

*The following letter was read to the Faculty Senate during Executive Session and then distributed via email to the Senators on November 12, 2008. That email included a brief response from Senate President Moosally, which is also included below.*

## Open Letter to the Faculty Senate

November 3, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

I understand that you are considering a vote of no confidence against Provost Woods. I have asked Trevor Hale, my faculty senator, to read this letter to you. This letter reflects my opinion. I have shared this letter with my colleagues in the College of Business via email and have also sent it to Professor Byron Christmas and asked him to share it with the full professors.

I begin with a brief background on my time at UHD because I believe my past experiences reflect my position on the issue of a no confidence vote. I have been at UHD since 1983 and it has been with great pride that I have served the students, faculty and administration. In 1994-96 I served as President of the Faculty Senate. It started off with our usual concerns about faculty salaries, workload, and the responsiveness of our administration, particularly the Provost and President. Unfortunately, our attention to these issues was sidelined while we fought what we considered a greater battle-- that of preserving the independence of UHD from centralized UH system control. We were successful in retaining control over academic matters on this campus although some processes were centralized and the role of UH president and UHS chancellor were combined into one position. Since those battles, I have continued to serve my college with limited forays into greater university service. Although I accept my responsibility to serve the university, I prefer the classroom above all else. Last year I participated in the strategic planning process because it provided the first opportunity for strategic planning. Prior to that time we had engaged in unit-based planning that seemed to be primarily a budgeting process. The development of a strategic plan for UHD is a significant and important step in forging the future direction of the university. The collaboration of faculty, students, staff and administrators to build this plan re-enforced my view that UHD is an excellent university. So as you listen (read) the remainder of this letter, please keep in mind that I am very committed to the continued success of UHD.

In reading through the various documents detailing the complaints against the leadership and management of Provost Woods, it is clear that there is a level of frustration and genuine concern, particularly around the SACS re-accreditation issue. I share some of that frustration and all of the concern around SACS re-accreditation. Many of the issues that have given rise to frustration, particularly the slow response to requests for action, have existed for a long time. In fact, when I was faculty senate president, we had discussions with Provost Woods about the need for improved processing of routine documents and better communication. Despite that I do not support a vote of no confidence. In the remainder of this letter I will explain why.

First and most important, it is my belief that the problems of communication, evaluations, document processing and support for academic programs will not be solved with a personnel change. These are systemic processes that must be addressed or the next Provost will face similar problems. Some will argue that the Provost should provide the leadership in resolving problems in these systemic processes. Certainly, a provost could provide leadership in that area. However, I have always perceived leadership vacuums as an opportunity to influence. I think that the Faculty Senate could adopt this perspective, take the UHD strategic plan and be proactive in its implementation. Some of the key strategies are SFS Strategy 3 addressing the need to review and streamline administrative procedures and processes; SFS Strategy 2 addressing the need to support and expand resources for faculty research; and BCC Strategy #3 addressing the need to promote effective communication and consultative decision-making complementary to university shared governance. The Faculty Senate has an excellent opportunity to review the set of recommendations under each of these strategies and then make further recommendations or propose specific actions to implement the recommendation. The Faculty Senate has an opportunity to strengthen shared governance, improve the internal academic processes, and create an administrative structure that eliminates its current weaknesses. This approach would have a more lasting impact on the institution. A vote of no confidence will not necessarily lead to a personnel change and even if it does, these other issues will still require attention.

Secondly, each leadership style has its strengths and weaknesses. The slow and methodical approach of Provost Woods has the weaknesses that have been identified already. However, it also has its strengths. A key strength is the patience to work the bureaucratic processes in the system and state. In this regard, Provost Woods has been very successful. She has championed and moved our new programs through the maze. Our growth in enrollment is directly connected to our growth in degree programs, including the addition of masters programs. In my experience, she has given the authority and responsibility for program development to faculty in the discipline. She has asked for us to provide her with the justification for the program so she is in a better position to fight for approval of the program. I have also observed that she can move fast when she thinks there is a limited window of opportunity. This was the case with the MBA program. She got it through the System Provost Council when she had the votes.

Related to this is the charge that Provost Woods lacks vision. I expect that there is truth to that statement but then President Castillo has certainly had enough vision for several provosts. There is also an old saying – be careful what you pray (wish) for. There is a risk in wanting a leader with vision. The risk is that we will not share that vision. Over the years, we have had our arguments with our visionary president because we didn't want to increase enrollment and we didn't want to leave our home base and go out to the suburbs (to name a few).

Thirdly, the timing of this no confidence initiative seems odd. President Castillo will be retiring next summer. Soon we will start a search for a new president. It seems that the Faculty Senate could provide significant leadership in identifying the qualities, characteristics, background and experiences they would like in a president. It is also an opportunity for discussion of how they would like the shared governance process to operate under a new president. What worked well and what didn't in the current relationship? With a new president comes the resignation of the provost. This is the way it works. Provost Woods offered hers when President Castillo was

hired. I expect that she will do the same with a new president. Once again there is an opportunity for the Faculty Senate to develop what they want to see in the next provost. Certainly, there is no guarantee that a new president will replace Provost Woods but a vote of no confidence is no guarantee either. Furthermore, I expect that the Faculty Senate will make their concerns known to the new president. All things considered, I don't see the need for a no confidence vote at this time. It will send a signal to anyone interviewing to be president or provost but it's difficult to predict how that signal will be interpreted. Personally, I would like to go into the president selection process with a faculty voice that says we want to be your partner in building one of the finest urban universities in the country rather than a voice of opposition.

Lastly, a vote of no confidence is a very public action. It is an action directed to inform the larger Houston community that the university is in such dire circumstances that we, faculty, can no longer work with the Provost. It is a public statement that the university's programs are being so damaged by the Provost that we, as public servants, must divorce ourselves from her actions and seek public condemnation of her actions. In looking at the list of complaints, I do not see anything of that nature. If we were to lose our SACS accreditation, then I would support a vote of no confidence on both Provost Woods and President Castillo. A loss of accreditation is a condition of dire circumstances and the university's leadership is responsible for that condition. However, we have not lost accreditation.

Some of you may believe that no one will notice this vote. A vote of no confidence is news. In the absence of some major news event, it will be reported. You will be interviewed. The Provost will be interviewed. The President will be interviewed. This is a news story. Given the current list of grievances, I am concerned that we, faculty, will look petty. When Provost Woods hands over her list of achievements, specifically the list of new programs she has shepherded, I fear that she will look like the victim. A vote of no confidence is a very serious step and you will need to be prepared to explain it to the larger Houston community.

I hope that you will consider these arguments when making your individual decision. Please understand that I know that we have problems to be addressed. My opinion about the best way to address the problems is different from the approach recommended by your faculty senate president, Michelle Moosally. I am sure that each of you shares my commitment to UHD and its students. I know that you have already devoted much time to thinking about your decision and that you will do what you think is in the best interest of the university.

Sincerely,

Madeline Johnson  
Professor of Marketing

*Response to Dr. Johnson's letter emailed to Senators on November 12, 2008*

**November 12, 2008**

**A Brief Response to Dr. Johnson's letter of November 3, 2008**

I did not have an opportunity to communicate with Dr. Johnson before she submitted the letter; thus, I would like to briefly respond on the topic of my approach to the question of academic leadership.

As Senate President, I have a primary responsibility to seek the faculty voice on critical issues and facilitate discussion so that I can more effectively represent the faculty at multiple levels. Therefore, when the question of academic leadership came to me, I promoted an approach that encouraged faculty to gather information, share perspectives, and engage in a visible and recorded way that also respected the delicacy of the issue for multiple parties – these are processes that allow the faculty will to be known. I have shared positions, ideas, and concerns from constituencies who were not able to represent themselves for various reasons. And, I have offered information from my own experience that seemed relevant to the conversation. Many of the points that Dr. Johnson made have also surfaced in the wide-ranging Senate discussion. Throughout the past weeks, in recognition of my elected role, I have attempted to guide the process rather than the outcome. Thus, I have not made any recommendations on specific action to the Senate and would see it as inappropriate to do so in this situation. The Senate is a deliberative, representative body. Recent decisions to continue discussion and consider options on the topic of academic leadership have been the product of the majority will of the Senate.

One note on the specific points from the Strategic Plan that Dr. Johnson raises; I absolutely agree that the faculty should seek action and promote key elements. That is why the Strategic Plan was the focus of the Faculty Assembly on October 14. The Senate can also highlight strategic planning issues as we move into discussion on workload, assessment, and student success (which will also be the topic of a system-wide UFEC conference in the spring). In recent work on the Strategic Planning Oversight Committee, other faculty representatives and I have sought to make campus communication and support for faculty workload critical priorities. Throughout all of this, I have seen that our discussions on academic leadership have clarified for many faculty what we would like to see happen at UHD in the coming years as we attempt to grow in strategic and effective ways.

Michelle Moosally  
UHD Faculty Senate President