

Dr. Alfred Lutz  
President, MTSU Faculty Senate  
Box 621  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Murfreesboro, TN 37132

Tennessee Board of Regents  
1415 Murfreesboro Road  
Suite 350  
Nashville, TN 37217-2833

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Dear Tennessee Board of Regents,

Like the faculties at all other TBR institutions, the MTSU faculty are aware of the difficult financial condition of the state of Tennessee. We appreciate TBR efforts to ensure that our system contributes its fair share to help Tennessee weather this economic storm, and we received Chancellor Charles Manning's November 20 memorandum "Board Action on a New Business Model for Long Term Productivity Enhancement" and the appended draft document ("Moving Toward a More Efficient, Productive Business Model") in that spirit. Unfortunately, these communications do not strike us as reasonable starting-points for this important and necessary conversation. Since the memorandum invites campus responses to "the substance of the ideas presented," the MTSU Faculty Senate wishes to share the following thoughts with you.

All observers understand that Tennessee institutions of higher education have to respond swiftly to the state's dire financial situation, and we do realize that system administrators are supposed to think of challenges as opportunities to usher in what they believe to be much-needed change. Usually, such change is presented as inevitable. This is the case here. As Chancellor Manning writes, "This level of decrease in state appropriations coupled with the fact that economic conditions are not expected to improve for at least a couple of years suggests that the Tennessee Board of Regents institutions need to develop and implement a new business model." A suggestion leads to a need (asserted rather than argued) that manifests itself in a business model, which is self-evidently - no argument in support of its excellence is offered in these documents - superior to the *status quo*. A few paragraphs later, this model turns into "one or more new business models." This kind of rhetoric does not bode well for the bulk of the argument, which, sad to say, justifies our apprehensions.

This is not the time to sugarcoat our response. If implemented, the changes outlined in the documents under review would end higher education as we know - and value? - it in this state. They would lead to a substantial deterioration in the quality of education offered at TBR institutions, they would greatly lessen the value of the degrees these institutions grant, and they would compromise the academic lives of both faculty members and students. Please consider the following as an initial response to your initiative, one that will surely be superseded by a more

detailed response once faculty members at TBR institutions have had time to think through all of the issues these documents raise.

Before sharing our substantial concerns, we would like to register our discomfort at the process. Chancellor Manning's memorandum was released as late as November 20, a week before Thanksgiving, and about two weeks before the Board "will formalize its approval of this undertaking" at its December 4 meeting. At this meeting, the Board will also "approve," according to Chancellor Manning, "a policy permitting furloughs as a short-term expedient in dealing with budget reductions." The word 'policy' here actually refers to a substantial addition - addressing both furloughs and pay cuts - to TBR Policy 5:01:00:00 (General Personnel), a policy that affects virtually all employees. It is shocking to realize that TBR would (a) initiate fundamental changes to the work faculty members do ("new business model") without so much as informing, let alone consulting, them, the experts on this work; and (b) consider adopting a radical change to the Personnel Policy within two weeks, again without soliciting faculty input. This constitutes a serious breach of trust, and we will certainly no longer assume that TBR values faculty members as stakeholders crucial to the future of higher education in Tennessee.

Although distressing, this breach of trust is punned into insignificance by the ideas the draft document includes. Chancellor Manning's memorandum informs us that the "new business model" will "bring the system to a greater level of productivity." The draft document opines that it "is incumbent upon the Regents system to explore how to be more efficient by increasing our productivity while continuing to improve the quality of the students' educational experience." In other words, despite a 20% cut in state funding, we will be more productive and the quality of a TBR education will increase. Would it not be more reasonable to attempt to maintain the current level - difficult though that would be - instead of trying to do a lot more with a lot less, especially when these anticipated improvements require a radical revision of both the kind of education TBR institutions offer and the educational philosophy supporting it? Instead of relying on business rhetoric to create a smoke screen hiding the deleterious effects of the budget cuts on higher education, TBR should explain the harm the TBR system - its institutions, its programs, its students and employees - and, in the long run, the state of Tennessee will suffer as a result of cuts to a system underfunded even before this economic downturn began. To move forward on the basis of this "new business model" without irreparably harming higher education in Tennessee is impossible. To make it appear that the harm is minor, that it can be quickly mitigated, and that we will soon be more productive and offer a better education to TBR students is misleading at best. We need to offer a cure, not flatter the disease.

The draft document informs us that the "faculty is the overseer." Although "the business model for higher education recognizes," quite generously, "the importance of the faculty's role" as teachers of "courses populated by students," faculty members are supposed to be "evolving more toward [the role of being] the orchestrators of an educational process to the point that they are not directly involved in the dissemination of course material in a classroom setting." One aspect of the "new business model" is apparently the removal of faculty members from the classroom, increasing in the process the distance between them and their students, in order, presumably, to reduce the overall number of faculty members. This (as well as the idea to "formalize a system that anticipates even greater use of adjuncts") flies in the face of the 2005 report *The Condition of Higher Education in Tennessee*, which lists, among its "Objectives for Excellence," this one: "By the year 2010, the percent of courses at universities taught by full time faculty will increase" (21). The

report's rationale for including this objective is worth quoting: "As Tennessee seeks to strengthen educational quality, recruiting and retaining top faculty becomes a paramount concern" (20). It should also be noted that teaching is not the same as "dissemination of course material," a phrase that suggests an automaton disgorging stuff into a receptacle (formerly known as 'student') capable of disgorging it for a test. If a university were a widget factory, and if students were widgets, this would make perfect sense. As it is, it doesn't. The student-as-widget idea also stands behind the suggestion, later in the document, to define faculty workload no longer in terms of the "number of courses taught" but in terms "of the number of students taught."

Once the number of faculty members has been reduced, how does "dissemination of course material" occur? It turns out that "there could be possibilities for productivity and quality enhancement" in several areas. Among these are: (1) "empowering students with technology for understanding a concept and for drill and practice." The implication appears to be that to work with a professor is somehow less empowering. As our colleague Dr. Aleka Blackwell puts it: "Why do we have higher education? We have it not so that students can earn yet another diploma. Nor is higher education a matter of simply learning facts. Anyone can learn facts by reading. We have higher education so that professors -- who are trained analytical thinkers and who have thought about the nuances related to their disciplines for years -- can train others to be equally (if possible) analytical: to think in ways that they have never thought before, to evaluate information from multiple perspectives, to learn methodologies and analytical strategies that are new to them and are current in their respective fields, to notice the limitations of their knowledge and of the methodologies, and to be wise consumers of information and logical thinkers more generally once they graduate. We train students to be able to discern patterns in new and different contexts, to choose wisely among non-perfect solutions, all with the benefit of the knowledge we have gained from our own mistakes and extensive experience. As disseminators of factual information, we could never achieve these goals, and disseminating information alone is not our goal, in any case. Given these more lofty goals that are far more central to the purpose of higher education, we can only achieve these goals by engaging personally with each individual student." (2) "[C]ollaboration among students and use of advanced students to assist beginning students." Why hire a Ph.D. if the junior down the hall can "disseminate course material" to freshmen? And, most ominously, (3) "abandoning some of the ingrained structures that restrict our approach to traditional models," which probably means that academic freedom, tenure, shared governance, etc. - all part of the "traditional model," yet responsible for making the American system of higher education the envy of the world - can and should be "approached," i.e., abandoned, to enhance productivity and quality.

Some readers may not find a radical attack on faculty members - and this is what this document amounts to, make no mistake about it - troublesome, but they may find an attack on students' interests less palatable. Students, we are told, will receive a tuition discount if they "work online with no direct support from a faculty member except oversight of testing and grading when a student is ready." If implemented, this would lead to a two-tier system, which would funnel the poorer students into the sorry-no-help-for-you-buddy track, while the wealthier students would be able to consult faculty members and, as a result, receive a superior education and graduate with higher GPAs. In addition, students' financial aid might be made to depend on their willingness "to assist beginning students" or, presumably, on their willingness to be instructed by "advanced students." It is difficult to imagine that accreditation agencies would look kindly on these innovations.

One could go on (and on), but these points should suffice to suggest that unless all who hold a stake in the TBR system, a number that potentially includes all Tennesseans, have the opportunity to register their concerns and discuss these documents fully, TBR might well do irrecoverable damage to higher education in Tennessee. Short-term damage to TBR's and Tennessee's reputation has already been done. On his well-known web site, Marc Bousquet, author of the influential recent book *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, has awarded Dr. Manning the first annual "Turkey at the Top" award for "his new business model for higher ed." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the most influential publication in its field, and the *Nashville Scene* have now picked up this story.

Best wishes,

Alfred Lutz

(615) 898-2655  
alutz@mtsu.edu