

## Northern Kentucky University Statement on Engagement with the Board of Regents

As Northern Kentucky University recruits its next president, and continues to confront structural budget challenges, we must focus on our shared mission, values, and identity. Since its inception, NKU has embraced its role as a regional, public, teaching-focused university. Among our core values is a climate of collegiality built on respect and characterized by open communication and shared responsibility.

The search process for the next president has brought together faculty, staff, students, community members, and regents to discuss our priorities and values. The faculty is encouraged by the receptivity of regents involved in these discussions. Nonetheless, a divide exists between the Board, as a whole, and the faculty, as a whole.

We believe that the Board shares the faculty's commitment to the well-being of the university. Nonetheless, several decisions made by the Board weaken the confidence of the faculty that the Board shares our understanding of the core values and mission of NKU. In this statement, we enumerate those decisions and identify a path toward better mutual understanding. The faculty recognize that some decisions were made when the composition of the Board was different than it is today. Not every Regent is responsible for every decision.

The University currently is suffering an unprecedented financial crisis. A primary role of the Board of Regents is to safeguard the financial stability of the University. At all times, the regents have regularly received ~~accurate and~~ audited quarterly-financial-statements of NKU's revenues and expenditures. Therefore, NKU's current financial crisis stems, in part, from the failure or inability of the regents to review and act upon financial information that was presented to them in the ordinary course of business.

The regents have reacted to this financial crisis by making decisions that have had the effect of decimating NKU's academic programs. These decisions have resulted in the elimination of one-sixth of the university's full-time faculty positions over a period of just three years, leaving some academic programs to be taught entirely by part-time adjunct instructors. Recently, the Board offered raises to certain athletic coaches just one week after 23 tenure-line faculty members were paid to resign and 17 additional faculty members were laid off. This decision and its timing suggest the success of the basketball program is more important to the Board than the success of the academic programs that have been devastated by cuts. NKU's mission is as a teaching-focused university. The cuts to academics means that, more and more, we rely on grossly underpaid part-time instructors to teach and nurture students. This cannot continue. Additionally, this increased athletic spending only exacerbates the financial crisis.

NKU's current financial crisis stems, in part, from the decision to hire the University's most recent president. The prior president was the first president NKU ever hired using a search process in which no finalists made public presentations on campus to the University community. Consequently, the faculty had no opportunity to raise any concerns prior to his appointment.

Such exclusion is contrary to the Statement of Collegial Governance which states that "[g]ood faith consultation with faculty bodies is routine in the . . . [s]election of the President and Executive Officers," and that "[f]aculty opinion in these matters should be strongly considered."

Because NKU's current financial crisis stems, in part, from the trust that the regents placed in our previous president, the Faculty Senate resolved on November 28, 2022, regarding the presidential search process, "that faculty, staff, and students should have a meaningful role in the presidential search process, which should include opportunities to attend public presentations on-campus from finalists and to provide input before a hiring decision is made." While the Faculty Senate agrees with the concern to maximize the quality and diversity of the candidate pool for the presidential search, we believe that it is possible to build a quality pool in a search that is confidential to protect the privacy of the candidates but is also transparent and accountable to the members of the university community. Ultimately, the search process cannot prioritize unknown candidates over the involvement of the university community.

Trust and confidence can only be restored by openness, transparency, and understanding built through professional relationships between the Board, as a whole, and the faculty, as a whole. The Faculty Senate holds that this can be accomplished while maintaining the healthy restrictions on the actions of both groups that is outlined in the *Bylaws of the NKU Board of Regents*. We propose these steps to begin:

1. Commit to a transparent process in the search for the next University president. All finalists must interact in a real way with a broad and diverse swath of the University community.
2. Commit to the regular engagement of individual regents with various campus groups throughout the academic year. Attendance at events such as the *Celebration of Student Research and Creativity and Experiential Learning Week*, the *Academic Affairs Faculty and Staff Awards*, and Faculty Senate and Staff Congress meetings are good places to start.
3. Commit to receiving regular updates from Faculty Senate and Staff Congress, in addition to ongoing input from the faculty and staff regents, on items of importance to these groups.
4. Commit to regular dialog between regents, faculty, staff, administrators, and students regarding important issues in higher education.