



2023 Annual Faculty Ombuds Report to the ISU Faculty Senate

**David J. Delehanty, ISU Faculty Ombuds
April 24, 2023**

I thank the ISU Faculty Senate for the trust they placed in me to serve as an ISU Faculty Ombuds for the 2022-23 academic year. Over the last year, I served as an ISU Faculty Ombuds to the best of my abilities. I conscientiously attempted to seek informal problem resolution as a neutral party when contacted by ISU faculty members and asked for assistance. I believe that the faculty and the university benefitted throughout the year from the ISU Ombuds Program.

During the course of 2022-23, the ISU Faculty Ombuds Program was enhanced by the addition of two new Faculty Ombuds, Professors Shannon Lynch who began mid-year and Laura Ahola-Young who is starting with the 2023-24 academic year. These are welcome additions to the ISU Faculty Ombuds Program. Not only will these excellent, proven, and experienced faculty members provide a diversity of professional and social perspectives to the Ombuds process, they will provide much needed sharing of the Ombuds workload. I commend the ISU Faculty Senate and ISU administration for this expansion of the Faculty Ombuds Program.

In the spirit of aiding the ISU Faculty Ombuds Program, I have agreed to serve as Ombuds for a fourth and final year. My willingness to serve one more year is contingent on Faculty Senate approval and is motivated by my desire to help the Faculty Senate set up a rotation of three 3-year Faculty Ombuds appointments. If I serve one more year, I will be replaced at the end of academic year 2023-24; Professor Lynch will be renewed for three more years or replaced at the end of the following year; and Professor Ahola-Young will be renewed or replaced the year after that; and so on. This logic assumes Faculty Ombuds serve three-year terms as the default appointment. If the ISU Faculty Senate has an alternative plan and does not wish my service as Ombuds for a fourth year, this is not contestable from my perspective. I would stand down without contest.

DISTRUST IN 2022-23

During the 2021-22 academic year, I was tasked by the ISU Faculty Senate to produce a report on faculty distrust. I did so as part of my 2021-22 Ombuds report. This report proved to be controversial in some circles, mostly blaming the messenger (me) rather than addressing the actual issues. The '*distrust report*' contained a great many concerns brought forth by ISU faculty members.

I wish to report that during 2022-23, I received substantial support and after-the-fact praise from rank and file ISU faculty members for the '*distrust report*'. I also received some circumspect criticism of the report from mid-level ISU administrators. I wish to inform the ISU Faculty Senate that I stand by the 2021-22 report. I regret to inform the Senate that most issues reported in 2021-22 remain unaddressed. I have included the 2021-22 '*distrust report*' at the end

of this report as an appendix. The report remains highly relevant, largely unaddressed administratively, and may be a valuable resource to incoming senators.

IMPROVEMENTS AND LOSSES IN 2022-23

I wish to inform the ISU Faculty Senate that Provost Martin-Conley brought a long overdue and much needed reform to ISU during academic year 2022-23. Under her watch, ISU once again began to recognize and support those academic values and faculty prerogatives that have made American universities strong and nimble over the last century. ISU had lost its way, in my opinion, and Provost Martin-Conley was helping ISU once again find its way. Without revealing details of specific Ombuds interventions, Provost Martin-Conley championed several legitimate faculty concerns and exhibited the courage and vision to cause fair and just application of university policy and academic principles even when it meant overriding misguided decision-making by deans under her supervision. From my perspective as a Faculty Ombuds, Provost Martin-Conley brought ISU faculty the greatest cause for optimism and the greatest hope for restoration of academic principles at ISU in at least 20 years. Provost Martin-Conley's surprise, indefinite leave-of-absence has been a tragedy for ISU faculty. Her departure quickly was followed by an uptick in faculty complaints and apparent abridgments of faculty rights.

OMBUDS ACTIVITIES DURING 2022-23

As was the case in the previous year, the program received substantial use by ISU faculty. Many faculty contacted me during the course of the year with heartfelt frustrations and I sometimes had as many as seven concurrent complaints. Some were relatively minor, but some were quite significant.

One new aspect in my service as Ombuds was that I was contacted by faculty members with supervisory responsibilities over other ISU faculty members. That is to say, directors and chairs were expressing concerns to me about ISU academic operations. Without revealing identities, the unifying theme was that lower-level faculty supervisors were being pressured to produce reports to their supervisors that comported with the wishes of their immediate supervisors or to their deans. Essentially, faculty members and directors nominally were asked to report upwards, but when their professional judgements were unsavory to their supervisors, they were asked (demanded) to change their reports. Essentially, they were asked to ignore realities or to report falsehoods to create the appearance that all was well. In the course of these demands, non-tenured or pre-tenured faculty members were threatened with losing their faculty positions if they did not change their reports to conform to administrative wishes. In other cases, they would lose their administrative supervisory roles if their upward reports did not conform to their supervisor's preferences. Needless to say, this kind of supervisory environment in which faculty members are only allowed to report what supervisors wish to hear degrades the institution.

A second recurring theme has been that faculty members increasingly are being denied their prerogatives over faculty hiring. Deans presume to decide what positions departments most need. Chairs are being appointed to departments by deans without faculty support. This means that faculty do not have genuine representation. Deans and chairs are presuming to hire new faculty members without consultation and approval by departmental faculty. This terrible practice includes denying faculty members the right to review candidate CVs and to rank candidates. In some cases, chairs and directors are presuming to tell faculty members what they can and cannot

say to job candidates. Effectively, deans appoint faculty to college-level committees without genuine faculty support. These kinds of authoritarianism exacerbate the already toxic distrust on campus.

A third major point to make is that annual evaluations continue to be used for retaliation. This problem has been raised repeatedly in the past, but the problem is getting worse, not better. Departments and colleges appear to be weaponizing the concept of ‘*collegiality*’ to subjectively condemn faculty members who raise unpopular issues. In a matter of one year, a faculty member can transition from many years of “*exceeds expectations*” rankings to “*needs improvement*” if they have the temerity to report problems upwards. This is not sustainable.

Lastly, a fair number of faculty members contact me with:

1. Weariness over poor salaries – made worse by the pay cuts faculty are receiving by pay raises that do not keep up with inflation rate.
2. Weariness over sexism at ISU – especially by brown-skinned female faculty members who are not defended by their chairs or deans.
3. Weariness that well-paid deans and VPs do not appear to have to perform well to retain their high-paid positions.

These are systemic institutional problems beyond the scope of ombuds actions, but they characterize ISU at this time and they are recurring themes in ombuds contacts.

SUMMARY

Serious problems persist at ISU. Faculty morale appears to be moderate to poor. From a faculty perspective, faculty are losing their voice in academic matters. I am very concerned that with this kind of disenfranchisement, a ‘*not my problem*’ culture is taking root at ISU. Under this culture, faculty provide effort sufficient to avoid condemnation, but are not inspired to give more. Faculty see that when the Idaho economy is struggling, one solution is cut back resources for higher education and when the Idaho economy is doing well that becomes a good time to cut back on resources for higher education. On top of this, we have poor enrollment and several departments and satellite campuses are in decline. Middle management is demanding ‘*sunshine reports*’ from faculty rather than problem solving reports. These trends may continue until faculty voice is valued and faculty commitment is compensated.

Appendix A

COPY OF PAST REPORT

Culture of Distrust at ISU ISU Faculty Ombud Report to the ISU Faculty Senate

***David J. Delehanty, ISU Faculty Ombud
April 11, 2022***

Executive Summary

At the request of the ISU Faculty Senate following discourse with President Satterlee, Faculty Ombud David Delehanty received and organized voluntary commentary from faculty university-wide. Faculty commentary identified wide-ranging actions perceived by faculty to be significant violations of trust and intrusions on faculty rights and prerogatives. Intertwined with the criticisms expressed by faculty was substantial faculty perception of institutional retaliation against faculty expression when faculty expression contradicts preferred messaging by supervisors. Because faculty concerns are widespread, recurring, and substantiated with evidence, faculty distrust within the institution is understandable and likely to continue without significant institutional change.

Background

In March 2022, President Satterlee during discourse with the Faculty Senate identified a culture of distrust prevailing at ISU. Many faculty senators agreed that distrust is preventing ISU from achieving its potential. Under a previous administration, ISU went through a long period of diminishment characterized by faculty disenfranchisement. President Satterlee asked if the culture of distrust at ISU is a carry-over effect from the past or were there continuing issues causing distrust. The ISU Faculty Senate requested that the Faculty Ombuds Program seek to identify any drivers of continuing distrust. This report is a product of that request.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this report is to initiate a conversation between ISU faculty and administration about a culture of distrust prevailing at ISU. Through their senators, all ISU faculty members were invited to communicate with a faculty ombud regarding member's views on distrust at ISU. This *ad hoc* survey did not invite commentary from administration, staff, or students. Hence, this report provides an exclusively faculty perspective. This report is meant to be used as a starting point for serious discussion on how to establish greater trust, respect, and cooperation between administration and faculty. This report does not presume to solve the issue of distrust. Solving distrust likely will require hard work and mutual intention by ISU administration and ISU faculty.

Disclaimer

This report attempts to portray honestly and concisely the problems and concerns communicated to me, David Delehanty in my role as an ISU faculty ombud, by faculty members from throughout ISU over the last few weeks. Any and all deficiencies in this report are exclusively

my responsibility. For purely logistic reasons during the short time between the senate request and the due date of the report, I was unable to consult meaningfully with my colleague and fellow faculty ombud, Dr. Rick Wagoner, and he may have additional insights to add. I did consult opportunistically with various anonymous faculty members who of their own accord sought out conversation with me on this matter and I thank them for their thoughtful insights.

Critics may see this report as nothing more than a litany of complaints about administration from whining faculty. Others will see dedicated faculty virtually shouting to upper administration and their own colleagues that there are deeply engrained internal problems that must be addressed for ISU to be successful. I hope this report elicits respectful inquiry and thoughtful introspection.

Body of Report

Faculty concerns were broad and robust. It is clear that there is substantial frustration within the ranks of tenured faculty and much fear of retaliation, especially among the non-tenured faculty. In private communications, faculty provided evidence supporting their concerns.

Faculty communicated adamantly that certain VPs and deans, many departmental chairs, and Human Resources act inappropriately. In frank terms, faculty gave strong examples of perceived administrative dishonesty, dismissiveness, cronyism, and sexism. They provided clear evidence of administrative infringement on academic freedom. Faculty were quite insistent that several mid-level administrators are blatantly untrustworthy.

An important ancillary concern expressed by faculty is that upper administration is out of touch with the faculty. Many faculty members expressed support for President Satterlee's words regarding fairness and harmony within the ISU community. However, they felt that President Satterlee did not know what really goes on at mid levels within his administration. Faculty expressed concern that President Satterlee has a poor understanding of how academia works and was poorly positioned to see that faculty initiative is being suppressed. Faculty also pointed to high turnover rate of recently appointed VPs and continuing high-level interim appointments as concerning, worrying that this instability indicates systemic dysfunction within administration.

In total, faculty expressed approximately 30 serious problems currently engendering distrust at ISU. To make this unwieldy list more manageable, I have attempted to organize the issues under broader categories of my own invention. This list consists solely of concerns supported by some form of evidence and where the concern is something more than a single incident directed at a single faculty member. In other words, this is a list of recurring actions that result in distrust.

List of Prevailing Concerns of Faculty

ISU has a Culture of Retaliation

- Faculty are acutely aware of the non-renewals (firing) of pre-tenured faculty members (four) who had spoken out in the context of their university service in ways disliked by their respective deans. These non-renewals are widely seen as retaliation. This sense was magnified when, in at least one case, the claim was made that the firing was necessary for

Covid-19 related financial reasons while simultaneously the VP for Finance was stating that finances had nothing to do with dismissals of pre-tenured faculty at ISU. Soon after these faculty members lost their jobs, new tenure-track positions were announced. Less than 5% of American universities dismissed tenure-track faculty due to Covid issues. ISU's actions bring shame to ISU. A great many non-tenured faculty members now decline to address institutional problems out of fear of retaliation.

- Many faculty members question whether they should complete dean and/or chair evaluations because they do not believe that their confidentiality is secure and they anticipate retaliation if they are 'caught' criticizing decisions. At least one faculty member reports finding trackers attached to the online evaluation s/he was asked to complete. (There was no allegation of nefarious behavior. The point was that the survey actually could be tracked despite contrary claims.) This clear manifestation of faculty distrust results in problems festering. Under the current process and current attitudes, deans are not receiving accurate information on how faculty feel about their chair's performance and the provost is not receiving accurate information on faculty perception of their dean's performance.

- Mandated Program Prioritization Mischaracterized and Misused.
 - Example: The Department of Physics was told that it would not be made smaller yet it was. President Satterlee indicated that he did not intend to cut programs yet shortly after, the Physics Department was told for the first time in its 17-year history that its graduate program would not be admitting students due to faculty cuts. President Satterlee commissioned a Physics Viability Study in response to concerns about support for the program but the study was not conducted. Meanwhile, Physics faculty members are told that their 'non-collegiality' is a barrier to university support for the Physics program.

- "Weaponizing" annual evaluations.
 - Annual evaluations continue to be retaliatory. A particular problem is the use of unsupported allegations of lack of collegiality placed in the annual evaluations of faculty members who dare to express disagreements. President Satterlee stated to the Faculty Senate that this should not happen. Faculty are extremely disappointed to see that it has continued.
 - Annual evaluation ranking system has devolved into the bizarre and invites retaliation and favoritism. For example, an annual judgment of "*meets expectations*" is subjective in what constitutes '*meets*' but also is subjective in what constitutes '*expectations*.' Furthermore, '*expectations*' seem to vary at the whim of the evaluator. Lastly, weighting of the relative contributions of *teaching*, *research/creative activity*, and *service* in the annual evaluation rank appears to be unmoored from the faculty member's appointment. In particular, *service* is given

exaggerated weight when a faculty member is declared to be “non-collegial” in his or her service because s/he has disagreed with the supervisor on one or more issues. This is a significant generator of mistrust.

- In-house salary inequity and the subjective basis for merit-based pay raises is seen as unfair. Faculty ‘liked’ by their chair or dean get merit pay raises while ‘trouble-makers’ with equal professional success get passed over.
- Here is one quote that encapsulates frustration expressed by pre-tenure faculty members who fear retaliation regarding annual performance reviews. There is a “*glaring lack of specificity in the college regarding tenure expectations.*”

Subverting Faculty Representation

- A recurring problem is pre-screening by chairs, directors, or deans of faculty members who are ‘allowed’ to run for elected committee positions. In other words, faculty do not actually get to decide who represents them. Rather, they only can vote for colleagues an administrator has pre-selected. In this way, faculty do not have true representation on certain college executive committees, for example. This disenfranchises faculty.
- Department chairs increasingly dictate departmental-level committee appointments without consultation and consent from faculty. In this way, faculty lose the ability to guide departmental direction.
- Faculty systematically are being excluded from decision-making on faculty hiring. This is a fundamental violation of faculty prerogative. Departmental faculty are being expressly told they do not have a say in who chairs a departmental faculty search committee, who populates the search committee, what candidates are invited for campus interviews, and even are told that they may not participate in ranking the interviewed candidates. In some cases, candidate’s CV or candidate’s statements are withheld from the departmental faculty. Gallingly, departmental faculty later are asked to support, review, and mentor new faculty members improperly brought into their department under these secretive processes.
- Here is one quote that encapsulates a commonly heard complaint from faculty regarding overall disenfranchisement when providing their views on departmental matters. “*I have learned from experience that [my] thoughts and concerns will be treated respectfully but will not be given any meaningful consideration. This includes suggestions about hiring decisions, curriculum assignments, strategic priorities of the department, ways of improving student experience, and ways to improve support for research. I maintain significant concerns in all of these areas.*”

“Weaponizing” lecturers to dilute the influence of regular faculty.

- Without the support of tenure/tenure track faculty, lecturers who may not have terminal degrees and who are subject to ‘right-to-work’ non-renewal (firing), are given influential appointments where any non-preferred actions expose them to retaliatory firing. This

system overrides one purpose of tenure which is to allow faculty influence without fear of retaliation.

Secretive and Authoritarian Administration

- ISU has chosen an authoritarian, top-down administrative model. This model contradicts the concept that faculty are vested in determining university direction and have expertise that should inform policy.
- Faculty from multiple departments report that favored faculty members are given undue opportunity to influence decision-making while non-favored faculty members are excluded.
- Some faculty report pervasive denigration by their chairs or deans

Absence of Administrative Accountability

- Administration regularly disregards policy and procedure when convenient
 - Example: The Division of Health Sciences decided, unilaterally, to deny faculty timely evaluation of their deans. This has deeply angered DHS faculty, is objectively unfair, and contradicts policy.
 - Example: Chick-Fil-A, a controversial enterprise in the eyes of many due to its history of social intolerance, was controversially selected to be brought to campus. Soon after, the Dean of the College of Business appeared on national commercials as an advocate for the company. Faculty see this as an example of actual or apparent disregard for conflict of interest policy. What is acceptable for administrators would be condemned if done by faculty.
- Administrators are alleged to hire friends, including girlfriends, into positions under their supervision.
- A VP culpable in the failure to ameliorate the circumstances of a victim of sexual harassment remains in his supervisory position.
- Faculty members report college governance based on, “*cronyism, deceit, personal loyalty and blatant favoritism*” without restraint or admonition from the Provost.

Pressuring Retirements or Departures

- Senior faculty or faculty disliked by deans or chairs are pressured to retire by giving them unfavorable annual evaluations and assigning them prohibitively difficult teaching schedules. There are many allegations of this that have been reported to me that appear to be substantiated. However, this report is the wrong venue for identifying individual faculty members and administrators by name.

Administration Seen as Unstable and Out of Touch

- Substantial administrative turnover is feared to signal deeply rooted dysfunction. To be clear, faculty welcomed the departure of a suite of upper administrators from the previous administration and praised President Satterlee for ‘cleaning house.’ The concern is that the current administration now appears to be unstable. Faculty worry, is there something fundamentally wrong such that people do not want to work at ISU? This means that faculty do not have full faith in decisions or understandings formed with current administrators. They soon will no longer occupy that position. Some examples raised by faculty:
 - Multiple VPs named by President Satterlee already have left their new positions.
 - Two Interim VPs are yet to be replaced (though replacements likely on horizon).
 - Both Registrars recently left ISU, seemingly abruptly.
 - High level of turnover noted in the CoSE dean's staff.

Human Resources is Seen as Untrustworthy and No Friend of the Faculty

- HR endorses seemingly unlawful restrictions on faculty service-related speech issued by university administration (chairs, directors, deans).
- HR endorses unsupported claims of ‘non-collegiality’ on annual evaluations by informing faculty members that they must reform their purported non-collegiality.
- HR does not post information to inform potential faculty complainants of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) 180-day deadline to submit complaints regarding harassment and discrimination. One result is that ISU complainants unwittingly miss the deadline to file complaints.

Poor Prioritization of University Resources

- Resources seem to be focused on non-academic endeavors while the academic need remains unmet. Examples:
 - \$11 million Alumni Center.
 - \$7 million soccer/track field renovation.
 - \$1 million rebranding campaign.
 - Direction of the development effort does not adequately prioritize academics.
- Space and renovation allocation - two moves and re-modellings of the COSE dean’s office while the Biology Building remains dilapidated. Physics space substantially reduced in the process.
- Faculty were furloughed while ISU was hiring new faculty.

- Idaho Falls Polytechnic School is a debacle. Virtually nonexistent outreach to students. Unclear if enrollment actually happening. Faculty hired without consulting the existing faculty. Despite years of support, little or no evidence of ‘product.’

Issues that Continue to Fester

- The RISE fiasco was covered up by the current administration, which inherited the mess. This means that there was no public accountability. This continues to be seen as unfair to the ISU community and signals secretiveness. It does not engender trust in faculty when administration claims to be transparent.
- Critical Race Theory. University presidents, including President Satterlee, did not publicly stand up for faculty an academic freedom in a prominent way.

This list portrays a sour environment at ISU, at least as seen by faculty, and one in great need of reform. Undoubtedly, this report will anger some and their reaction may be one of denial, denigration, and condemnation. Others who already are angry and frustrated may take glee in the harshness of this report. These kinds of reactions will not be helpful. ISU is a diminished institution, currently far from achieving its potential, but has substantial unrealized potential. The simple fact that administration and faculty want to engage in serious dialogue for improvement is a sign progress and reason for hope. This report is not the final word. It is a starting point.