

From: **Matt Lamkin** <matt-lamkin@utulsa.edu>
Date: Thu, Oct 3, 2019 at 7:23 AM
Subject: Maximum Poignancy
To: Tulaw-ft-faculty

Dear Colleagues,

I'm writing to respond to President Clancy's email last Friday and to clear up any confusion it may have caused. What we saw last week was a coordinated attack on faculty critics of the administration's True Commitment plan. Within a 24-hour period, multiple deans and high-ranking administrators sent emails – many of them sounding remarkably similar themes (see attached). These emails portrayed Concerned Faculty of TU as (in one of the more intemperate descriptions) “an anonymous message board troll sniping from the comfort of your made up moniker.” Dean Sorem referred to “‘concerned faculty’ who hide behind the name” and called on the ENS faculty to rally around the university's leadership. Dean Ploeger emailed not only the College of Health Sciences faculty, but its staff as well. She lamented “the selfishness and negativity of the resistance to True Commitment” and called on both faculty and staff to speak up in support of the administration and its plan.

Finally, President Clancy sent a message to all faculty and staff, in which he portrayed these messages as a spontaneous eruption of grassroots support for the university's leadership and the True Commitment plan. His message echoed those that preceded it, referring to Concerned Faculty of TU as a “nameless group” (?) and a “faceless entity.” He characterized CFTU's criticism as “misleading” but did not identify any allegedly misleading statements. And he encouraged faculty and staff to “take a stand” by “denounc[ing]” the administration's critics.

The core of the administration's message, sent through its surrogates, seems to be that a few disgruntled faculty members are terrorizing the campus by voicing concerns about the True Commitment plan, while cravenly hiding their identities. As an active member of CFTU, I would offer the following facts:

- **We are not hiding.**

The first letter sent from the “Concerned Faculty of TU” went to the Board of Trustees last May with signatures from 79 faculty members. The President and Provost were copied on it. Since that time, our ranks have grown considerably and we have made ourselves visible in countless ways. [Jake Howland](#), [Brian Hosmer](#), [Bob Jackson](#), [Jeff Hockett](#), [Vic Udwin](#), [Matt Hindman](#), and others have published op-eds, letters, and blog posts in local and national media outlets. I proposed and argued a Faculty Senate resolution declaring that True Commitment violates the Constitution. Bob Jackson recently hosted a campus-wide “teach-in” at the Kendall Hall theater, where Tamara Piety, Adrien Bouchet, Josh Corngold, Vic, and Jeff voiced their concerns in front of a sizable crowd. Scott Carter has organized a series of meetings – for the College of Business, ENS, and the faculty at large – to discuss concerns about the True Commitment plan. Other members have hosted information tables during First Friday in the Arts District.

In sum, the members of CFTU have publicly expressed our concerns on our own behalf, both

individually and collectively. We have not enlisted surrogates to deliver our messages for us. In light of all of this, the claim that we are hiding is difficult to comprehend.

That said, those of us who have been visible in our opposition are also speaking for a much broader group of faculty – many of them non-tenured – who refrain from publicly voicing their concerns because they fear retaliation by the administration. As described below, those fears are well founded. To characterize their anonymity as “bullying” states the matter precisely backwards.

- **Opposition to True Commitment is widespread.**

In April, the College of Arts & Sciences faculty voted to reject the True Commitment plan by a margin of **89-4**. Our College of Law voted to reject key features of the plan by a vote of **11-1**. A [petition calling for repeal](#) of the plan has garnered more than **8,000 signatures** to date. More than **300 TU alumni** have joined [TU Alumni for Responsible Reform](#), which has called the plan “a profound mistake.” A Faculty Senate resolution calling out the administration’s violations of shared governance passed by a margin of **30-13** – with 7 of those votes cast by members of the administration itself.

It is hard to square these facts with the administration’s claims that opposition to True Commitment is coming from a handful of malcontents. That said, if the administration is confident that True Commitment enjoys broad support from the faculty, they should put that question to a vote of the entire faculty.

- **The administration is violating the university’s own rules regarding shared governance.**

One of the key deficiencies identified in the HLC report was that shared governance at TU is “fragile” and that the university suffers from a “top-down” culture that is inconsistent with the norms of higher ed. In response, in May of 2018 the Faculty Senate adopted – and the Board of Trustees ratified – amendments to the Senate Constitution designed to guarantee that the faculty acts as a full partner in setting TU’s academic policy. Those amendments require the administration to discuss with the Senate major academic plans before submitting them to the Board or attempting to implement them.

Less than a year after adopting these requirements, the administration ignored them by bypassing the Senate and submitting its True Commitment plan directly to the Board. Accordingly, in August the Senate considered a resolution stating that the administration’s efforts to implement this plan violate the Constitution. As a further display of their hostility toward shared governance, the President, Provost, and every dean in attendance attempted a filibuster to prevent the Senate’s voice from being heard. That effort failed, and the resolution passed overwhelmingly.

At the next Senate meeting, Provost Levit issued a formal apology, stating that “we clearly missed the mark.” She then announced that the Board had invited the Senate’s leaders to craft an alternative proposal. This apology and offer appeared to signal an interest in crafting a new plan that could garner widespread faculty support. **The Provost would not be apologizing if the administration had done nothing wrong, and the Board would not be inviting Senate**

leaders to craft a new plan if the initial one had been fundamentally sound. Yet in last week's email, President Clancy made clear that the administration remains intent on ignoring the requirements of shared governance, writing that True Commitment "was adopted by the board without change. The trustees instructed the administration to implement the plan and that has not changed."

It is alarming that the university's leadership continues to show abject disregard for our institution's own rules – particularly when those rules were adopted at the insistence of the HLC. Given that restoring shared governance was a key pillar of the HLC report, I am deeply concerned that the administration's continuing disregard for the role of the Senate could threaten the university's accreditation.

• **The administration continues to violate academic freedom by working to silence dissent.**

A recurring theme in last week's email barrage was the claim that to criticize the True Commitment plan and the administration is a form of "bullying" and, in Clancy's words, an attack on the university itself. This transparent attempt to delegitimize and silence faculty members is a public relations tactic that has no place at a university. Many of us believe the True Commitment plan is fundamentally flawed and was not duly adopted, and we have lost confidence in the university's leadership. As faculty members who care about our university and the future of higher education, we have a duty to express those concerns.

Unlike the administration, we do not control budgets or have the authority to hire, fire, or discipline university employees. Our only power lies in our willingness to speak truthfully about our concerns. Last week's PR blitz was just the latest in a series of efforts by the administration to intimidate its critics and rob us of our voice. Here are just a few examples:

◇ At a Senate meeting last fall, one senator asked how he should respond to colleagues who were concerned about participating in what they saw as a flawed PPRC process. Pacing across the room – in front of a slide that read "This year, I'd like to focus on... deliberating together" – President Clancy pointed at the senator and responded, "you look them in the eye and you tell them, 'do it.'"

◇ At a Senate meeting this past April, President Clancy slammed the table and yelled at a senator who had reported the A&S vote rejecting the True Commitment plan.

◇ When CFTU held a forum at the College of Business last spring, an associate dean actively discouraged CCB faculty from attending, indicating they had nothing to gain from listening to their colleagues' concerns.

◇ As noted above, in August's Senate meeting the administration sought to prevent the Faculty from voting on a resolution calling out its violations of the Constitution.

◇ **Most disturbing, the administration has targeted several of its critics with investigations and official sanctions for speaking out against the plan. Multiple faculty members have**

had to engage attorneys to defend themselves from these attacks. This should never happen at a university.

◇ These efforts hit a new low last week, as the President and multiple deans encouraged staff to denounce critics of True Commitment and to express support for the administration. These staff members are at-will employees whose livelihoods depend on the administration's goodwill. It is astoundingly inappropriate to enlist them in the administration's PR campaign.

I know of many more examples from faculty members who are too afraid to share their stories publicly. Apart from being manifestly inconsistent with academic freedom, it is telling that the administration and its enablers believe such tactics are necessary to create an impression that True Commitment enjoys widespread support.

I understand that the university's leaders would strongly prefer that faculty members stop voicing concerns about their violations of university rules, their trammeling of shared governance, the shortcomings of the True Commitment plan, and the poor judgment that lies at the root of these problems. But I believe it is our duty to do so as members of this community and partners in the university's governance. I would again suggest that **if our leaders truly believe a "silent majority" of faculty have confidence in them and their plan, they would bring these issues to a vote of the faculty.**

Respectfully,

Matt Lamkin