

ALARMING TRENDS ON IDAHO'S CAMPUSES

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The immediate governance of the University is [entrusted] to the faculty.

~The Constitution of the University of Idaho

I fear that what we see emerge under [the ISU administration] will be nothing but a hollow shell of the traditional faculty senates at other universities.

~Bob Croker, former ISU faculty senator

There are some alarming trends on Idaho's campuses, which I believe are indicative of what is happening at colleges and universities in other states. Idaho State University continues to be the source of the most egregious examples of administrative abuse.

A recent example of how ISU President Arthur Vailas brooks no opposition is the firing of Professor Emeritus Leonard Hitchcock. In May of this year Hitchcock wrote a brilliant satire for the *Idaho State Journal* about a King Arthur whose arbitrary rule was the worst in the land. At first many wondered how a retired professor could be fired, but it turned out that he had come back to the ISU library to do part-time work at \$11 per hour. His offer to do the same work as a volunteer was rejected.

Even more alarming was the brutal and unprecedented way ISU engineering professor Habib Sadid was removed from campus in November of 2009. Security agents stood guard as he cleaned out his office, and then he was warned that he would be arrested if he ever came on the ISU campus again. No evidence has ever been presented that he was a danger to himself or others. His generous offer to teach a continuing education course about contemporary Iran was summarily rejected.

Current ISU Faculty Senate: A Shadow of its Former Self

After the ISU faculty voted 80 percent against his leadership in February 2011, President Vailas abolished the faculty senate. In June 2011 the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), whose policies on tenure and academic freedom have long been supported by ISU and nearly every other American college and university, sanctioned ISU for violating basic principles of faculty governance. There are only four other colleges and universities that have this dubious distinction.

The State Board of Education proposed that a provisional faculty senate write a constitution for the governance of the university. Earlier the Board had approved a BSU faculty constitution, and the provisional senators used it as a model. Vailas refused to

accept the draft document and, incredibly enough, the Board approved Vailas' own document "General Principles of Faculty Governance," which gives all power to the president and guarantees that ISU will remain on a national black list for dysfunctional campus governance.

Only 26.5 Percent of Faculty Voted for the New Senators

In the selection of new senators the ISU administration made it clear that those who had served in the last three years could not be nominated. A large majority of faculty refused to stand for election, and only 26.5 percent of the faculty voted in the early October vote. The administration announced that the turn out ranged from 19 to 75 among the colleges, but only science and engineering actually reported that only 31 of its 139 faculty voted. Provost Barbara Adamchik believes that the low turn-out was due to intimidation by those who opposed President Vailas. Given the large number who voted against Vailas in February 2011, a very different interpretation suggests itself.

Provost Adamchik is currently chairing the faculty senate, also unprecedented in my experience. To her credit she does not want the job, but no senator has volunteered to lead nor has anyone been nominated. Senator and biology professor Jeff Meldrum expresses his own hesitations: "I certainly don't agree with the unprecedented actions to disband the faculty senate. I don't agree with some of the extreme positions of some past senators, but I feel many points that they made are very valid and have not been given true consideration by the administration and the State Board." It is difficult to see how honestly expressing one's opinions could be called "extreme."

The current senators have been stripped of most of the duties that faculty representatives have across the nation. This action appears to be a violation of Board policy about faculty governance, which states, following the long tradition of self-governance, that "the faculty of each institution will establish written bylaws, a constitution, and necessary procedures, subject to the approval by the Chief Executive Officer and the Board." The procedures now in effect at ISU were imposed by Vailas and the Board; they did not originate with the faculty.

The current senators cannot address research issues or personnel cases. (Traditionally, faculty appeal boards, such as the one that supported Professor Sadid, report to academic senates.) This semester they have taken minor issues such as tuition breaks for dependents of ISU faculty and complaints that some of ISU's international students have problems with the English language.

Although I've been informed that no senator has been authorized to speak for the current senate, posts to the blog at ISUVoice.com contain the following statements. "We the members of the newly formed faculty senate" [believe that previous senators are] "misguided people who refused to understand their subordinate role in faculty

governance.” Vailas “must lead and that is why he disbanded those dysfunctional faculty senates.” The statements conclude: “We are sincere in promoting good will and representing (not repressing) our constituents.” The tradition on American campuses, embodied in AAUP principles universally recognized, is “shared governance” between faculty and administrators.

Problems with the State Board of Education

In the not too distant past, Idaho faculty senate leaders and college and university president were given equal time before the Board. Now they have to get permission to speak and only then for limited time. When previous faculty senators did speak in the past two years, none of the Board members even had the courtesy to ask any questions. One board member was overheard saying that “we should bust the union.”

Over the past decade State Board of Education has been criticized for being “power hungry and arrogant,” returning the state to “the dark ages of higher ed non-cooperation” (GOP Rep. Tom Trail), and “undoing a decade of progress” (GOP Sen. Gary Schroeder). Board members have shown little respect for faculty rights, and have been particularly critical of academic tenure. In 2003 board members were shameful in their treatment of Superintendent of Schools Marilyn Howard, the only Democrat serving on the body.

College of Western Idaho

At the College of Western Idaho, Idaho’s newest two-year school, conditions have been described as “plantation-like.” The faculty senate is disrespected and a very competent ombudsman was fired for daring to help out her colleagues. The situation at CWI stands in stark contrast with relatively good relations between faculty and administration at North Idaho College and South Idaho College.

With financial and moral support from the Idaho Federation of Teachers, faculty, staff, and students have set up a website entitled “CWI Exposed” (cwiexposed.com). Here are some excerpts from the Preamble:

- “We are the cautious who have seen the dangers of what happens when people speak out at CWI”;
- “We are fearful of retribution”;
- “We are students who have been manipulated into silence”;
- “We believe in shared governance and not consolidating the power in the hands of a few with questionable agendas.”

Has CWI President Bert Glandon been consulting with ISU President Arthur Vailas?

Two Disputed Firings at the University of Idaho

Last Fall Luidmilla Pohzar, UI assistant professor of physics and highly qualified researcher from the Ukraine, was fired after a third year review. Students objected to her high academic standards, and some said that “she should go back to where she came from.” Just as in the case of Professor Sadid, Pohzar was banned from campus and her dean stood over her as she was given three hours to clear out her office.

Also last autumn Sanjay Gupta, UI assistant professor of agriculture and researcher with over \$1 million in grants, was falsely accused of improper behavior. He, too, was summarily forced out of his lab and warned never to come back. In July he received a letter of dismissal from UI President Duane Nellis, and a promising career has been destroyed if his final appeal is denied.

Gupta’s grants have now been assigned to other professors, and his data is being used, without his permission, by his former associates. Gupta had a distinguished graduate student career at Washington State University in the early 1990s, and several professors there, along with 13 others from across the nation, have written to Nellis calling for reconsideration.

On July 21 Gupta filed an appeal, but the administration took four months to respond. Faculty members have 14 days to file an appeal; but, incredibly enough, the procedures do not provide for a timely response from the administration. Due process has not been followed in this case, and this delay is a very good example of the old adage that “justice delayed is justice denied.”

Even though Gupta’s family and friends were allowed to attend his dismissal hearing in May, I was not allowed to be present even with Gupta’s written permission. I was told that UI Counsel Kent Nelson was sitting in the middle of the faculty dismissal committee leading the proceedings. I responded that this could not possibly be the case.

In no other dismissal or appeal hearing of which I am aware has the UI Counsel played this role. A faculty member was always chairing the sessions, and UI counsel always sat to the side. (In fact, in several hearings that I attended UI attorneys were not present at all.) Current UI policy does not contain any provisions for Nelson to take such a dominant and justice-obstructing role. Among the many functions listed at the UI Counsel’s website, this task is not mentioned.

BSU Professor Summarily Dismissed

Byung Kim, an assistant professor of physics at BSU was also fired this spring. University administrations do not have to give reasons for dismissing non-tenured faculty, but the issue appeared to be a dispute about grading standards. He had co-taught a class with his department chair, and he was criticized for giving lower grades

than the chair. He is a highly trained researcher from China, and he, too, was banned from his lab, but, after his attorney intervened, he will at least be paid until December 2012.

One could easily get the impression that, as each of these professors are from foreign countries, they have received this inhumane treatment because of that reason. I hope that the reason is extra caution because of the 9/11 attacks and/or the increase in workplace violence over the past decade. In any case these draconian actions are a violation of basic human rights.

Gier taught philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read all of his columns on higher education at www.NickGier.com/Columns.htm.