does not have authority; therefore, the President must have
this right. That does not rule out the advertisement of the vacancy or the involvement of a committee to make recommendations; the President can nevertheless choose whom he pleases. He said that, "in his opinion, a large part of the emotional reaction to the recent administrative appointments is due to the fact that, at Western, administrators surpass faculty in both status and salary, and, therefore, the only way a faculty member can improve himself significantly in those areas is to obtain an administrative position."

At this point, the discussion of May 15 ended. We now take up the discussion of June 9. Ed Dorman (overcoming his natural reticence) said that he was in agreement with the thrust of the resolution but he believed the wording to be imprecise in that the terms administrative position and duly appointed were not defined; in addition, he did not think that the resolution, as worded, applied to a permutation of a given number of administrators among the same number of positions. He recommended the addition of an amendment remedying the alleged defects. The redoubtable Joan Krenzin doubted that such an amendment was necessary, and redoubted that it was advisable for the Senate to define the appointment policy for the President in a resolution in which it was requesting the President to establish an appointment policy. She thought that the resolution was applicable to the "permutation situation," as each of the positions involved would become an open position and be treated in the same manner as any other open position. She also maintained that we could assume that some common sense would be used.

William Buckman (not a member of the Senate) expressed a desire to speak on the resolution. After some discussion, the Senate voted to allow any member of the audience to speak. Dr. Buckman deplored the manner in which the appointments controversy had been handled by the Senate leadership, saying that the Executive Committee and the Chair of the Senate had a responsibility to meet with the President and see if they could resolve the issue before proceeding with a media event which had the potential to polarize the Board of Regents and the President against the faculty. He said that the President needed to meet with both faculty and administration groups in order to achieve a reasonable understanding between the groups.

Rich Weigel responded that he did not believe that a media event had either occurred or been planned, and that the Faculty Regent's advisory committee had strongly expressed its concern to the Faculty Regent, who had conveyed it to the President prior to the Board meeting.

Robert Otto questioned the validity of Dr. Weigel's estimate of the degree of outrage experienced by the faculty over these appointments, on the grounds that such an estimate would require a data base, which Dr. Otto believed to be lacking, from all four colleges. He said that Dr. Weigel's statement did not reflect the opinions of the people he had talked to, and that he considered salaries to have been the main cause of outrage among faculty throughout the last five years.

Chairgene Evans tempted the President to ask to be recognized, and the President succumbed. (The following is an abbreviated paraphrase of the President's address to the Senate.)

The President said that there had indeed been a gap in communications, and accepted the responsibility for it. He had not been aware of the feelings of the Senate in this matter; Regent Miller did indicate to him that there was disenchantment, but he did not appreciate its magnitude. He stated that improvements can be made in our processes so as to overtly seek faculty involvement, and that he was generally in agreement with the resolution. The administration followed the Board of Regents' rules to the letter in making these appointments. These rules state that search committees are to be used when seeking a Vice President for Academic Affairs, College Deans, and Department Heads, or the equivalent. For other positions, the President is to determine "in a reasonable manner" how the appointments are to be made. The problem then becomes a question of what is reasonable, a matter on which individuals acting in good faith can differ. Quite a few administrators were involved in the process of making the appointments; recommendations were taken from administrators who had been here and knew the personnel in order to determine whether the appointees were competent to fill the positions. The processes used did not violate any common law or convention of this institution. Of the 28
administrators now at Western, classified as directors, etc., 25 were appointed without searches. In 3 cases, searches were used because there was no person already in the administration qualified to do the job. At other institutions, these types of bureaucratic positions do not involve searches if there is someone already in the administration who has the ability to fill the position. The President said that he has a rationale for each appointment, and is willing to discuss any of them with anyone who wants to talk to him about the matter. The objectives of the appointments were, by reassignment of duties to administrators already here, to increase their productivity and utilization, to reduce administrative costs and the total number of administrative positions, and to achieve, as far as possible, the goals of affirmative action. If searches had been used, rather than the reassignment of administrators already here, and we had hired new administrators in addition to those already here, we could not have reduced the number of administrative positions except by firing, or demoting, some of the administrators already here — an inhumane policy that the President does not want to adopt. An administrator who has been here for 18 years, he said, who has worked hard and is competent, is entitled to advancement. There should be some kind of career ladder for administrators just as there is for faculty; an Assistant Director should be able to aspire to become a Director someday, just as an Assistant Professor can aspire to become a Professor. This is necessary for the morale of administrators, and the morale of both administrators and faculty is important if we are to accomplish our objectives here at Western.

These objectives, the President continued, are to expand Western’s role in serving the community and the state, to increase the number of highschool students attending Western, and to stop the precipitous decline in the number of students remaining at Western. We have lost 2700 students, and 36 faculty members, in four years. If this loss of students continues, we will have to lay off still more faculty members. Our major problem is the recruitment and retention of students. The President said that he would like for the Senate to be more proactive and less reactive, to have an agenda to deal with the major problems of transition of students from highschool to university, remediation, research, curriculum, and advisement. He would like to work with the Senate and meet with the Executive Committee to talk about anything its members want to talk about.

The President said that he is concerned that there is very likely an imbalance between faculty and administrative salaries. If there is, he wants to do something about it. At major institutions across the country, the highest-paid persons are outstanding full professors.

If the resolution before the Senate is passed, he said that he will do the best he can to be sure that he and the faculty communicate, and that the faculty — in particular, the Faculty Senate — are always involved. He remarked that, when a search committee is necessary and useful, it will be used. He pointed out, however, that a search committee can be manipulated and used as an instrument of deception, citing as an example an instance occurring last year, when he was chair of a search committee whose recommendation was reversed. This type of behavior, the President said, is dishonest. Search committees should not be used to indicate a false involvement of persons who are not really involved.

Nancy Baird then proposed an amendment as a substitute for the resolution on the floor: that the Faculty Senate Chair appoint a committee composed of members of the Senate to meet with the President and negotiate a policy for filling positions at Western in the future. The motion to amend failed for lack of a second.

Rich Weigel said that a University rule had been violated in the appointing process, as the Affirmative Action Officer is supposed to meet with a search committee.

The aphlogistic Joan Krenzin applied balm to a Senate obviously winding down, by asserting that she did not perceive the resolution to be a hostile statement that everything has been done wrong, but rather a statement of how we would like things to be done.

The resolution was then passed by voice vote, with no dissenting vote.