

EDUCATION

UK president says he will keep reviewing faculty senate's role. They've asked him to stop

BY MONICA KAST

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Pedestrians walk along Rose Street on the University of Kentucky campus in Lexington, Ky., on Thursday, Nov. 16, 2023. RYAN C. HERMENS rhermens@herald-leader.com

As the University of Kentucky senate council is asking President Eli Capilouto to stop the process of reviewing the university's shared governance structure, the president says he plans to adhere to the original timeline given by the board of trustees.

The senate council — the executive arm of the university senate — approved a resolution Monday asking Capilouto to pause work on potentially reorganizing the

governance structure and to collaborate with the university senate.

Capilouto, in an interview with the Herald-Leader Monday, said he plans to continue meeting with groups across campus and will stick to the timeline from the board of trustees, in part to make sure UK is in compliance with statewide recommendations from [Senate Joint Resolution 98](#) from last year.

Earlier this month, the senate council also passed a resolution [expressing their “profound concern”](#) over potential changes and asked to be included in the process.

The senate council outlined several concerns in the resolution Monday about the charge from the board, including the short timeline and that “the fact-finding underlying the President’s March recommendations will be inadequate.”

“The University Senate Resolution is important because President Capilouto’s communication with campus continues to fail to offer sufficient data or analysis to justify the changes to our governance structure that we are bracing for,” Senate Council Chair DeShana Collett said in an email Tuesday.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

On Feb. 23, the [board of trustees approved a resolution](#) directing Capilouto to “formulate recommended changes” to the university’s governing regulations, to be presented at the April board meeting. The charge is part of [Project Accelerate](#), which has five work groups reviewing various aspects of the university.

As part of work group 5, “more responsiveness,” UK worked with Deloitte Consulting to present findings to the board. Administrators said the move would streamline the

decision-making and policy-setting processes, while giving equal governance to student and staff groups on campus. But faculty members worry potential changes would remove them from the decision-making process around academics.

“The University Senate is open to evaluating and assessing our current processes,” Collett said. “We are willing to evaluate and determine whether there are better ways to incorporate the perspectives and expertise of staff members and students, whose input we have always valued and integrated into our procedures. Once again, we offer our time, energy, and resources to a process that involves genuine collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and a partnership between the administration and the University Senate.”

CAPILOUTO MEETING WITH UK STAFF AND STUDENTS

Capilouto said he has met with over 240 faculty, staff, students and administration members in small groups to gather feedback for how shared governance should work at UK. Feedback from those meetings generally [falls into four categories](#), he said: more voices, more clarity, more local control and more understanding.

Responding to the university senate’s call to halt the process of reviewing shared governance, Capilouto said the board has directed him to bring recommendations to the April meeting. However, review of the university’s rules and regulations in other areas will be an ongoing process, he said.

UK’s senate, which was first established in 1917, serves in an advisory role to the UK administration, but also holds policy-making power. For example, the senate approves academic programs and sets admissions standards at UK.

Capilouto said that out of respect for those he is still meeting with, he wouldn't yet share concrete ideas about what shared governance could look like.

"I have more thoughts now that I did when we started this," Capilouto said. "It reminds me of the benefits I have from listening. I also told some of the groups that I'm going to be very respectful and not prematurely draw conclusions, and listen a lot more. It is my hope that whatever we decide to do, we present to the campus by the end of this month and get more feedback and reactions."

Capilouto said a variety of opinions have been voiced in these meetings, all coming from a deep care about what is best for UK.

"I would be very disappointed if there were not a lot of different opinions on a university campus," Capilouto said. "I'm pleased to hear them, and they're not necessarily rooted in where someone may happen to sit. I think many people begin with what's best for the University of Kentucky, and obviously, I think people show great respect for other members of the shared governance constituency."

Addressing faculty concerns about still being able to have oversight of curriculum, Capilouto said that responsibility will remain with faculty. Other responsibilities, like performance reviews, will also stay with faculty, he said.

"We've said many times what will not change is the primacy of our faculty in developing curricular academic programs, content of courses, their responsibility in assessing students and how they perform," Capilouto said. "They have to feel confident about the degrees that they confer."

University of Kentucky President Eli Capilouto speaks about building upon the university's health care services and programs, especially interdisciplinary care, during an interview on Friday, Jan. 12, 2024. BY RYAN C. HERMENS

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