

Transcript

Open Forum

Dec 3, 2019, 3:30–5:00 p.m.
238 Broun Hall

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Good Afternoon. Thank you all for coming to Open Forum today. I am Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate.

As we stated in our open forum call sent to faculty last week before Thanksgiving break, the Chair of the Trustees executive committee, Charles McCrary, made the proposal to remove the interim designation from Interim President Jay Gogue’s title, making him Auburn’s President at the November 22nd Board of Trustees meeting. Dr. Gogue was amenable to this proposal but stated that he will only accept the designation with Auburn University community support. President Pro Tempore Wayne T. Smith recommended that all stakeholders input be solicited, and Mr. McCrary’s motion be taken up at the February 2020 Board meeting.

Even though we all know that the board’s responsibility for selecting the President of the University is established by law and regulatory policy, we’d appreciate President Pro Tempore Wayne Smith that the BOT requested all stakeholders’ input, which is required for shared governance, on this matter. This is an important positive step to encourage and strengthen faculty communication with the BOT.

Dr. Jay Gogue is well known, highly respected and extremely -liked figure by AU community. Dr. Gogue is a strong advocate for faculty, students, and the most importantly, shared governance.

So, this is an OPEN FORUM for discussion about the removing “Interim” word from Dr. Jay Gogue’s title making him the president of Auburn University.

This is an opportunity for all of us to have a voice in the direction of the university. Therefore, we strongly encourage everyone to participate in this discussion.

I now call the meeting to order.

We will record the discussions as we always do at Senate Meetings

Before we start our discussion, First, I would like to give you of some basic procedures for the Open Forum.

Second, I will summarize the proposal with details provided to me by President Pro-tempore Wayne Smith.

Basic Procedures

- *If you would like to speak please go to the microphone on either side aisle **and** state your name and affiliation.*
- *All remarks should be addressed to me, the Chair. Please remember this is not a time for personal conversation.*
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals should dominate a discussion. When you speak, be brief and to the point.
- Please limit your comments to three (3) to five(5) minutes.

Upon my request, President pro-tempore, Wayne Smith sent me a memo explaining why removing “interim” word from D. Gogue’s title is needed. [4:32]

I will now try to summarize the proposal. BOT are considering the reinstatement of Dr. Gogue as Auburn University’s regular president until such a time as they prepare and search for Auburn University’s next president.

They actually listed several reasons; the simple pragmatic reason they said, Dr. Gogue is demonstrably worthy and deserving of the title he had for 10 years, the very same awarded to him after a full and open search. The second reason they say his wisdom and selfless service is well documented and established as an advocate for Auburn University, and therefore they say that having him serve with any less title or formality would not seem to make great sense.

So this is the simple pragmatic reason. Of course, this is not the only reason. They listed more reasons. So here they are:

- They said it would help for communication with Alabama Legislature. Dr. Gogue has excellent communication skills. This skill set is needed for communicating with Alabama Legislature. BOT do not wish to artificially tie Dr. Gogue’s hands with that important task since the interim title somewhat appears to limit his authority.
- This will be important for implementation of the recently adopted 5-year Strategic Plan. They think that removing this title will give full power of regular presidency, Dr. Gogue will be able to communicate with all stakeholders and start this process as quickly as possible since he know Auburn University really well. [6:40]
- This will attract skilled Chief Executive Officer as his successor. Why? Upon to the past couple of years Auburn University has enjoyed a great period of stability under the leadership of Dr. Gogue. Removing this title and restoring his full presidential authority should also restore the stability and placing the university in the best possible position to attract a skilled Chief Executive Officer as his successor.

The forth reason which is not as important as the other ones.

- Students do not wish to have “interim” presidents sign their diplomas.

So, these are the reasons that they listed, and they continued...they say that Dr. Gogue would bring stability and achievement to the important mission of Auburn University. Therefore, at the next Board of Trustees meeting in February they would like to move forward with this change.

Of course, they provided more information about next steps regarding the search for the next president. They assure us that the BOT intends to conduct full and open presidential search with twelve-month’s notice to the university community.

This was information that was provided to me on the search for the new president. Also when this process begins they will form an advisory committee consisting of all stakeholders including faculty and others who will be charged with helping the Board of Trustees in this task of choosing a new president.

That is actually the end of the memo. I tried to summarize, and I would like to open the floor for discussion. 3:40 p.m.

Discussion

Mike Fogle, Physics, senator: There is a lot of sentimentality in these reasons. I think he can do all of those things, unless someone could point out, with his current title. I think we could take a poll in here and asked how many people know who signed their diploma? Probably, nobody. So, I don’t think student care that much.

What’s the real motivation here, what’s the real advantage? Does it really buy him negotiating power with Legislators representing Auburn…it’s just hard to see and it sounds like a 12 month notice on searching, we are at least 12 months out before starting a search now if we do this. Which could be a 2 year process at least. I don’t know this is in the best interest of the university given our strategic plan and where we want to go. I certainly like what Dr. Gogue has done in the past, but maybe that’s not where we should be going.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Thank you. [10:17]
Jim Witte, for AAUP: The president of AAUP is currently in Tuscaloosa. Now why in the world she would want to be there is beyond me. (laughter)
She did ask me to read into the record the following:
This is a collective statement in response to the University Senate call for feedback from its stakeholders. The Auburn University Chapter of AAUP has drafted the following response.

During Jay Gogue’s previous tenure as Auburn University’ President we believed that he served with the utmost professionalism, encouraging and insuring shared governance with a commitment to respectfully listening and considering the needs and opinions of faculty. As a strong supporter of faculty rights and openness and transparency Dr. Gogue’s leadership brought with it an orientation toward consensus building that served all university stakeholders. To the extent that the Board of Trustees in removing “interim” from the title of president Gogue is to result in an appointment for a specified period of years. In order to facilitate a thoughtful, inclusive, and transparent search process for the next university president. The membership of the Auburn University Chapter of AAUP overwhelmingly supports the proposal.
Thank you.

term limit recommended

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Thank you Dr. Witte. [12:04]

Ed Youngblood, Media Studies: Just to clarify, other than a job change title there really is nothing else happening with this, is that my understanding?

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Yes.

Ed Youngblood, Media Studies: That’s all I’ve got. Thank you.

Andreas Kabazis, Kinesiology, Senator: We went ahead and polled all of our faculty, the response we got was 22 yes to 0 no, in favor of removing the term interim from his title..

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Thank you. I wasn’t expecting this but this is important. Thank you very much. This is going to be a short open forum. Yes, come on Tony.

Tony Moss, Biological Sciences,senator: So if fact, I did the same thing with Biological Sciences and had a very low response. The 3 people who responded were all entirely in favor of Dr. Gogue being installed as president. I think they were curious as to why the mechanism had to occur, but saw no danger and were not concerned about him coming back. These are 3 people outside of myself, so I add myself to this, and I agree with all this. Is this part of standard procedure though? Can we...is this normally done in a circumstance like this?

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: No.

Tony Moss, Biological Sciences,senator: There is a little concern in our department about...the process.

Jim Witte, parliamentarian: As a parliamentarian, there are multiple avenues for us to come together as a faculty. This meeting was called under the premise of an Open Forum. There are specific guidelines within Roberts Rules of Order. What it comes down to; these are very interesting times here at Auburn. We don’t usually have an opportunity to input on removal of a president’s title. So for those of you who are concerned about what we should call our meeting or what procedure to follow, I would recommend that we call this a bunch of faculty getting together to give an input. That absolves us from a lot of procedural issues, because that’s really the bottom line here., is for the assembled faculty to have an opportunity to voice their concerns or lack there of. Does that kind of lighten this up a little bit?
I hope so and I hope is causes us to participate and lay down, for or against. Either way is just fine, but at least we can come out with some degree of consensus.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: That’s why we wanted to have an Open Forum instead of a Senate meeting. This is an informal atmosphere and please feel free to come up and say whatever you are thinking about this proposal.

Jim Witte, parliamentarian: There are rules that cover Open Forum but they are far less stringent than we would have in a regular faculty meeting, so let’s take advantage of it.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Thank you. Yes. Tony.

Tony Moss, Biological Sciences: So the statement from the AAUP stated quite specifically that this would be for a prescribed period of time. Is that correct? Is that what the circumstances would be if this goes forward to decision by the BOT.

Jim Witte, parliamentarian: AAUP recommends specific period of time. 2–3 years up to 5 years. [16:49]

Tony Moss, Biological Sciences: Has Dr. Gogue agreed to a particular period of time?

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: No, he did not. We asked him, but he doesn’t want to stay here forever, I can tell you that. He had already retired and enjoying his retirement. So, I asked that question to the Board of Trustees and that is the answer that I got.

Connor Bailey, Prof. Emeritus of Rural Sociology: I served on the search committee that brought Dr. Gogue to campus, so I have a bias, I like Dr. Gogue. Because I served on that committee, I got to not only know Dr. Gogue but also Charles McCreary, who is the chair of the Executive Committee of the Board. And being a pushy kind of person, those of you who know me, I just reached out to these people and said, what gives?

So let me tell you what I’ve learned. To the first question of what is the difference that it makes removing the title; maybe not much but I was told that there are several key state boards, one in the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama that an interim president is not eligible to serve on but a president is. So, there are some things that might be useful. The other thing is, and Charles McCreary said I could quote him on this, so I will do; he

said the Board offered Dr. Gogue a 5-year contract and Jay said, No. He doesn't want to be committed for that kind of timeline. So, I don't have a specific time period. Dr. Gogue is certainly not using this as a power opportunity to build an empire. He does enjoy his retirement, but he understands given the time...some of the stresses that have happened recently, that having a period of time of a couple years, my works not his, is something that might be useful for us to initiate a successful search. He is not interested in spending 5 years in this role. He will not sign a contract for that. He won't tell the Board any timeframe. He will know when it's time to subside and move forward.

I don't have specific answers, but Charles McCreary said, we offered 5, we offered 3 and Dr. Gogue would not commit to that length of term. That is what Charles McCreary said. It's not that Dr. Gogue would not stay for 3 years if that was necessary, but he is interested in moving on as soon as he can.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: I was told that at the end of every year they will be evaluating. That's what I was told.

(something spoken off microphone)

Connor Bailey, Prof. Emeritus of Rural Sociology: I can't answer the question, I don't know. Why don't you come to the mic?

Mike Baginski, IPC: I want to tell you, I hear a lot of things. One of the things I get is well, how long is he going to stay? I don't know. I didn't ask him that, but probably should have. And the second thing, I didn't know he was offered a 3- or 5-year contract. Nothing was ever said to anybody. Did you ever hear this Nedret?

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: No.

Mike Baginski, IPC: So, I don't know anything about that.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Connor Bailey. He reached out to Charles McCreary personally. He asked that question, and this is what he got.

Mike Baginski, IPC: So, I guess the question I would like to see answered at some point is what right now is the contract timeframe that he's on and when will it be reevaluated. In other words, how long do we have? That's what I am really up to.

Second thing I want to say is that I have worked with Jay Gogue for years, long ago when he was first here. He was the great peace maker, he came at a time of terrible uproar and, Connor remembers some of this I'm sure, and he was a very welcomed person. I don't know one person that didn't welcome him with open arms after the first and second year he was here. I was impressed by that. He never was somebody that was trying to cause a lot of stress, he was trying to smooth things out. So that's the reason I personally like him. I think it would be good if we had a little more background on how long he might stay or what the search plans are. because a lot of people are asking about the next president we would be considering, what are we looking for. These are legitimate questions but nobody, at least I haven't heard anybody, Emmett's not here, all the people I am looking for are not here. At least nobody has mentioned or addressed these issues. This is my own personal concern, I'd like more information about the search, what's going on with their planning and more or less what his thoughts are. How long he sees himself being here, at the most.

Nedret Billor, Chair of the University Senate: Thank you. [22:24]

I ask these questions, and this is the memo that I have received, so they have some information but not full information. What we will be doing is preparing a statement to deliver to the Board of Trustees and whatever the concerns or questions you might have we may include them and deliver the statement to the Board of Trustees. Because this BOT meeting will be in February, maybe by that time they may have some information. It's good to have this open forum right now. [23:00] [bkup 22:29]

Jim Witte: I would just like to emphasize that the question at hand is do we remain or drop the term "interim"? A lot of the extraneous factors that may break into that decision really don't have an answer. Connor just gave us the most current information we have on a possible length of term and even that is not a thing that is solidified. So, taking things first things first, do we want to keep interim or not keep interim and beyond that we may have other questions to be brought up the chain, but our first one is to focus on the business at hand.

Did I say that wrong?

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: No you said it right. Thank you.

Jamie Harrison, Curr & Teaching, College of Education: I had 2 people respond to my query who wanted to make comments so, I thought I should mention them. They were both concerned with the change related to standard protocol and procedures and whether (not understandable). These people are newer to the faculty and do not have experience with Dr. Gogue and historical knowledge that others have so I thought it was important to bring it up.

Also related to issues of the open search down the road for diverse people to be considered for the search.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: This is what was promised.

Jamie Harrison, Curr & Teaching, College of Education: I just wanted to bring those ideas to mind and wanted to ask a question also. Does taking the term interim out change the timeline of how long Dr. Gogue is staying with us? Or is what we are saying is that it doesn't change that at all? He will be here however long he is whether it (the term interim) is there or not?

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Yes.

I agree with you and I would like to know how the search for the new president is going to be. We are all concerned about this. We all know who Dr. Gogue is, we have all worked with him. I have been working at Auburn University for 17 years, I had a great experience with him, but that is not the issue. This issue you are all concerned about is how the search is going to be, so, in my power I will work with the Board of Trustees. I've been doing that behind the scenes, you may not know I have been meeting with them and talking to them and I think we are taking good steps. I am positive about our communication with the Board of Trustees. This is the main important thing, I am working on that. For the search and how it's going to be, as they pointed out it will be open and forming an advisory committee including a lot of people from different stakeholders and these are important steps. We will follow up when the president search starts. I will work with them in my power and I am hopeful they will do a good search. I am optimistic.

Any more questions or comments, thoughts? Yes Collie?

?Woman?: He there, I am an assistant professor in the Higher Education Program at EFTL, College of Education. From the research I've done, this is not an unusual thing to happen. It's not from my understanding of university policy and the Faculty Handbook against any formal policies that we have so, I appreciate that the Board of Trustees wants our input on this matter. I wasn't here for his last tenure as president of Auburn, but my understanding is that overall it was a fairly calming presence for the whole university. And often from what I've seen in literature is that when universities do this it is often a really good opportunity to make a really excellent hire next. So that's what I am hopeful will happen, but I do want to echo the sentiments of AAUP that we need to think very strongly or make recommendations as a faculty for a term contract for Dr. Gogue in this

interim, not interim, role. [bk 27:57] I would put forth a recommendation that fall of 2022 or 2023 is when we would look to have a new president in place. I think the term contract would be very important so that we can have this 12-month lead time and we do have a time-line put in place for faculty involvement, but also other stakeholders, students, faculty, staff, administrators as well. Thanks.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Thank you Collie.

Andreas Kabazis, Kinesiology: I don’t know if it’s in the plans to actually take a vote in here by showing hands. What is the decision of the faculty who actually came, and then present that data showing how many in favor of removing the term interim and how many against?

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: We may do that, but I also think that we can send out a Qualtrics survey, this is what I had in my mind, but it doesn’t really hurt if we do it right now. I can provide this information and also send a survey, it is no problem. It is entirely up to you guys.

We did not bring clickers because we have 87 clickers and we thought we would have more people and we were wrong about this. I thought this would be an important topic that people would be interested in.

Let me ask you. Would you like to vote right now?

Lots of chatter about this in the room. Many people are not willing to vote, some are anxious to vote.

Doug Goodwin, senator Chemistry: I think that is a bad idea. We talked about this as an Open Forum. The attendance of this meeting would look a lot different if it was known that there would be a vote. I think it’s a bad idea.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: This is not what I wanted to do. My goal is to send out one question with a brief statement and ask everyone to; support, not support, or abstain. This is just an advisory opinion to the BOT from faculty. So, we can send a Qualtrics survey to faculty containing only one question and a brief statement.

Any further discussions?

Off microphone: Will this be sent to all faculty.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Yes, all faculty, that is why this is Open Forum and we sent this e-mail to all faculty. BOT are requesting this input not only from faculty but all stakeholders. I am hoping that A&P also would do such a thing to provide input.

Tony Moss, Biological Sciences: May I make an amendment to your suggestion that it include a statement regarding this would be a limited term as was suggested by our colleague a few minutes ago.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: I don’t want to include that. I will be delivering a statement to BOT that statement, that memo will have that information. I am hoping to hear from them what they will be saying. I don’t want to put that in the Qualtrics survey. Just regarding the “interim” word, that’s all. I don’t want to make it complicated.

Mike Fogle, Physics, senator: I think without some guidance and language about the discussion of what we have already had, we said this is future search focused even though we are talking about removing a title. That’s what’s on everybody’s mind. You ask people blankly without any other context, you may get a lot more NOs without some discussion or understanding that YES we would yes, but conditionally.

I think a lot of us have this conditional statement in our head of “YES, with limits”. And if you do that without context you may just get NO blatenly. There might need to be a mechanism to provide context with that.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Alright, thank you for your comment.

Lisa Kensler, EFLT, College of Education: I would second that point (made by Mike Fogle) and would add just another voice to the request that the feedback from faculty include support with that condition of a limited term, and some clarity of what that timeline will be. Of course, that’s something they will negotiate with Dr. Gogue or President Gogue, but that is an important piece. We are hearing it from a number of different places that they receive that feedback.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: I will think about it. I can’t say right now immediately what we need to do, but maybe we won’t have to. We will gather all of these comments together and deliver them to the BOT. In addition to that I just thought it would be a good idea to provide a quantitative measure, that is what I thought would be useful to have. But I agree with you there are some other context we may need to worry about. Let’s discuss this later, alright, but this is an Open Forum just to see how we feel about removing the interim title.

Further comments?

Dr. Henson (came in late from another meeting): I apologize first, I just walked in the door from another meeting. So, I heard none of the context or previous comments so if I say something that is repetitive I apologize.

I think that the Board needs to recognize that we need to mover forward. Dr. Gogue has been a wonderful president, that’s not to say that is who we should choose for our future president for any period of time. I understand the necessity given the events of the summer that there needed to be an appointment of an interim president, but it’s time to move on. The Board should make plans, in my opinion, to hire a president by the fall of 2020. There is no good reason for delay and the Board should perhaps learn from their previous experience with a very closed un-transparent process of the choice of our previous president, and include more faculty voices and perspectives of the choice of president.

Again, without context I don’t know anything that was said previously, but there it is.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: thank you, we’ve been discussing the Board of trustees president protempore delivered a memo to us, Dr. Henson. So, I just summarized the proposal. Thank you very much for your comments. Mike was here, he may provide you with some further information.

Lordes Betanzos, Foreign Language Dept.: I want to echo Dr. Hansen’s statement, I felt the same way. Gogue was great, but I am actually surprised at this proposal and surprised we haven’t heard plans for a search by now. I agree, it’s time to move on and time for a search.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: thank you,

Susan Youngblood, English: I had 2 questions. First, how widely the qualtrics survey will be distributed? Is that limited to faculty? There was some talk about other stakeholders and I want to be able to relay whether other stakeholders will be included in that survey opportunity? Second, what is, I

think most of us are well aware of the search time tables for faculty, what is the typical search timetable or range of timetables for a presidential search?

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: At least 12 month search time table. For the first question, the Qualtrics survey, this is a platform for faculty. Therefore it comes from the Senate Executive Committee and we would like to send the survey to faculty. But I talked to Mark Brasby, chair of A&P and he is having his meeting tomorrow at their regular meeting.

Mark Brasnby will bring up as topic at A&P meeting Dec. 4. Not open forum, don’t know your plan, but we wanted to do it from our side as faculty and provide that information. BOT would like to get feedback from all stakeholders. Other stakeholders are welcome to do their own survey. Ours will be only to faculty.
To your second question it is 12 months, to me it is one and a half year because of getting feedback and a lot of things, as well as meetings on campus as what kind of president we want, etc.
I already told the BOT the timeline, 1.5 years.

Jim Witte, Parliamentarian: I think we are a lot closer to resolution here than I actually thought we would ever get, but first of all I like the idea of not voting here. I think that would be inappropriate. We are not a big enough representative group to begin with, but the most important thing we captured out of here are concerns about a president of the university. There’s got to be a mechanism to capture that kind of input just in summary. Then do we forward that out to the entire faculty, do we just send it to the Board? Those decision would have to come through the Senate because they are the ones that have convened this (open forum meeting). But sooner or later we are all going to be faced with a yes or no. I don’t know that we have a caveat; yes I would support it for a period of “fill in the blank;” one year, two year, no less than 5, but rather a definitive do we remove the title or not (“interim” from title).
That is a difficult question to broach without having any background. Maybe that is the initial problem here.

Hopefully discussion like this could be continued. Are we going to have absolute clarity, probably not. Sooner or later faculty are going to vote their gut feeling. And it is only a recommendation. Having said that, it would be my recommendation to continue to gather input. Terms limits, when are we going to start an actual search? Things like that need to be addressed, but keep in mind we get carried with all of those conversations and ignore the issue of removing “interim.” I think any president is limited by the term interim.

Just because it’s removed doesn’t mean that Jay Gogue is going to have a cart blanche and stay forever. Bottom line, those are my thoughts and consideration based on the discussions we’ve had here. That’s all I’ve got.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Our plan is to provide a summary of comments of this meeting. We will be sharing that information with you too.

Brian Anderson, Civil Engineering: We all want Auburn to be number one. We want to compete in the state, we want to make sure that all of our interests are served and I think what the Trustees have said is that purely the limitation on interim does not allow our president to serve on boards and to represent us against the other universities and to compete at the state level. I think it is a way of how do we say, that he is interim only, he is interim but not entitled is what this is.
His is going to serve as our interim president and serve a couple more years. He is still an interim in term, but want to take the title (interim) away so that he can serve as our president in all those functions. I think that is really what we have to answer and nothing else.

All of the rest of this is very important and the problem is we didn’t feel like we had that last time and we want to make sure that we are represented but this is purely about that word. I know from the fact that my faculty responded, those that took time to respond, we feel like we are in good hands, Gogue can take care of us. We are comfortable with him being president again, but all of us want Auburn to be number one. So, if this gives him an opportunity to represent us everywhere across the state, more than being interim, I am all for it. I think that is what we ought to do.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Thank you.

Further comments?

Susan Youngblood, English: Just to follow up, I think I want to echo what I am hearing to make sure that this is correct. Contextually, if he’s not interested in signing a 3-year, 5-year contract

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: We don’t know. I haven’t heard that. Connor Bailey provided that information. I haven’t heard that information from anybody.

Susan Youngblood, English: So, that’s not official

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: No.

Susan Youngblood, English: So, via un-official channels, we have a sense that perhaps he is looking at 2 years. So, we are looking at a 6-month extension on if we started the search at this point? But also gaining the privileges that not have “interim” in the title would offer.

Nedret Billor, Chair of University Senate: Thank you.

Again, I ask this question about the term and I did not get any specific answer. When they delivered this memo to me and I said, faculty will ask this question, be prepared. I told them, already, they are prepared. When I read the memo and automatically I was able to have that question. It is good to have this conversation so that we can deliver these comments to the Board of Trustees.

Hopefully they will be prepared to answer some of those questions.

If you don’t have further comments, we may finish our meeting. I now adjourn the meeting. [47:57]