

Minutes of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee
University of Kentucky Board of Trustees
Friday, February 23, 2018

The Human Resources and University Relations Committee of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees met on Friday, February 23, 2018 on the 18th floor of the Patterson Office Tower.

A. Meeting Opened

Kelly Sullivan Holland, Chair of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee, called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Chair Holland began by honoring Terry Mobley, who passed away on Monday, February 12, 2018. She spoke about his time as a former Chair of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee and dedicated member of the Board of Trustees. In his memory, Chair Holland called for a moment of silence.

Chair Holland asked Ms. Leonard, secretary of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee, to call the roll.

B. Roll Call

The following members of the Board of Trustees answered the call of the roll: Kelly Sullivan Holland, Angela L. Edwards, Robert Grossman, David V. Hawpe, David Melanson, Sandra R. Shuffett. Committee Member Benjamin Childress was not in attendance.

Other Board Members present included Jennifer Barber, Skip Berry, Lee Blonder, James Booth, Britt Brockman, Mark Bryant, Cammie Grant, Elizabeth McCoy, Derrick Ramsey, and Barbara Young.

C. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Committee member Sandy Shuffett to approve the minutes from the December 12, 2017, Committee meeting. Motion was seconded by Committee member David Hawpe. Motion carried, minutes approved as written.

D. Free Speech

Panelists for the free speech discussion included Sonja Feist-Price, Vice President for Institutional Diversity, Bill Thro, General Counsel, and Kathi Kern, Director of the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching(CELT).

President Capilouto began by thanking the Board for their interest in the topic of free speech. He summarized the history, locally and on college campuses around the nation, noting many instances of controversy regarding free speech. The President continued by highlighting, “over

the past 50 years, the University has become more diverse. One, out of many, dimensions of diversity has been increased in the number and percentage of people of color.” The second point developed over this period of time has been the amount of research and awareness on the fact words can do harm in many ways and the University has become aware and implemented things like student codes to be sensitive on the topic of free speech. Our goal as a University is to respect free speech, all individuals, and create a place with a sense of belonging. The President remarked that we all have a lot to learn on the issue.

President Capilouto introduced Sonja Feist-Price, Vice President for Institutional Diversity, to address preparing today’s students for navigating our campus community. An educational environment provides an opportunity to have discussion, dialogue, discourse, and to examine things from different points of view. Learning not only happens in the classroom, but also through engagement and discourse throughout the campus community. Microaggressions, Trigger Warnings, and Safe Spaces limit dialogue or discussion.

Sonja Feist-Price defined the following terms:

1. Microaggressions: Small actions or word choices that seem on their face to have no malicious intent but that are thought of as a kind of violence nonetheless.
2. Trigger Warnings: Alerts that professors are expected to issue if something in a course might cause a strong emotional response.
3. Safe Spaces: Offices or locations on campus where students go to find refuge and helps to elevate psychological harm. Students are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable.

A cultural shift is taking place across the country, now being called, “Vindictive Protectiveness”. It impacts the way students think and the way they navigate their environments. It limits what people say and the extent to which students are prepared for the world outside an academic institution. The goal is to equip students so they can thrive in environments where not everyone thinks alike.

Bill Thro, General Counsel, continued the conversation addressing First Amendment issues. Bill outlined that the First Amendment protects hate speech, comments that are harmful and ideas that some think are heretical. Bill Thro outlined the policies and procedures the University follows in relation to free speech regarding students, student groups, faculty, and staff as well. The University is in good standing with these regulations and will continue to abide by the guidelines.

Kathi Kern, Director of CELT, represented the faculty on the free speech panel. Kathi called attention to the balance of two important main principles: free speech, and a sense of belonging and community. Kathi Kern made a point, “It’s one thing to understand intellectually that anyone should be allowed to say just about anything, but what about in circumstances where that language targets the vulnerable?” Angles of free speech are not only addressed in the classrooms on campus, but socially and in public spaces as well. Most important as faculty, Kathi Kern

explained, “Universities are the one space in our society in which we teach people how to argue, build arguments, and puncture the arguments they disagree with. College education is about learning how to think critically. It’s a time where students can call into question everything previously believed to be natural and examine it. From this process, new ideas, strategies, and inventions can be made.” Kathi Kern finished by noting that building this freedom of expression, community of trust, and a sense of shared values is important for the common good.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Chair Holland asked Committee members for questions and comments:

Trustee David Hawpe commented on students getting from class to class without being subjected to hate speech and asked how often that happens at the University.

Kathi Kern noted that reports are kept to track instances reported by students, but also stated there may be instances that go un-reported day-to-day.

Sonja Feist-Price added that typically there are few reports of instances because of the wide-variety of examples that could negatively affect an individual.

President Capilouto added that it’s important for students and faculty members to keep having conversations about comments or instances that happen in order to maintain dialogue and an atmosphere of trust.

Kathi Kern spoke about a project called Critical Conversations on Race and Teaching which was created to help faculty feel more equipped to talk about issues in the classroom. Drop-in sessions and training sessions were implemented for faculty to attend in order to learn how to hold a discussion, establish ground rules in order to create a climate of trust, and hold each other accountable. The Program led to the creation of the Faculty Learning Community consisting of 20 faculty and 13 different colleges contributing financial support. This Community will study issues for a year and make a set of recommendations for campus after the completion of their research.

Trustee Cammie Grant asked if there were plans to hold follow-up conversations for the students after their Campus Panel conversation previously this week?

President Capilouto responded that there will be additional ideas implemented to engage people inside and outside the classroom. The classroom provides a great opportunity for structured conversations.

Sonja Feist-Price spoke about receiving feedback from students saying they want to get to know other students different from themselves. The classroom is one way to open this opportunity, as well as common cafeteria or work group areas.

Trustee Bob Grossman made the comment that the idea of the First Amendment and the variety of conversations that can take place is what we all want. He noted that if a comment is made from someone that simply doesn’t realize the implications, the conversation is much easier to

deal with. On the contrary, the comments that are intentionally vicious are usually made from individuals not interested in the dialogue. Communicating consequences to the students in these instances is important.

President Capilouto and Bill Thro responded by confirming the University does address these instances and ensures educational opportunities for students. Although the University will not punish these instances, it tries to communicate consequences not only on campus in a general sense, but also consequences later in life in a private sector, for example.

Chair Holland thanked the panel for the discussion and dialogue shared with the Committee.

E. Meeting Adjourned

Chair Holland called for other Committee business. Seeing none, motion was made by Committee member Sandra Shuffett to adjourn and seconded by Committee member David Hawpe. Meeting adjourned at 8:58 a.m.