

OPINION AND COMMENTARY

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OP-ED

Capilouto's assault on shared governance is a radical attack on democracy at UK | Opinion

BY WILLIAM TAYLOR AND KAMRYN LIN

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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

When considering the changes to shared governance proposed by UK President Capilouto and the Board of Trustees, undergraduates, like ourselves, feel a sense of dread. **The radical proposal would dissolve the University Senate, formed in 1918, composed of faculty and students.** The University Senate currently votes on decisions that affect our experiences as students at UK, including course curricula, enrollment numbers, and the continuation of departments and courses.

Capilouto says he aims to dissolve the senate due to a need for flexibility in decision making and a lack of accurate representation in the senate. Under his new plan, the

senate would become advisory. That means no votes and no power to stop the administration from pursuing their own interests, which may not align with the interests of students.

Attacks on shared governance are not new. Faculty and community representation at universities across the country have been under fire for decades.

In 1992, the [University of the District of Columbia](#) temporarily dissolved their Faculty Senate for similar reasons to Capilouto: to provide accurate campus representation. In reality, the decision had the opposite effect: barring members of the faculty and staff union from having representation on the newly instated senate, limiting their voices in university decision-making

In 2005, after the [Faculty Senate at Texas A&M issued a vote-of-no-confidence](#) against University President Rumaldo Juarez, he temporarily disbanded the senate in order to create one that supported his interests. The decision to disband the senate was suspected to be retaliatory and highlights the overall corrupt power university presidents have in interfering with the balance of voices on their campuses. These decisions are not made in the best interests of students. Is Capilouto's plan to strip the University Senate of its power truly being made in our best interests?

Only three years ago, Capilouto praised shared governance in a [campus news update](#): "I reaffirmed my commitment to a foundational value for us – shared governance. It's the essential idea that all of us – particularly our elected leaders among faculty, staff and students – must rely on each other, [and] listen to one another..." What has changed?

Accelerate Kentucky is the administration's plan to strip faculty's say in decision making. The [project website](#) states: "[UK] has been striving to meet the needs of Kentucky... graduating more students, moving enrollment to record levels..." But the administration has failed to establish the proper framework and infrastructure for such changes.

If the administration were truly interested in "meeting the needs of Kentucky," we feel that they would take steps to improve the lives of *existing* students, faculty, and employees, before rushing to accept new ones. Booming enrollment numbers will mean less personal attention per student and less connection to our campus community.

Furthermore, President Capilouto has stated that the removal of voting power from the University Senate will not result in classes and departments being cut from the UK roster as they were in the case of [West Virginia University](#). But who would be able to stop him if the proposal passed? An administration set on expansion and profits would be equally willing to make cuts. Why should we believe the people who are set on eliminating faculty and students from the conversation?

Undergraduate students at UK can see that a future of rapid changes made by administration without proper faculty consultation is a recipe for disaster. Surely the important part of any change is thorough consideration, not how fast it can be done.

Removing the checks-and-balances on an already powerful President and Board is never the answer in a collaborative field like higher education. As for representation, add the underrepresented groups to the existing senate if that is truly the issue. Don't strip the senate of its power.

If you feel strongly against Capilouto's action, stand with UK faculty, staff, and students and sign this [petition](#) to demand the continuation of shared governance at the University of Kentucky.

William Taylor is an undergraduate senior at UK who has been employed on campus for nearly two years. Kamryn Lin (they/them) is a national award winning Landscape Architecture student minoring in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Kentucky.

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