

EDUCATION

Capilouto announces his proposed changes to faculty senate. What it means for campus

BY MONICA KAST
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Attendees listen to a presentation during a University of Kentucky Board of Trustees meeting at the Gatton Student Center on the UK campus in Lexington, Ky., on Friday, Feb. 23, 2024.

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The University of Kentucky university senate could lose its policy-making power and become an advisory group under recommended changes President Eli Capilouto

announced Wednesday.

Capilouto also proposed the creation of a president's council made up of 12 members split evenly between faculty, students, staff and senior administrators to advise him on institutional issues. In order to include "more voices" in the decision-making process, the faculty senate, staff senate and student government would serve in advisory roles, he said.

"I believe deeply that this is the right direction for our institution: more voices, more clear lines of authority, more control at the local level closest to those impacted. We can continue to refine and improve these ideas over the next few weeks as we develop specific (governing regulations) for Board members to consider at their April meeting," Capilouto said in an email to campus Wednesday.

Capilouto said he identified four principles to guide the revisions following his conversations across campus:

- Recognizing the board of trustees as the "ultimate authority for all policy matters"
- More voices and a range of roles within the university represented
- A "greater institutional focus," with the creation of the President's Council
- More development of and decisions about educational practice made at the college-level

The university senate — composed mainly of faculty, but also includes several students as voting members — was first established in 1917. It holds policy-making power and has authority to create broad educational policies and academic standards for the university. Among those responsibilities are approving academic programs and setting admissions standards at UK.

"The constructive feedback I have heard spoke loudly to the issues of student and staff representation — they are not adequately represented within the current structure," Capilouto said. "It is not organized to focus on the overall health and well-being of the whole University, nor is it positioned to establish or convey an overarching mission and vision for this institution. It is recommended, then, to be transitioned to a true faculty body — a Faculty Senate."

The announcement comes about one month after the board of trustees directed Capilouto to [propose changes to the university's governing regulations](#), including a directive to define a distinction between the roles of the board, president and faculty. The resolution also called for recommend changes to regulations that "define and clearly articulate a shared governance structure that is in greater alignment with institutional benchmarks and that clearly recognizes the Board's primacy as the institution's policymaking body."



University of Kentucky President Eli Capilouto is photographed at the administration building on the UK campus in Lexington, Ky., on Friday, Jan. 12, 2024. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com

This charge came out of work group 5 in UK's Project Accelerate, which has been asked to look at ways to make the university more responsive.

Additional recommendations announced Wednesday include giving more decision-making power about academic programs to individual colleges and a directive to continue reviewing the university's administrative regulations.

Since the February board meeting, administrators have said this review is to make decision-making at UK an easier and faster process, while bringing more voices to the table. Faculty members have expressed concerns the changes could remove them from the decision-making process.

TIMELINE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Capilouto announced the recommendations on Wednesday, and will gather feedback until April 3, which can be [submitted on the UK website](#). Based on the feedback received, changes could potentially be made before presenting recommendations to the board at the April 25 and 26 meetings. If approved by the board, the recommendations would go through another month of feedback and potential changes before being presented to the board for final approval at its June meetings.

Some faculty have repeatedly voiced concerns about the quick timeline for presenting these changes. The senate council — the executive arm of the university senate — passed a resolution shortly after the February board meeting asking Capilouto to [take more time in formulating recommendations](#) and involve the senate in the recommendations.

UK spokesperson Jay Blanton said the process has been “substantive,” and Capilouto has spoken to over 1,000 people through this process of gathering feedback. Last week, Capilouto met with more than 400 people in an hour and a half long university senate meeting, talking with faculty about the process and recommendations.

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“We’ve had a timeline with lots of debate and discussion, lots of ability to scrutinize and criticize and honest differences of opinion,” Blanton said. “I think the timeline has been substantive and deep, and he’s honestly taking feedback.”

In response to concerns that moving the faculty senate to an advisory role mirrors actions taken by West Virginia University, where a budget deficit and changes to the governance structure has resulted in the elimination of academic programs, Blanton said UK is not in the same position as WVU. Blanton pointed to UK’s strong budget and growing enrollment, and said the goal is not to cut programs or faculty positions.

“The president didn’t go into this and the board didn’t go into this with the intent of eliminating programs,” Blanton said. “We want to continue to grow.”



DeShana Collett, chair of the University Senate Council at the University of Kentucky, speaks following a university Board of Trustees meeting at the Gatton Student Center on the UK campus in Lexington, Ky., on Friday, Feb. 23, 2024. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com

DeShana Collett, chair of the senate council, said she was disappointed in the proposed changes. Collett and other members of the council, as well as members of the Student Government Association, staff senate and work group 5, met with Capilouto on Monday to go over the recommendations.

“I’m still waiting for the president to tell us what’s wrong with the university senate,” Collett said. “I would like for him to keep a students-first principle as a priority in his decision-making, and that includes faculty having decision-making authority over educational policy. Not having the experts at the table can be detrimental to the academic integrity and the academic excellence of this university.”

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.



University of Kentucky Board of Trustees Chair E. Britt Brockman speaks to the board on Friday, February 23, 2024. Ryan C. Hermens rhermens@herald-leader.com

The Herald-Leader has filed an Open Records Request for documentation of Deloitte’s research on the faculty senate, but has not yet received all requested records.

Following that meeting, the senate council passed a resolution asking Capilouto to [pause work on reorganizing](#) the governance structure and to collaborate with the university senate.

Capilouto held meetings with students, faculty and staff to gather feedback on how the governance structure could change, meeting with hundreds of people over the course of two weeks.

Capilouto met with the university senate on March 18, where more than 400 people attended virtually and in person. At the time, faculty expressed concerns about the approach taken by the administration, while Capilouto said he planned to continue on the timeline give by the board of trustees, and “the changes that I will recommend to the board are designed to clarify” and “give clear direction” on how the university operates.

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