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U. of Colorado Regents Delegate Power to Administrators in Hopes of Focusing on Major Policy Issues

By [PAUL FAIN](#)

The governing board of the University of Colorado System has voted to overhaul its organization and authority in a series of significant steps that cede power to campus officials.

In resolutions unanimously approved last week, the Board of Regents gave the system's president and campus chancellors increased power over personnel matters, reduced the board's number of annual meetings, and urged the creation of more-specialized board committees.

The board and the president, Hank Brown, who was officially confirmed in May, after serving as interim president for a year, are dealing with the aftereffects of two years of controversy, over a football-recruiting scandal, critical audit findings, and the Ward Churchill furor.

Mr. Brown and two regents said they hoped the reforms would create a nimbler and more effective board that could focus on major questions of policy rather than micromanaging the campuses.

Public scrutiny of the university has encouraged regents to respond broadly to problems at the university, Mr. Brown said.

"We went through two very difficult years, and you had intense media pressure on the members of the board," Mr. Brown said.

Pattern of Overinvolvement

Paul D. Schauer has been chairman of the nine-member board since last July. He said regents, who are all publicly elected, face pressure from their constituents to become overinvolved in management decisions. That pattern has led in the past to a "conflict of directions" sought by regents.

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"We are a board of directors," not managers, Mr. Schauer said, adding that he anticipated that the power shift would enable regents to "create policy judgments that have greater depth and breadth."

Another regent, Thomas J. Lucero Jr., agreed. He acknowledged that the regents had micromanaged at times and that "we have never focused on major public policy."

Mr. Lucero said he hoped to take advantage of the board's new procedures to prioritize issues such as the university's core curriculum, the proportion of tenured faculty members, and possible cuts in academic departments.

Mr. Brown, in an interview with *The Chronicle* on Wednesday, said the previous board structure had played a role in the heavy turnover among his predecessors. The university has had 12 presidents in the last 36 years.

"People have not had the authority to carry out their responsibilities," Mr. Brown said.

Asked for a specific example, Mr. Brown cited the turmoil over athletics at the university. The athletics department reports directly to the board's committee on athletics, and thus has bypassed oversight by the chancellors of the system's three campuses and the president's office.

"When you had problems in athletics, who owned those problems?" Mr. Brown asked. "It wasn't always clear."

Striking a Balance

The overhaul has earned plaudits from experts on university governance.

Richard D. Legon, president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, who spoke last week with the regents about the proposals, said the overhaul would help the board to be more efficient and to act more strategically.

By "providing appropriate delegation of authority," he said, "it really does facilitate a board to do what it is charged to do, which is to be accountable."

Boards face a challenge in delegating the right amount of oversight authority, said Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. But she said the Colorado

regents seem to have struck the right balance with the new policies.

"Clearly the board needs to focus on the big issues, and that has been recognized here," Ms. Neal said. "Boards should be zeroing in on their priorities rather than just rubber-stamping minutiae."

Mr. Brown said that, in addition to giving him new authority, the reforms had re-emphasized that he should refer major policy matters to the regents.

Often in the past, he said, "the president had been making the policy decisions and not bringing them to the board."

He also said the new board procedures and reduced number of board meetings should make a "huge difference" in both his productivity and the regents'. "There simply isn't enough time" to prepare for 11 board meetings each year, Mr. Brown said, noting that such a scheme required the president to send off materials for each board meeting just two weeks after the previous one.

The new policies also:

- Give the president the authority to hire and fire vice presidents and chancellors, as well as to set their levels of compensation. The president is encouraged to "consult" with the board on those decisions. The board retains its authority over personnel matters pertaining to the president, to the awarding of tenure, and to the dismissal of tenured faculty members.
- Grant the chancellors authority over personnel matters pertaining to deans, administrators, and other positions on their campuses.
- Create an ad hoc committee to consider whether the board should reorganize its study sessions or create new committees with a focus on "major policy areas."
- Resolve that the chancellors are the "public representatives" of their campuses and respond to news-media inquiries. The policies also note that the president is the principal executive officer and chief spokesman for the university.
- Reduce the number of board meetings from 11 to six, starting next year.

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