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USM Faculty Senate

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Faculty Senate

February 13, 2007

A Motion of Concern about Recent Personnel Changes Initiated by the Thames Administration during a Semester of Transition

Members of the Faculty Senate remain committed to doing all we can to assure a smooth transition to a new administration. As such, Senators and many of the faculty we represent were surprised and dismayed by the decision of the Thames Administration to "encourage" the Dean of the College of Education and Psychology to resign virtually "overnight" and just days after the untimely death of the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. This action is reminiscent of another Thames Administration maneuver in January 2003 when an entire cadre of deans of colleges was informed of their terminations as deans at a stunning morning meeting.

We believe that conspiring to secure the resignation of a respected dean just months before the appointment of a new president is fully out of step with the premise that all should now focus on assuring a smooth transition from the current administration to a new one.

We are also concerned about on-going leadership issues within the College of Education and Psychology including the process that led to appointments of two fairly junior colleagues from the same sub unit of the same department to the positions of interim dean and interim associate dean. These appointments were made outside the usual process of consultation with the chairs and departments to solicit opinion and/or volunteers for possible selection. Further, the appointment of an acting chair in that same department who is a visiting faculty member, who does not hold a tenure track position, and again without appropriate consultation with faculty within the department seems to be at odds with the prerequisites as described in the sections 2.10, 3.3.1, and 3.4 of the Faculty Handbook to be the top department administrator.

We repeat that the members of the Faculty Senate remain committed to doing all we can to assure a smooth transition to a new administration. We urge the members of the Thames Administration to dedicate themselves to administrative practices that will assure a smooth transition to new University leadership and to refrain from other major decisions and surprises that will affect the University well beyond the 2007 spring semester.

2.10 THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

The department chairs¹ are both faculty members and administrators, being integral members of the administration. Reporting to the dean, the department chairs are the chief administrative officers of their departments, responsible for the general direction and supervision of their departments. The department chairs are also responsible for the preparation and administration of the department budgets and for making appropriate recommendations to the deans regarding personnel needs. The department chairs are involved in determining educational policy and implementing institutional policies. This includes establishing curricula, schedules, departmental majors, and graduation requirements. The department chairs encourage excellence in teaching and engage the faculty in the evaluation of teaching. The chairs are directly responsible for developing department faculty, encouraging research, establishing standards of instruction, evaluating instruction, and making recommendations to the deans regarding salaries, promotions, tenure, and retention.

3.3 FACULTY DEFINED

3.3.1 Corps of Instruction. The Board of Trustees defines the faculty of Mississippi's public universities as those employees holding appointment within the Corps of Instruction. The University Corps of Instruction consists of full-time employees holding the ranks of Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, and Instructor, but the Board may approve other teaching personnel. Full-time extension and research personnel and librarians may be appointed by the President to the Corps of Instruction on the basis of comparable education and training.² All other employees are neither members nor ex officio members of the Corps of Instruction, do not qualify for a status of continuing employment within a state institution of higher learning, are expressly excluded from the privileges conferred by faculty status, and may not vote in institutional elections or personnel proceedings.

3.4 NON-FACULTY ACADEMIC STAFF

Not included within the definition of faculty propounded by the Board of Trustees are further classifications of academic staff that may be employed within the state's institutions of higher learning. These include:

- (a) part-time personnel performing specified instructional, research, or library duties;
- (b) personnel holding honorary titles or impermanent academic ranks such as "adjunct," "interim," or "visiting";
- (c) temporary personnel funded in whole or in part by contracts or agreements of fixed duration with external public and private entities;
- (d) library and research personnel not holding academic appointment; and
- (e) postgraduate and graduate assistants and graduate fellows performing specified instructional, research, or library duties.