

November 12, 2007

Northwestern University Board of Trustees
633 Clark Street
Room 2-112
Evanston, IL 60208

Dear Northwestern University Board of Trustees:

As alumni of the Medill School of Journalism, we are writing to express our concern and discontent with the changes being made under Dean Lavine's new Medill 2020 curriculum.

To begin, we are appalled at the manner in which these changes are being implemented. Because faculty governance has been suspended, Dean Lavine has been making changes unilaterally or with staff members that support him indiscriminately. Those who have expressed dissent have been demoted or forced out. In fact, faculty members are so fearful of retaliation that they would only speak to us on the condition of anonymity. As alumni, we are left to wonder how the university could allow conditions to get to such a point.

The Northwestern General Faculty Committee tried to step in last June by passing a resolution condemning the suspension of faculty governance at Medill. This resolution predicted "curricular changes that are ill considered . . . the demoralization and enmity of the faculty . . . damage to the national reputation of the School . . . the loss of and the inability to hire faculty who believe that the faculty's role in governance is important for students, faculty and the public." This resolution has, thus far, been seemingly ignored by the university.

We are also concerned about certain changes being made to the curriculum. In particular, we oppose the re-vamping of the Washington Program in which students no longer work as correspondents for particular publications. This program not only gave Medill students job offers from many of the newspaper editors that they had worked for while in Washington, but it also was a source of revenue for the school. Since the dean changed this successful program, at least one newspaper has refused to accept stories from Medill students, and surely more are on the way.

In short, the Medill Washington Program was one aspect of the graduate journalism program that distinguished Northwestern University from other top schools in the country. The changes to the program will not only damage the quality of the Washington reporting experience, but it will also hurt student job prospects.

Under the new curriculum, the graduate Legal Reporting Program has been eliminated. Students will no longer have the unparalleled and challenging opportunity to report on the Illinois and federal courts. This change comes at a time when the dean of the Columbia University Journalism School has stated his curriculum will begin to emphasize legal reporting. In truth, there are other successful programs that have been changed, but there are too many to list in this letter.

Please know that we are not anti-change. We understand that journalism is a changing industry, and we encourage the integration of new technologies into the curriculum. But those changes need to be implemented with faculty input, and those changes do not need to come at the expense of the unique programs that set Medill apart from other schools.

We ask that the Board address this matter. The Chicago Reader and Chicago Magazine have written about these changes, and many students and alumni have posted comments online following these articles. For more student and alumni perspectives, we encourage the Board to look at these comments.

<http://blogs.chicagoreader.com/news-bites/2007/06/22/nu-faculty-rips-medill/>

<http://chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/September-2007/Campus-Revolutionary/index.php?cp=1&si=0#artanc>

If the dean is allowed to continue to operate without faculty voting, we anticipate that there will be more negative coverage of the university in the press.

We have attached a petition with more than 75 alumni signatures, asking that faculty governance be reinstated. These signatures come predominantly from 2004-2007 alumni, the years directly preceding and during the tenure of Dean Lavine. This shows a resounding vote of confidence for the current faculty.

As alumni of the graduate program of the Medill School of Journalism, we know that we attended the best program in the country. However, we fear that Medill will no longer be providing the type of education expected from a top-tier school. The changes will also affect the quality of the incoming students, which include people with some of the strongest scores and backgrounds in the university.

We ask the Board to take action to ensure that Medill remains a place where students learn core journalistic values and skills, where they are provided unique opportunities in which they utilize and practice those values and skills, and where faculty members are respected for their valuable input.

Respectfully yours,

Camille Gerwin, MSJ '04
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