

August 22, 2008

**To:** University of Louisville Board of Trustees

**From:** Twenty-one former UofL faculty members who served under Robert Felner

**Re:** "The Felner Affair" in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD)

We write this letter to the Board of Trustees of the University of Louisville in response to what is being referred to in newspaper, TV, and blogosphere reports in Kentucky and elsewhere as "The Felner Affair." We are former UofL CEHD faculty members who served under Dean Robert Felner. Some of us left UofL in part because of Dean Felner's abusive and unethical behavior.

We take issue with President Ramsey's assertion in news reports about the "Felner Affair" that input from faculty to the higher administration was nothing more than "anonymous crap." We would like to set the record straight by presenting the facts.

Setting aside alleged misconduct currently under federal investigation, Robert Felner's actions included the following: He –

- brushed aside repeated queries by faculty about his excessive and questionable expenditures;
- created a hostile workplace, which included influencing voting;
- publicly humiliated people, screamed at them, spread falsehoods about them;
- professionally undermined those who dared to oppose him;
- made inappropriate personal advances;
- made a mockery of accepted collegial governance policies;
- violated principles governing the hiring of new faculty and the promotion of other faculty;
- showered resources on those who supported him;
- denied resources to those who stood up and questioned him, and threatened them with dire consequences;
- hired an excessively large number of administrators, many of whom inflicted cruel and unfair sanctions on faculty not in Felner's favor; and
- cultivated inappropriate relationships with female employees, giving some questionably qualified persons extreme salaries.

In response to these actions by Felner, we, the faculty, followed appropriate procedures seeking relief. First, we went to Dean Felner in an attempt to resolve issues. When that failed, some of us met personally with and or wrote to Provost Shirley Willihnganz, and some of those complaints were copied to President Ramsey. Some of us met with University sexual harassment officers. More than a third of all full-time faculty members in the College met with the faculty grievance officer. More than thirty grievances or complaints were sent to the Provost's office, most of them bravely signed.

To our knowledge, nothing was done, and Felner often bragged openly at faculty meetings that he had the full support of the Provost and President.

After the administration failed to take action, and the situation continued to deteriorate, the faculty of the CEHD in an open meeting in March of 2006 voted "No Confidence" in Dean Felner. Felner sat in the same room and observed the proceedings. Such a vote is an extraordinary event, extremely rare and courageous, especially in the presence of an oppressive dean.

We are insulted by President Ramsey's response to this crisis. The items listed above, and especially the "No Confidence" vote, contradict the notion that the faculty were cowards and resorted only to "anonymous crap." On the contrary, faculty stepped up repeatedly, knowing that any overt action would make them vulnerable to severe retaliation. Universities take pride in their tolerance and collegial style of governance, and the faculty should feel free to speak their mind to the higher administration and be counted. Yet, when faculty did exactly that, they were systematically ignored and further targeted for abuse by Felner.

It's troubling that President Ramsey and Provost Willihnganz seemed to convey the view that Felner was merely "cleaning house" in the College. Professors who left CEHD are highly accomplished, award-winning scholars and teachers, many with exemplary national reputations who were eagerly welcomed at other institutions. Not only did the University of Louisville sacrifice a great deal, the Greater Louisville Community also paid a significant price in losing faculty who served the public in unique ways and with distinction.

During Felner's employment, progress slowed in many important areas, in part because of the considerable time and effort he invested attacking those who disagreed with him, and defending himself against accusations. We know Felner used the *U.S. News and World Report* annual rankings to justify his actions. We question the validity, accuracy and relevance of data provided for the rankings which created a misleading image that the CEHD at UofL had made dramatic improvement in a very short time. While the normal improvements were being made by faculty, morale was plunging and good faculty were leaving in increasing numbers. We believe a closer look would reveal that any achievements during Felner's deanship were made despite him, not because of him.

Notwithstanding the abominable actions allowed during Felner's tenure, we continue to love UofL and want to see it thrive. To do this, however, requires responsible leadership. The present scandal calls for accountability, and we believe the Board of Trustees should address this in a meaningful and substantive manner. Please note; one or more of the undersigned has information, or based upon information and belief, would assert and produce appropriate substantive support for each of the above mentioned issues.

Sincerely,

Bryant Stamford  
Pedro Portes  
Ellen McIntyre  
Yash Bhagwanji  
John Burke  
Laura Cherry  
George Cunningham  
Joe Devitis  
Christos Dimitriadis  
Kara Gallagher (Mohr)  
Elizabeth Kirsch  
Andy Kemp  
Chong Lee  
Phyllis Metcalf-Turner  
Justin Moore  
Jennifer Olive  
Elizabeth Rightmyer  
Lea Smith  
Bernie Strenecky  
John Strobe  
Randy Wells

Please note, because of the timeliness of the issues cited above, we felt the need to forward this letter now. Faculty and staff who are presently at UofL were not invited to participate. Moreover, at this time of year, it's extremely difficult to contact faculty spread across the country, because many are out of the office and not available. Thus, although there are twenty-one signatures on this letter, a substantial number, if timing were not an issue and there was perceived to be no need to protect those still in the employment of the University, we believe many more signatures could have been obtained from those who would support the contents of this letter.