

RESOLUTION, 10-17-90

While the Faculty Senate of the University of Houston welcomes Chancellor Schilt's assurances that the UH System supports the principle of shared governance, we do not believe such support is reflected in the dismissal of Professor Chris Downs from UH-Clear Lake.

In what was essentially a dispute of fact between a professor and his student, Chancellor Schilt maintains that it was "reasonable" for President Stauffer to conclude that a "preponderance of evidence" favored the student, even though the university's faculty grievance committee unanimously found no grounds for any action. Given that the professor's reputation and perhaps his livelihood were at stake, this is not an acceptable conclusion.

As reasons for rejecting the findings of the grievance committee President Stauffer stated only that he had concluded that Professor Downs was guilty of "gross professional misconduct." Since this is not a reason but merely a statement of the charge, it is inappropriate for the Chancellor to support a university president in such circumstances.

Chancellor Schilt acknowledges an obligation to deal only with the process while ignoring the content of the case. While this posture properly recognizes the autonomy of universities within the System, it does not fulfill the spirit of shared governance in a case where a president reverses the judgment of a duly constituted faculty committee and dismisses a tenured professor.

This sequence of events poses a grave danger for every professor in the UH System, raises obstacles to recruiting at a time of intense competition for quality faculty, and creates a poor public image of the university.

In light of these considerations, the Faculty Senate strongly condemns the action of President Stauffer in recommending Professor Downs' dismissal without providing the required explanation. It further deplores the failure of Chancellor Schilt to conduct a full and impartial review of the evidence supporting that recommendation.

In order to prevent any repetition of this failure, the Senate proposes that a policy be established providing for a System-level faculty-administration review of the substance and procedures of any case in which a university president recommends dismissal of a professor against the judgment of that university's faculty grievance committee. We invite Chancellor Schilt to work with the faculty senates of the four universities of the UH System in devising a mutually satisfactory policy.