

Boyd views conflicts as personality clashes

Editor's Note: This story, the final in a series examining Pres. William Boyd, looks at some of the conflicts he's faced at this University and gives some of his reasons behind his actions.

By CHRIS JUPP
and PATTY FARRELL
Of the Emerald

... It seems to me strangely unbecoming for either the Emerald or the ASUO to suggest that the poor student at the University of Oregon is somehow disfranchised by a new, authoritarian president. It's simply not true. — William Boyd

The abruptness of many of University Pres. William Boyd's actions in the last seven months have indeed convinced many students that the University is now in the hands of an "authoritarian president."

And students, minorities, and some faculty and administrators are objecting not only to Boyd's abruptness, but to the effects of the actions themselves. Many feel these decisions have disfranchised some students.

Although Boyd's actions have been unpopular and abrupt, he thinks that they are the best way for the University to achieve the goals which he has set.

Boyd defends his decisions with arguments which are based firmly in his conception of how the University should be run. But because he often announces decisions without fully explaining his reasoning, Boyd leaves the feeling that he acts without any valid basis at all.

Minorities outraged over Boyd's reorganization of the minority program are one group who have heard all of Boyd's reasons for his decisions, but they disagree so strongly with his methods and his rationale that the controversy remains about one of the hottest issues on campus.

Boyd had only been president for six weeks when he reorganized the Educational Opportunities Services (EOS) into the Academic Opportunities Program (AOP). Decentralizing the program, he reshuffled most of its facets into different departments within the University. At the same time, he eliminated the four cultural centers on campus, offering nothing in his new program to replace them.

While the minorities agreed that EOS was doing a substandard job, they feel that Boyd's AOP is even more of an atrocity.

Six months later, Boyd still claims that "Minority students were served well by my action. I give minority programs a high priority, and I feel that the EOS program was a scandal."

He calls his new program a needed "shift in emphasis" toward the academic development of disadvantaged students.

But the most controversial aspect of Boyd's reorganization was the methods used. Many feel that he acted too quickly in making his decisions, and that he didn't get adequate input from the persons affected.

But Boyd doesn't see it that way. "Frankly, I don't know who else I should have talked to. I really don't see anything wrong with the procedures that I followed."

Boyd's willingness to ignore criticism and to make rapid decisions leaves adversaries feeling that the president has little regard for their opinions. The charge that Boyd ignores input from others is compounded by strong personality conflicts between Boyd and ASUO Pres. Jim Bernau, his main political opponent.

This conflict has left the two presidents confused over each other's positions on controversial issues. The confusion leads to strained and frustrated communication, which has resulted in nothing constructive coming out of the interaction.

Communication difficulties have intensified two debates at this University: student access to faculty evaluations and student governance of McArthur Court.

When the General Faculty voted against the ASUO proposal to draw up separate faculty-course evaluations for publication purposes last December, Boyd considered the matter of access to evaluations settled. But Bernau felt that the faculty had not specifically addressed the question of public access to any evaluations, but had voted merely on whether to draw up separate evaluations. Bernau also contended that since the State Board of Higher Education had left the final question of access to evaluations up to the University presidents anyway, that the ASUO should ask Boyd for the final answer to their request for access.

Boyd answered Bernau by flatly refusing to allow public disclosure of any evaluations, claiming that that was the faculty's intent. The conflict Oregon Daily Emerald

erupted into a two-week battle of each president insisting that he was right and the other wrong.

When the smoke finally cleared, Boyd and Bernau had come up with a logical and agreeable solution: to reframe the proposal, making it more specific, and to take it back to the faculty.

Boyd argues that Bernau should never have come to him with the question in the first place.

"It's the simplest matter in the world to reframe the question and resubmit it to the faculty," says Boyd. "Jim can do that because he's student body president. It's always been an option from the very beginning that could be pursued."

Bernau says that Boyd's initial response was "typical" in that it was "arbitrary and didn't allow adequate input from interested parties." He also says that Boyd gave him the impression that his decision was final and that the ASUO was allowed no recourse. Bernau argues that Boyd should have made him aware of all the options available.

An even worse breakdown in communication is causing gross confusion concerning the ASUO's proposal to form a Mac Court governance board. Boyd and Bernau still do not understand each others' definition of a governance board as opposed to an advisory board.

In January the ASUO proposed the establishment of the governing board to Boyd and the General Faculty. Under the ASUO plan, the board would set and implement all policies. But like all of the University's governance boards, the Mac Court board would be ultimately responsible to the University president.

Boyd strongly opposed the plan at the General Faculty meeting and by doing so effectively squelched any debate of the issue. He said that student governance of Mac Court was inappropriate, and that the language of the proposal was "dangerous."

In reply to Boyd's action, Bernau said that the proposed board was by definition advisory, not governing, because the president would have ultimate veto power. Boyd thought that Bernau was changing the proposal from establishing a governance board to establishing an advisory body, which Boyd says would be "Totally appropriate and can be done without my consent." But anything that "looks or smells like a governing board" to Boyd will never get his approval, he says.

Bernau never has made clear to Boyd his definition of an advisory board, and so the two sides have still not been able to come to a solution.

The frequency of confrontation has hardened Boyd and Bernau into inflexible opponents. Faculty communication between the two has resulted in misunderstandings and increased polarization.

"Maybe we bring out the worst in each other," Boyd says. "I certainly consider the relationship to be an unsuccessful one. I think that the administration has been badly served by lack of success in dealing with the ASUO, and I think similarly that the ASUO has not been well served by their lack of success in dealing with me."

"I'm trying in part simply to step aside and to let other people who may have more adaptable personalities deal with the ASUO," Boyd says. He suggests Vice President for Student Affairs Gerald Bogen as a likely administrator who will begin working more with the ASUO.

"I'm hoping that to the degree that it's a personality conflict, I can solve it by backing away from it," says Boyd.

Bernau disagrees that the problems between the two presidents are due completely to a personality conflict. "As a matter of fact, I like the guy," he says.

Bernau thinks that the problem is instead a matter of conflicting ideologies. "We have two different approaches to bettering the University. The key difference is that the ASUO feels that all members of the University community should be involved in the decision-making process."

Co-governance within the University Senate and General Faculty was "one of the most significant victories students have won at an American university," he says. "It surprises me that students still look to student government as opposed to co-governance as the means of increasing involvement. Now when the student government finds itself thwarted in something, it looks like the student body is somehow thwarted. But students still have the whole co-governance system to use."

Students may still find that co-governance is the best way to increase involvement. But since the conception of the system in November of 1974, the students' part in co-governance has been ineffective. Members of the Student University Affairs Board (SUAB) belong to the University Senate, and have full voting rights in the General Faculty.

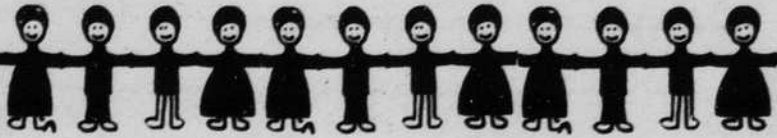
But the student body does not seem to realize the power and importance of the SUAB; voter turnout has been the lowest for those positions, and sometimes positions cannot even be filled.

Boyd would naturally encourage students to turn to the SUAB; the students are in close governing contact with the faculty, and it is the faculty's opinion which Boyd feels is most important. Boyd believes that students for the most part are too inexperienced to have the amount of say in decision-making that the ASUO would like to see.

In student participation on tenure and grievance committees, for instance, Boyd believes that the student role should be only advisory.

But the student involvement in tenure and grievance procedures has barely surfaced as an issue yet. Boyd will be making decisions on the proposals sometime this year. He also has a long fight ahead of him when the ASUO comes forth again with their EMU tavern proposal — an idea he has fought since he first heard of it.

No one is ever sure how William Boyd will react to each problem that confronts him. But one thing is certain: unless compromise can replace conflict between Boyd and his adversaries, the University faces a future marked with more questions than answers.




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