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Faculty Forum discusses shared governance, changes

Analicia Haynes, Staff Reporter October 28, 2015 Filed under News

Faculty members flocked to the Martin Luther King Jr. University Union to attend a faculty forum Wednesday afternoon and discussed the issue of shared governance between faculty, staff members and the administration.

Todd Bruns, current chairman on faculty forum, facilitated the meeting and suggested it be held just as a general discussion for faculty members to take notes and ultimately construct ideas and recommendations regarding shared governance.

The idea of a faculty forum, Bruns said, originated from a member on faculty senate who wanted a forum on the upcoming referendum, which called for a vote of confidence/no confidence to Vice President Provost Blair Lord.

After a discussion in the Faculty Senate, it was determined that the original idea was too focused of a question and instead a forum on the idea of shared governance was recommended Bruns said.

"This is a good time for it (forum on shared governance) because of a new president and a potential turnover in administration," Bruns said. "We think it's a good time in terms to see where we have been in the last five years and what we think went well and what didn't and how we as participants in shared governance can change that."

Melinda Mueller, professor of political science, gave a summary on a committee that focused on shared governance, nearly five years ago, but has since dissolved.

Mueller said the committee was a sort of task force under former Eastern President Bill Perry meant to study shared governance by looking at recommendations about the topic from peers and return with a set of recommendations for Perry.

"We did that and we met with him in April 2011. He said he would recommend everything, but I think things just got filed away," Muller said.

Mueller said that of the recommendations sought to improve shared governance discussed five years prior, topics such as communication among the faculty, staff and the administration is still valuable to consider.

Mueller spoke about the five areas where recommendations were made five years ago that seek to improve communication between faculty members.

Mueller said even if 75 percent of the campus faculty and staff came to a meeting at a particular time then it would be valuable.

Other recommendations included the establishment of a university council to the president that would bring staff members together.
"We don't always have clear, consistent mechanisms for staff," Mueller said. "We want to improve communications there."

Further recommendations considered a delegate or hybrid system of representation on the Faculty Senate to encourage change on shared government as well as changes in the hiring process by allowing committees to rank candidates and a website dedicated to faculty and staff.

Faculty members discussed the possibility of incorporating these recommendations and re-establishing or revising committees that were created in 2011 to help carry out these recommendations.

In particular, the forum discussed the re-establishment of a shared governance committee.

Grant Sterling, professor of philosophy, attended the Faculty Senate meeting that discussed these recommendations and said, "One thing we didn't notice in 2011 is the degree of committees not being able to perform their function."

Sterling said a large number of the committees that were established are not meeting at all which serves as a problem to shared governance.

The committees that do meet, however, are being treated only as opportunities for the administration to tell faculty members their decisions instead of asking what faculty thinks the administration should do.

"I didn't perceive the recommendations from 2011 or the faculty having the chance to provide input into the various functions of the university as the problem, it's committees not being able to do their function," Sterling said.

Sterling recommended this problem be discussed because it is the fundamental problem of shared governance.

Gary Aylesworth, professor of philosophy, said to have real shared government, we have to keep an eye on the mission of the university.

"We (the faculty) are the collective body to keep everyone focused on that mission," Aylesworth said.

The faculty forum will try to assert itself and push for shared governance, Bruns said.

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