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Local opinion: Faculty and staff-not high-paid administrators-should run the University of Arizona

Anna Cooper, Carol Brochin, and Marcia Klotz Special to the Arizona Daily Star

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The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

The financial mismanagement crisis at the University of Arizona is not merely a blunder of this particular president or regents. Rather, the corporatist model for running the University of Arizona has failed. We need to return to a model of university governance that empowers faculty and staff to take the reins.

In the current model, a permanent class of highly-paid bureaucrats runs the university like a private business, with an emphasis on profit generation and entrepreneurialism. The language of public service, of working for the greater good of our students and the people of Arizona, goes by the wayside.

Instead, money moves away from teaching and research — the core functions of our



Anna Cooper

university — and towards “strategic initiatives” designed to increase our rankings and our credit ratings. Currently, less than half of the UA’s budget is actually being spent on its academic units; much of the rest is being wasted on this corporate structure itself.

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The tumultuous past two years have afforded us a rare opportunity to survey the wreckage of this failed system: an institution that made a deal with a sketchy for-profit college run by swindlers who have now left us holding the bag of their legal penalties; that takes money from our academic departments and pours it into athletics; that provides unchecked tuition discounts for elite out-of-state students at the expense of in-state

students; that has failed even to secure the basic safety of its members.

This corporatist system of management has not only failed by its own measures (with a \$177 million budget deficit), but has failed students, employees, and the state of Arizona.

Faculty, both tenured and non-tenured, are at the core of the University of Arizona's mission: we create knowledge, educate students and serve our communities. Staff are also central to this mission, supporting research, education, and service in myriad ways. Collectively, faculty and staff hold the expertise to guide this university and



Marcia Klotz

keep the commitment to our core values. Many of us work here for decades—often far longer than our administrators. We are motivated by public service and we are paid like public servants, not CEOs. Moreover, we have world-class experts in education, business, law, and any other field that might be germane to running our university. This is why democratic faculty governance — a long tradition that has been seriously eroded in recent years — is central to the UA as a public-serving institution. (Staff have not traditionally had a collective voice in this governance system, but we believe they belong at the table too.)

The Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR), although charged by statute with overseeing the university, lacks these kinds of expertise and commitment. Most of them have no prior experience in higher education, coming instead from the corporate world. Most were appointed to eight-year terms by a governor who is no longer in office — and are largely unaccountable. Despite the governance structures long in place that center faculty voices, the Regents have increasingly positioned themselves as the sole authority for steering the UA's strategies, policies, and funding models. They show disdain for and actively try to silence faculty experts, or anyone else who tries to challenge their power.

We, as leaders of the UA faculty caucus of United Campus Workers of Arizona, are calling for broad changes to this failed status quo. We supported the successful petition that has enabled a Meeting of the General Faculty to be held on April 25, 3-5 p.m. (on Zoom, and open to the public). Speakers at this meeting will present a brief State of the University overview, and will then frame a new model for UA governance that centers faculty voices.

The first priority of ABOR and the university president must be to collaboratively serve our students, faculty, staff, and communities, rather than bending our institution to their own out-of-touch priorities. The first step out of this mess is more faculty participation, not less.

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Anna Cooper, Carol Brochin, and Marcia Klotz are all faculty at the University of Arizona, and founding members of United Campus Workers of Arizona (UCWAZ).