

September 9, 2007

Dear Members of the University of Oregon Faculty Senate,

As the new academic year is about to begin, I hope everyone still remembers the shock felt at the end of Spring term when President Frohnmayer announced that he had decided to shift the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art's reporting relationship from the Provost to the Vice-President for University Advancement. That move, made abruptly and without any clear explanation, raises serious concerns over faculty governance and faculty oversight of academic matters. The museum and its programming are integrally tied to the curriculum and research of a number of departments in the School of Architecture and Allied Arts at both the undergraduate and graduate level. A range of departments or programs across the University also work or have worked closely with the museum (Asian Studies, the Humanities Center, English, History, for example).

The president's decision to change the reporting structure directly contradicts standard professional practice as stated in *Professional Practices in Art Museums*, the guiding publication from the Association of Art Museum Directors. This publication stipulates that the director of a university art museum should report to "the central academic officer," the assumption being that a university art museum, unlike private or strictly public museums, has a prime responsibility to engage with the academic programs of the university's students and faculty. The publication urges all responsible for museum governance "to accept and be guided by the professional practices and code of ethics" contained in the document. It also advises that advance consultation about any deviation from the policies "can help avoid infractions of principles of professional practice."

The change in reporting as well as the president's equally precipitous decision to accelerate the search for a new director--despite faculty objections--have as their larger context serious problems within the governance structure of the museum, and in particular the proper role of the community and donors. In Summer 2006 the Provost's Office commissioned an independent assessment by the Pappas Consulting Group, parallel to that done for the Bach Festival. Issued on January 30, 2007, and only after taking the unusual step of responding to the concerns of the largely community and donor-oriented Museum of Art Board before reporting its findings, the report <http://www.uoregon.edu/~uoma/documents/PappasJSMAfinalreportPDF.pdf> found the entire internal governance structure, including the charter and by-laws of the Museum's Board in need of revision. It recommended that the museum's current mission statement be rewritten, with all stakeholders, including university faculty, participating in the articulation of "the mission, vision, values, goals and strategic initiatives" of the Museum. It also called for a stewardship workshop precisely to delineate Board and donor roles in relation to those of university and museum leadership. The report recommended that the review of the Board's charter and by-laws be completed by the end of April 2007. The only discussion to date appears to have been restricted to the Board's Executive Committee, which includes no faculty.

To her credit, Provost Brady encouraged the process of reevaluation and in a letter to Board members dated May 8, 2007 announced her intention to conduct a regular academic search for a new museum

director that would become fully active during the Fall term. Because of continuing problems encountered in discussions about museum governance, she also called for a Board meeting that would include past presidents and members to resolve the issues, writing: "I believe this meeting will provide us a forum to discuss issues related to the JSMA mission, charter and bylaws and agree on a plan for moving ahead. In suggesting this path I realize we might face some difficult and even uncomfortable conversations. Knowing that, I hope we can collectively approach this meeting open to hearing and honestly expressing various points of view with the goal of resolving differences and agreeing to a plan of action."

That public discussion did not take place, because over the course of one weekend, and in response to outside pressures from donors, President Frohnmayer removed responsibility for the museum from the Provost as well as stipulated that an accelerated search should take place over the summer. This would occur before any public discussion about the museum's governance structure, or about the position description, or the logical composition of the search committee for the hiring of position that for the last 20 years has included teaching responsibilities. Just to reiterate, there has been no open discussion about museum governance despite the repeated requests by concerned faculty that such discussions indeed take place.

The result of the actions recounted in this sad story is injury to the museum's reputation and integrity, including the strong possibility of endangering the museum's re-accreditation. A well-planned conclusion to the "Oregon Campaign" seems to have been given priority over the Provost's admirable efforts to reverse previous administrative neglect of the museum as part of her plan for academic excellence. While donors suggested the names of possible candidates for museum director before a position description was even written, faculty members with connections to top public and university museum directors feel unable to ask such people for recommendations about up-and-coming professionals who, if successfully hired, would then find themselves working at an institution where donors are able to oppose the institution's central academic officer in such a manner and have such power with the President. There is an urgent need for public discussion of these issues before the hiring of a new director, and as internal address of the museum governance goes forward, because they raise serious questions about academic integrity and faculty oversight of an academic unit of the University, and about donor ethics at the University of Oregon.

I request that the Faculty Senate discuss the issues raised above and consider a resolution calling for President Frohnmayer to return the JSMA Museum Director's reporting relationship to the Office of the Provost and to involve faculty representatives fully in any discussions about the JSMA's governance, as well as its "mission, vision, values, goals and strategic initiatives," as advised by the Pappas Report.

Sincerely,
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Department of Art History

University of Oregon