

Faculty Meeting with UMass President Jack M. Wilson

The UMass Boston Executive Committee of Faculty council invited UMass president Jack M. Wilson on Tuesday, May 29, 2007 to campus for a candid discussion about the recent recommended administrative changes that the UMass Board of Trustees will consider at its meeting on June 21, 2007. President Wilson answered questions and heard concerns while helping faculty members make sense out of “what is real and what is not real.”

Professor Noushin Ashrafi served as the moderator and opened the meeting with the following remarks:

No one has yet spoken for the faculty of UMass Boston. Let me repeat: No one has yet spoken for the faculty of UMass Boston. The faculty has not yet spoken for itself. We have all read in the newspaper, and heard on the local airwaves, unsourced rumors about the faculty's will and intent, or individuals who presume to speak for the faculty. But the faculty of UMass Boston has not yet spoken on the recent developments in the UMass system. While we might object to individuals presuming to speak for the faculty, it is easy to understand the high level of emotions involved.

Leaks of massive administrative changes were a complete surprise, described important changes undertaken without faculty consultation, or any kind of apparent transparency and put into question an important strategic planning process here at UMass Boston, undermined trust between administration and faculty on this campus and in the system as a whole, and hinted at long term structural realignments. These leaks have been met with varying degrees of concern, anger, alarm, and many, many rumors. Our purpose today is to get a few answers to our questions and for President Wilson to hear our concerns.

As I said earlier, the faculty of UMass Boston has not yet spoken on these issues. The faculty speaks through Faculty Council which is the highest faculty governance body at UMass Boston. It is there where resolutions are crafted, discussed, and voted upon. The next meeting of the Faculty Council will take place on June 4th, when we will discuss, and vote upon resolutions pertaining to the events that we will discuss today. The resolutions decided on June 4th will articulate the sense of the faculty to the Board of Trustees -- which will next meet on June 21st—to our campus, and to the larger UMass community. I encourage faculty to share their thoughts with the members of Faculty Council before June 4th. Our purpose today is to try to cut through the rumors and confusion, so that we will have carefully thought out, well informed, and clearly articulated resolutions to consider at the next week's Faculty Council meeting.

I thank you for coming and look forward to your questions and comments. I thank President Wilson for coming and look forward to our conversation here. I hope that we can have a productive and civil discussion.

The following are concerns expressed by UMass Boston faculty members and questions they asked President Wilson at this meeting. It should be noted that this is not a word-for-word transcription of the meeting, but it is an account of what occurred.

Question #1

A faculty member expressed his regrets that he heard about the recommended administrative changes from the press.

Faculty member: Did you intend to consult with faculty about changes specifically about the timing of changing chancellorship?

President Wilson responded by noting that he made the decision, accepts responsibility for his decisions and did not feel that faculty consultation was necessary.

Question #2

Faculty member: What do you think the role of faculty and students is in these kinds of decisions?

President Wilson noted that faculty members are the center of appropriate kinds of decisions (searches, etc.). Many faculty members assist the university on important searches and serve as advisors on international program committees. President Wilson also shared that he is committed to American Association of University Professors' shared governance policies and when an issue arises on one of the campuses, he always comes to campus to address the faculty and the university community.

Question #3

A faculty member expressed concern and was puzzled about collaboration. She noted that Governor Patrick's administration has "big plans" for higher education.

Faculty member: Why wasn't the decision to make changes in sync with the governor's plans?

President Wilson noted that the decisions were in collaboration with the governor's administration. The governor will be making an important announcement about higher education at UMass Boston's commencement exercises. The governor does support the decisions that have been made and the recommendations that have been proposed.

Question #4

A faculty member expressed concern that the unions were not informed that the Board of Trustees were meeting. According to the collective bargaining agreement, when the Board of Trustees gathers the union must be informed.

Faculty member: Why wasn't the union informed about and/or invited to the meeting?

President Wilson explained that members of the Board of Trustees met informally over dinner and that it was not a formal meeting. It was at this dinner that the One University Plan was presented. Before attending this meeting, President Wilson consulted with the General Counsel's office and the office did

not seem to think that it was a conflict. He also noted that in the future he will be careful of such gatherings that could appear to be a conflict.

Question #5

Faculty member: Do you intend to appoint Chancellor Collins as the chancellor of UMass Medical School?

President Wilson responded and said that he would not be appointing Chancellor Collins as the chancellor of the medical school because he was not a candidate in that search. Chancellor Collins will serve as interim chancellor and he would be welcome to apply for the position should he be interested.

Question # 6

Faculty member: If there was a major split between campuses on the view of the One University Plan, how would it be handled?

President Wilson responded to this question by saying that he would come to each campus and listen to all of the concerns (as he does when there is any major issue on any of the campuses).

Question # 7

Faculty member: Who is proposing the one university model?

President Wilson noted that the concept of one university model is off the table and he is committed to the campus with its aspirations and wants to help it fulfill those aspirations.

Question # 8

Faculty member: What is the urban mission?

President Wilson noted that he has an idea of what an urban mission is but that it is up to the faculty and university community of the Boston campus to define its urban mission.

Question # 9

Faculty member: How do you repair the harm that has been done?

President Wilson noted that transitions are always difficult and that we need to work together to move forward. We are passionate advocates for higher education. The five campuses are working together and the governor also has a strong passion for higher education.

Question # 10

A faculty member felt concerned that the president was making decisions without the Board of Trustees.

Faculty member: Shouldn't the Board of Trustees be the governance body that decides on a "one university"?

The president responded by saying that the "One University" was a vision and not a plan.

Question # 11

A faculty member had serious concerns about the previous UMass Boston chancellor search counting for the appointment of Chancellor Motley.

Faculty member: Should a previous search count for appointment?

President Wilson has consulted with other university presidents, the General Counsel, and other advisors concerning this issue and found that since Dr. Motley was vetted in the search process, that his appointment is legal and in the best interest of the Boston campus.

Question # 12

Faculty member: How do you see chancellors also serving as vice presidents working?

President Wilson noted that with members of the university's leadership in dual roles, that there will be a team approach to working together.

Question # 13

Faculty member: Can you comment about trustee John Armstrong's resignation?

The president responded that he respected John Armstrong very much and that it was his personal decision to resign from the Board of Trustees.

Statement # 14

A faculty member felt strongly about collaboration amongst campuses. She felt concerned particularly for the Boston campus because its students are different. She also felt concerned about the image of the Boston campus and that often students see UMass Boston as their last resort and that this image and feeling needs to change. There is a lot of pride in the UMass Boston campus and the faculty member did not agree with the choice for Amherst to be the university's flagship campus. The faculty member ended her comment by noting that "trusted leaders need to lead by example".

Statement # 15

A faculty member expressed her regrets for trustee John Armstrong resigning from the Board of Trustees. She called his resignation a "tremendous loss" of someone who had a lot of passion for the campus. He was an advocate for students and a friend of the system.

Statement # 16

Faculty member: The process of communication was flawed and poor.

President Wilson agreed that the communication about the recommended administrative changes were flawed and poor and that it was not the intention of the President's Office for the recommended changes to be announced in the press before they were announced directly to the campuses.

Statement # 17

Faculty member: A faculty member expressed her concerns about an administration that does not recognize the humanities.

Statement # 18

Faculty member: Are there other recommended changes that the campuses are not aware of that the Board of Trustees is reviewing at its meeting on June 21?

President Wilson answered, "no". He also emphasized that the PowerPoint presentation discussed is a vision piece and not a plan.