

May 16, 2024

IU President Pamela Whitten invited College Chairs and Directors, along with departmental representatives, to share our concerns with her in a listening session. Not all Chairs and Directors chose to attend. To accommodate the size of the College in a limited-size venue, she hosted two sessions on consecutive days. Below we summarize the sessions.

Tuesday, May 14, Federal Room, 1:00-2:30 pm

In Attendance: Pamela Whitten (President, IU); College chairs and faculty: Sarah Bauerle Danzman (Incoming Chair, CPC; International Studies); Purnima Bose (Incoming Chair English); Maria Bucur (Gender Studies & History); Selene Carter (Theatre, Drama & Contemporary Dance); Chris Connell (Chair, Mathematics); Laurent Dekydtspotter (Chair, Second Language Studies); Gregory Demas (Interim Chair, Biology); Sara Friedman (DGS, Anthropology; Gender Studies & Anthropology); Shane Greene (Anthropology); David Hertz (Chair, Comparative Literature); Natalie Hipple (Chair, Criminal Justice); Elizabeth Housworth (Chair, Statistics); Sarah Imhoff (Religious Studies); Michael Kaganovich (Chair, Economics); Stacie King (Chair, Anthropology); Volodymyr Lugovskyy (DGS, Economics); Sarah Phillips (Anthropology); Fabio Rojas (Chair, Sociology); Jeremy Schott (Director, Institute for Medieval Studies); Leah Shopkow (Incoming Chair, History); Brian Yanites (CPC Chair, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences). Observers: Donna Spears (IU Board of Trustees); Vivian Winston (IU Board of Trustees); Rick Van Kooten (Dean, College of Arts & Sciences).

A group of College chairs, College Policy Committee members, and departmental representatives met with President Pamela Whitten in the Federal Room on May 14, 2024 in the first of two meetings she convened to hear from College departments why faculty have no confidence in her administration. It opened with the president stating that she was serious about her desire to hear from faculty directly. A colleague began by iterating the April 16, 2024 No Confidence vote in which 93% of the voting faculty expressed their lack of confidence in her leadership and recapping the subsequent votes of No Confidence in academic units across campus. This colleague concluded by asking President Whitten if she intends to resign given that she has little support on campus. Her response was an emphatic “no,” followed by statements about how “we” need “to address these things.” The president also expressed confidence in her Provost.

Another colleague reminded her that “her approval ratings were in the single digits” and attempted to elicit more specific responses by asking “rhetorical questions”: 1) “When will you issue a public apology re: police response (in clear violation of 1st Amendment principles) to peaceful campus protests?; 2) When will you issue a blanket approval of the appeals for those “banned” from campus following 56 arrests (of students and faculty)? 3) When will you explain why specific minority students arrested during DM protests have not been allowed back on campus during their appeal process while most of the others have? 4) When will you rescind the “ad hoc” amendment to policy re: use of Dunn Meadow? 5) When will you publicly defend the politically motivated and public attacks on specific IU faculty members (Dr. Caitlin Bernard and Prof. Abdulkader Sinno) and, most recently, the entire IUB faculty/student community (following Rep. Jim Bank’s partisan portrayal of us in the Indy Star on May 2, where he called those engaging in free speech ‘pro Hamas protestors’ and characterized IU faculty as an

‘embarrassment’ to the state / ‘loiterers’ on our own campus?; 5) When will you issue a public explanation and apology for the cancellation of an abstract art exhibit, years in the making, for IU alum and former faculty member, Samia Halaby?” Whitten ducked these questions as rhetorical and, therefore, undeserving of a response. She also contended that some of the questions contained factual errors.

Forty-five minutes of the session focused on the police action in Dunn Meadow and injury to our students and faculty, the arbitrary creation of policy regarding encampments, and competing accounts of the events in Dunn Meadow. In spite of the fact that a number of faculty attendees were eyewitnesses to police violence, including one who had been brutalized, President Whitten insisted that her intelligence reports indicated that the IU community was at risk of violence based on her review of “audiotape” and “pictures of pepper spray and creek rocks.” IU Police, in her version of events, attempted to speak to the protesters, but were discouraged or told that they should not; their attempts to de-escalate were rebuffed. We were never told who these naysayers were. Multiple faculty members disputed the president’s version of events and asked that she provide evidence for her account. One colleague read a moving statement of her experiences and those of other faculty, who placed their bodies on the line in an attempt to protect our students from “heavily armed SWAT officers and Indiana State Police.” It was clear that President Whitten’s understanding of the demonstrations at Dunn Meadow differs dramatically from the experiences of faculty and students who were present on the scene. Faculty repeatedly pointed out that calling in heavily armed ISP and refusing to meet and/or negotiate with the students at the encampment constitute failed leadership and attendees of the meeting reiterated the question: When will you resign? Throughout, President Whitten refused to answer this question. At the end of the session, one colleague turned to the BoT members and asked that an independent investigation of the Dunn Meadow events be conducted, given the wildly divergent stories the President presented in contrast to the experiences of people on the ground, including several in the meeting.

President Whitten asked the room what accounted for the unique nature of current campus protests nationally. (She also claimed that sixty university presidents nationally have responded precisely like she did, by which she appeared to mean by using police force to dispel demonstrators.) Whitten asserted that “it’s been a hard road since October 7” and that she felt that she was “in a terrible position” regarding the “overnight policy change, ... a position [she] did not want to be in again.” She emphasized that campus policies are a problem since they are often ambiguous and contradictory, and that the Dunn Meadow policy was itself unclear. An attendee pointed out that the policy was not unclear and that, in fact, to the extent that it is policy, it clearly says that violations (such as overnight camping) were supposed to be met with legal recourse, not police. At some point during this exchange, President Whitten interrupted to make clear that there was no actual threat of violence, only the potential for violence, at which point multiple people expressed alarm because there is always, in every situation, the “potential” for violence. In general, President Whitten was unrepentant about inviting the State Police to campus, expressed no remorse for the injuries inflicted on students and faculty, and declined to apologize for her actions, reiterating the potential for violence and her firm belief that it was the intent of the protesters to camp overnight.

President Whitten stated that she did not want the media to control the narrative. And in response, an attendee asked if she was in accord with Jim Banks' assessment of our faculty as "immature radicals" who are not in touch with Hoosier values. She answered that she didn't agree with that characterization and was then asked, "why don't you make a public statement to defend our faculty and our reputation against these kinds of attacks?" President Whitten then reverted to generalities that university presidents are having a difficult time responding to so many things at once. We reminded her that Banks' article came out on May 2, and she had plenty of time not to let the media control the narrative, a concern she herself had articulated. She had little response and the questioning moved on.

The conversation shifted to faculty perceptions of President Whitten's leadership and the general chaos that characterizes upper provostial administration. Someone inquired whether she was aware that she was viewed as "an anti-faculty president." She has recently become aware of this perception, she told us. Others emphasized the absence of trust that faculty have in her administration because of failed communications, a lack of transparency, and ongoing confusion about procedures and policies, particularly in relation to budgetary matters. Colleagues articulated frustration at the provost's micromanagement of academic matters ranging from the "disaster" of the Faculty 100 Initiative (e.g., the mismatch between candidates chosen by faculty and those by the provost; the near 0% success in recruitment) to changes in ICR to space renovations. All of these factors have resulted in obstacles to maintaining our research productivity. "Chaos," a colleague told President Whitten, "is a sign of bad leadership." One attendee explained that the only way forward is with complete, utter transparency and openness, principles that must also apply to any who succeeds the President and Provost.

At one point in the session, President Whitten attempted to explain the complexities of the budget, professing her commitment to "support the College out of its hand-to-mouth existence." "The problems," she noted, "are systemic, endemic, and there are recurring budget challenges." For her, some of the solutions involve centralization of services, which she both embraces and eschews. For example, while generally being against centralization, she applauded the reorganization of UITS as increasing "efficiency"; it is a success because employees were retained, she asserted. Colleagues attempted to explain that the budget was a moving target—the numbers continuously shift, making any planning (short, medium, or long term) extremely difficult. She insisted that part of the problem seems to be that the reasoning behind high-level decision-making is not reaching lower levels. President Whitten also suggested we could engage in a David Letterman-type exercise and list our top ten suggestions for "the most annoying things that could be fixed," an exercise she reported to have previously implemented with success at other institutions. None of her responses addressed the central concern that reorganization and budget manipulations were making it impossible to successfully conduct the day-to-day work of the College.

Another constellation of questions and comments involved President Whitten's understanding of IUB as an R-1 institution. She reported being deeply appreciative of all the research conducted here and of "bragging about it" externally, but not internally. Whitten purported to know that IUB ranks number one in the Carnegie Classification of PhDs produced in the arts and humanities (but did not provide this ranking herself, instead a faculty member raised it). Yet she failed to mention that PhD students are central to the mission and operation of an R-1 university.

Citing her “decision to work at institutions with a full range of scholarship,” she referenced her experiences at Michigan State University and the University of Georgia as evidence of her knowledge of research institutions. We were offered no specific initiatives or commitments to support the arts, humanities, or social sciences on campus.

To conclude our session, colleagues demanded that President Whitten tell us the concrete steps that she planned to take in response to our concerns. “Let’s pitch spaghetti at the wall together,” she exclaimed, “It can’t just be me!” We pressed for a follow-up meeting, which we suggested that the provost could attend. (You can invite him to meet with you at any time, she told us, you don’t have to wait for me.) We ended with a colleague’s observation that faculty are tired of attending performative meetings with no outcomes; these meetings represent “hours of our lives we can’t get back.” The colleague cautioned President Whitten that if we do not see improvements, many faculty will devote themselves to their contractual obligations to focus on research and teaching at the expense of service. We could, in other words, become selective in our service with negative consequences for the daily operations of the university. It was suggested to the President that starting over with leadership on the Bloomington campus would show the faculty that she is listening and willing to move forward with us.

Wednesday, May 15, Tudor Room, 9:00-10:50 am

In Attendance: Pamela Whitten (President, IU); College chairs and faculty: Asaad Alsaleh (Chair, Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures); Charles Dann (Associate Chair, Chemistry), Jonathan Elmer (Professor, English), Cynthia Graham (Kinsey Institute and Gender Studies), Kaj Johnson (Acting Chair, Earth & Atmospheric Sciences); Mark Messier (Chair, Physics); Armin Moczek (Incoming Chair, Biology), Amrita Myers (Director of Graduate Studies, History), P. David Polly (Chair, Earth & Atmospheric Sciences); Stephanie Sanders (Chair, Gender Studies); Kennon Smith (Interior Design); Steven Tait (Chair, Chemistry); Robert Terrill (Incoming Associate Chair, English); Johannes Türk (Chair, Germanic Studies); Brenda Weber (Director, College Arts and Humanities Institute; Gender Studies); Cynthia Wu (Gender Studies). Guest: Ben Hunter (Associate Vice President, Public Safety). Observers: Donna Spears (IU Board of Trustees); Vivian Winston (IU Board of Trustees); Rick Van Kooten (Dean, College of Arts & Sciences).

The meeting opened with a statement made to Whitten that her decision to send militarized police and snipers to Dunn Meadow on April 25 and 27 had severed the failing trust in her leadership, trust that had been taxed by the cancellations of the Halaby exhibit, the failure of due process in the suspension of Professor Sinno, the reorganization of the Kinsey Institute, and low-key defense of academic freedom in face of SB 202 as well as by systemic institutional and academic issues, and which had already resulted in all-faculty vote of no confidence on April 16. As those grave issues had formed much of the conversation in the May 14th meeting, the opening statements continued that this meeting would try to focus on the other systemic issues that had undermined confidence and damaged the university, many of which had arisen from the higher administration’s insertion of their will into day-to-day decisions about the academic mission of the campus, their failure to listen to constructive feedback, their ineffective communication with faculty, staff, and students, and their capricious management of university

finances. The ensuing discussion touched on many issues related to all of these themes, as well as others.

While most of the meeting consisted of attendees relating problems that had grown under her leadership rather than posing questions for her to answer, President Whitten was asked to explain her vision for the university. Attendees explained to her that despite the many sudden and profound reorganizations and changes she has imposed, we have not yet heard a clearly articulated vision for where she thinks these changes are leading. Whitten was asked for her vision three times during the meeting in three different ways – her philosophy for decision making, her vision for what IU looks like in two to three years, what goals she wants to accomplish – and each time she said she needed more time to develop major points, to come up with big ideas, and that she needs our patience.

When Whitten said that she was learning from these meetings, attendees reminded her that faculty, chairs, students, and deans have been at the discussion table with her, the Provost, and the vice presidents for almost three years. She and Shrivastav have heard from us about problems with morale, hiring, research space, reviews of majors, advising, IU scholarship system, adherence to policies and procedures, and especially the need for meaningful faculty input many, many times. Any president to be successful must recognize, utilize, and embrace the expertise of faculty in setting academic direction, hiring priorities, and curricular matters. Meanwhile, the university is in such disarray that we cannot plan for next year, we cannot respond to external department review recommendations to develop strategic hiring plans, and there is increasing pressure from wider university students and faculty not to work with Whitten's administration. Members of the Muslim community broadly feel marginalized if not threatened, and some members of the Jewish community feel similarly marginalized by what is perceived as a very one-sided response to the horrific events in Israel and Palestine. Past listening sessions have appeared to be a sham – none of the sessions about restructuring the Kinsey Institute were attended by either the President or Provost, for example – and worry was expressed today that this meeting and the one yesterday are similar shams. The IUB 2030 strategic planning initiative was also described by attendees as a sham with few or none of the recommendations from the working groups having been incorporated into the final document. Others described pressures in other faculty-led planning exercises to change their recommendations to fit the university administration's views. Attendees explained it is now too late for listening sessions or promises to change – action should have been taken long ago to rebuild trust.

A recurring theme throughout the meeting was the damage that has been done to IUB's reputation and morale by the programs initiated by PW's administration, the changes they have imposed, and the public decisions they have (and sometimes have not) made. Invitees to local conferences and talks have sometimes refused to come and have explained that they had been asked to boycott IU because of the more public problems that we described in the opening statements. We are also starting to see the loss of faculty who are leaving for other institutions and chairs expect the rate to increase over the coming year. The need to make retention offers for Faculty in the College is up 40% this past year, and there has been almost complete loss of faculty in some small but highly ranked groups with highly enrolled programs (such as African History) and there is potential for very large losses of faculty in Natural & Mathematical Science disciplines.

Attendees explained in many ways that the Faculty 100 initiative is counterproductive because of its failures to recruit candidates to IU. Issues include the limited range of areas targeted by the initiative, the secrecy with which the program is being run in its second year, the lack of faculty and departmental involvement that is required to effectively define, advertise, and recruit candidates, and the impact that reallocation of financial and space resources to the program has had on ordinary hiring. So far, the initiative has only rarely attracted stellar candidates and under VPFAA it has been conducted in ways that are embarrassing to faculty and to the institution alike, including failure to follow legal requirements in initiating some searches. A quote from one science chair was read that explained, *“the hires imagined in those searches are not even close to the ones we would choose (and frankly need). Faculty in place that we would immediately hire if they were to apply from outside in the search are seriously threatening to leave.”*

Budgetary issues were another theme of the discussion. Higher administration has imposed changes in the allocation of indirect cost return funds from grants, in the amount of assessment paid by schools to fund activities at the presidential level, and in the transfer of staff lines (especially IT support) to UITS, all of which result in considerable loss of discretionary budgets in schools that are used to fund student experiences, centers and institutes, startup packages, and hiring. All of this has been done before a comprehensive revision of the university’s financial model has been completed, which leaves schools and departments with the inability to make decisions about new initiatives, new student programs, new research areas, or filling vacancies in staff or faculty lines in the coming year, much less in the years leading up to 2030. Just in the last few weeks the assessment made to the College has wavered from \$8m to \$12m and back to \$3.5m at a time when the ordinary deadline for budget setting is already past.

Related to the budgetary and staffing reorganizations, it was noted that the centralization measures that have already been implemented in the name of financial efficiency have damaged IUB’s responsiveness at a time when universities need to be more nimble and responsive than ever before.

An important discussion centered on the fact that IU’s two highest Carnegie research metrics heretofore are threatened by the changes being implemented. Those metrics are being top ranked in the humanities in terms of number of PhD students and being among the highest in the country in terms of the number of monographs per faculty. In addition, many departments and graduate programs in the arts and humanities are ranked among the best in the nation. Our leadership in these areas is threatened by the sudden shift of hiring almost exclusively to the STEM and professional fields (although it was noted that hiring has virtually stopped there too) and by the threats to close or merge language, humanities, and social science departments and to cancel majors with small enrollments. These changes, attendees argued, will result in very little cost savings yet could significantly reduce IU’s lead in these two metrics. It was noted that while the sciences at IU are high performing, it would take unrealistic investment to capture top Carnegie metrics in the sciences (especially under the total grant income and journal articles per faculty metrics). PW responded saying that she and government relations have been active in lobbying the state not to remove school world languages requirements.

The need for effective leadership in the current state political climate was also raised. Attendees observed that SB 202 was already compromising our ability to recruit students, visitors, and faculty and may leave the university with no way forward (the attendees recognized and thanked PW for being the only Indiana university president to make a public statement against SB 202). It was noted that with the accelerating trend to place universities in the sights of state and federal legislators, it will become increasingly urgent for university leaders to be able to effectively extoll the importance of the university, our values, and our contributions to society and the future, and also that they will have to be able to sway public opinion towards the university and deflect attacks on it. Furthermore, it was noted that the IU President needs to be able to effectively communicate to students, faculty and staff the interests of the university are being defended and that this aspect of communication is weak under Whitten's leadership.

Throughout the meeting solidarity across the university was expressed – arts, humanities, sciences, and professional fields need each other to thrive and to train students to meet the capricious changes the 21st century offers. Cutting some areas in favor of others damages the mission and functionality of a modern university.

The meeting began to come to a close with summary statements that the problems that have arisen under the Whitten administration are profound, complex, and pervasive. While not all of the problems are individually the fault of the president, one attendee explained that "the buck stops at the top". Attendees explained that feeling among the faculty is generally one of discouragement and sadness because of the damage that has been done to IUB. One attendee summarized our recommendations that in order to truly restore trust and functionality at IUB, the provost needs to be replaced and that Whitten herself needs to engage in serious dialogue with the trustees whether it is in the best interest of the university for her to continue as its President.

The President chose to end the meeting by defending her decision to send militarized police to Dunn Meadow, and she asked Ben Hunter to discuss evidence that swayed her. Her explanations (and his) took the conversation in a tense and heated direction, with attendees rebutting that there was no excuse for her decision, that her action had damaged the campus's morale and reputation, and that if there had been credible evidence of danger or crime from participants in the demonstration that those issues should have been dealt with in the ordinary way (low visibility investigation and arrest and emergency notification of the danger as required by the Clery Act) rather than by convening a secret committee late the night before to create an entrapment under which to confront and arrest students for an action that had been explicitly allowed for decades. The meeting ended heatedly and abruptly 20 minutes later than planned.

--Purnima Bose & P. David Polly