

Short Communication

Selecting a Dean of Faculty through a Partially Democratic Process to Improve Health Programs: Short Communication

Ali E. Oskouei

Department of Physiotherapy, Faculty of Rehabilitation, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

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Abstract

The Dean of Faculties is normally selected by the Chancellor of Universities. The democratic way of selecting a dean of faculties is an innovative procedure that first happened in 2013 at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (TUMS). A brief survey of the faculties revealed that there were some disadvantages of this procedure. An insufficient number of candidates, obligation in nomination in some cases, casting ballots only by faculty members, and lack of future and strategic plans by candidates are some deficits in the process that brought some risk to the faculties and sometimes unrest to TUMS. These risks made the process more dangerous than it used to be previously, when we used more traditional ways of selecting a dean of faculty. In order to prevent possible risks to the faculty and university, we offer some suggestions to make the ground ready for democratic practices in selecting a dean of faculty.

Introduction

Creativity and innovation in problem-solving and defining processes are attractive elements of a good workplace, and may lead to an improvement in procedures. Despite the fact that these characteristics have some distinct advantages, they are not usually considered in selecting top-level managers in academic institutions due to the political, social, cultural, religious, and administrative considerations that complicate the process.

Selecting a dean of faculties affiliated with Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (TUMS) through an imitation of a democratic choice was an innovative procedure that first happened in the administrative history of TUMS. Observing the status of the faculties under this procedure in the past year reveals that due to some unexpected administrative problems,^{1,2} it does not have priority over the traditional way of selecting a dean of faculty. Thus, the implication of the current procedure in the appointment of a dean of faculty may impose some risks to the university and its faculties. Its implication to other academic institutions can be noticed considering the three following main factors:

Main factors in selecting a dean of faculties

Nomination

First, a democratic nomination of eager and qualified people for taking the responsibility of the dean of faculty is the first and most important factor in practice

of a democracy.³ At least two candidates must show their interest and be nominated for the possible position of dean of faculty; they would then be evaluated and judged by the faculty. Care must be taken when using a democratic way of selecting a dean of faculty with no attention to this necessary factor, as has happened in some faculties of the TUMS recently.

Participation of the whole faculty

Second, according to the definition, in a democracy people have a direct say in the country's affairs. So, on a small scale, such as a university's faculty, it ensures that all qualified individuals of the faculty including faculty members, staff, students, and possible representatives of the university participate in the process.⁴ This is because a dean of faculty is responsible for all endeavors and activities related to the faculty, such as education, research, logistics, budgets, student affairs, continuing education, etc. So, participation of the entire faculty in the process is a main factor in the democratic practice of selecting a dean of faculty. However, it was limited only to the faculty members in the recent dean of faculty appointment practice in TUMS, making the process not truly democratic.

Strategic plan

Third, having a strategic plan at least for five years into the future is the last main factor which is necessary for a democratic practice. The future plan needs to be discussed

*Corresponding authors: Ali Eteraf. Oskouei, Email: eterafoskouei@tbzmed.ac.ir

and explained in detail for the faculty, and it must be defended in a roundtable discussion with the presence of other candidates. This part of the democratic process may help the people to vote for the best and most practical plan. This should also draw less attention to political and unnecessary subjects in the appointment process. It may also increase the people's participation in casting their ballots and make the atmosphere of expressing opinion very exciting. The recent attempt at a democratic selection of the dean of faculty at TUMS suffered from this factor, too.

Conclusion

In summary, a complete democratic process in selecting a dean of faculty cannot happen unless three main factors, including nomination, participation of the whole faculty, and discussing a future plan by candidates are considered in the process of appointment. In some foreign universities, this procedure of selecting a dean of faculty may diminish the traditional and usual way of appointment with negative consequences. We suggest universities to pave the way for democratic practices in the appointment of the dean of faculties. According to my observation in a foreign university, this may help to ease administrative challenges

in academic institutions. Thus, incomplete implementation of a democracy in selecting a dean of faculty, as performed recently in TUMS, may impose some risk and unrest to the university, which sometimes is more dangerous than it would be otherwise in the usual method of appointment.

Competing interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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