

# HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Board of Trustees

June 18, 2020

Professor Marcus Alfred, Chair  
Howard University Faculty Senate  
325 Bryant Street, NW, Rm C-119  
Washington, DC 20059

Via Electronic Mail to [Maralfred@howard.edu](mailto:Maralfred@howard.edu)

Dear Professor Alfred:

My fellow Trustees and I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you on Friday afternoon, June 5<sup>th</sup>, and want to thank you for the summary you have provided of the “Topics” on your agenda, briefly discussed in our meeting, to which I wish to respond.

1. Again, my thanks for your congratulations and good wishes for my forthcoming tenure as Chairman of the Howard University Board of Trustees (the “Board”).
2. You expressed the desire that the Faculty Senate Steering Committee have an opportunity to meet with the Board periodically, and members of the Board in attendance at our meeting offered no objection.
3. Regarding your references to the current Graduate Faculty Trustee, I wish to note for the record that our views differ significantly. You proffered the view that because the Trustee referenced was not domiciled on the main campus, this perforce diminishes that Trustee’s ability to adequately represent graduate faculty. Further, you noted (as a negative) that the Trustee does not attend “council” meetings.

To your first point, I know of no clause or stipulation in the list of qualifications to serve as a Graduate Faculty Trustee that requires such individual to be a member of the faculty of one of the schools or colleges situated on the main campus. Were such a clause to exist, I would think it ill conceived.

With respect to your observation that the Trustee referenced does not attend council meetings, I am not familiar with the particulars of service as a Graduate Faculty Trustee, but would be surprised if there were a “requirement” that a Trustee holding such position attend “council” meetings, although you may well consider this desirable.



From my perspective and that of Board members who have had the privilege to serve with the Trustee referenced over the last three years, I can only say that this Trustee's attendance record and active participation in all deliberations of the Board have been exemplary and of the highest caliber. Moreover, this Trustee has never failed to consistently offer a perspective, informed by service on the faculty, which is additive to and welcomed by the full Board.

4. The absence of an undergraduate faculty trustee is the unfortunate legacy of an impasse involving the interpretation of candidate eligibility as set forth in the Bylaws. The Board recognizes the legally binding authority of the Bylaws, and as a result must require deference to their official interpretation. Recently, the Board decided to maintain the status quo and refrain from adding any new Trustees while it addresses the many complex challenges arising from the COVID crisis. This decision affects both general and affiliate Trustees equally.
5. Your assertions that there exists a "relative lack of HU faculty voices in the current protests" and that such voices as have been represented are but a "handful" are not consistent with the facts. I would ask you to review the 11-page Attachment detailing the participation of Howard faculty in the current national conversation and local conversation over the last two months alone. Far from a relative dearth of voices, or there being only a "handful," faculty from no fewer than 15 University departments have been outspoken in print, audio, visual and all forms of social media, lending their voices, thoughts and perspectives on the current moment – in the best Howard tradition – providing intellectual leadership not only for the Black community, but indeed for the nation and the world.

Moreover, you contend that the "recent no confidence vote is an example of faculty apathy" and "recommend the Board not to interpret 600 faculty not voting as an endorsement of the current HU Administration" but rather "... a measure of HU faculty apathy, skepticism and low morale."

In response to this assertion, you will recall my pointing out to you that I am no stranger to a number of members of the Howard faculty, some of whom I have known for many years. I am not alone among members of the Board who can make a similar statement. While as a trained social scientist, I never assume that the views of the small sample of faculty with whom I interact with some frequency represent the views of some 600 or more faculty absent hard data confirming such, for the same reason I am not prepared to accept your "recommendation" that the large number of faculty who chose not to participate in the no confidence vote did so because of apathy. Neither would I accept a "recommendation" that their lack of participation in the vote represented an "endorsement of the current HU Administration," although in the absence of ample data to the contrary, it is equally likely that they chose not to participate in the vote because they found the case for holding such a vote lacking in merit. It is an axiom in the field in which I was trained that if there is one hypothesis consistent with the available

evidence, there are always an infinite number that are. In this instance, I know of no compelling data that would be dispositive with respect to either hypothesis.

In addition, you assert that “many faculty feel retaliated against by the University Administration as the new normal at HU and sanctioned by the HU Board.” Although you provide no evidence to support this, in response to my asking for a specific example of such “retaliation,” you cited the instance of a particular faculty member in the School of Business who was reprimanded by the School’s Dean. While the notion that the Board would sanction unmerited action against faculty by members of the University’s Administration is baseless, and would be greeted by Trustees with both surprise and displeasure, the specific case you cite of presumed “retaliation” versus merited reprimand by a Dean against a faculty member is a serious matter. The University has well-established grievance procedures to deal with such cases, and I would suggest that the faculty member you referred to follow those procedures, seeking redress if warranted.

In light of your having brought this matter to our attention, I have made direct inquiries with respect to this matter, have now reviewed the timeline and substance of all communications between the faculty member, the Dean and the Office of the Provost; have been given to understand that a final request from the faculty member to the Office of the Provost requesting that the entire matter be reviewed in light of the provisions of the Faculty Handbook, and that the reprimand be rescinded was received by the Office of the Provost on June 8, 2020; that a final determination with respect to this matter by the Office of the Provost will be made within the next two weeks, and that the faculty member involved will be informed of this determination.

6. “The collapse of research infrastructure at HU”

As I said to you in our meeting in response to your contention here, I do not doubt that there are some faculty who find the current research infrastructure at Howard challenging and inadequate. However, I questioned then and I question now that “many” or “most” (as you contend) “see it on the verge of collapse.”

Roughly two-thirds of the members of the current Board of Trustees are Howard graduates, many of whom were trained by your predecessors, some by your contemporaries. Some of us remain in touch with current faculty who continue to produce a steady stream of articles and papers for academic journals, conduct ongoing scientific research, and spend countless hours preparing material with which to teach and engage their students. The fact that they remain committed to doing so is not to suggest that no obstacles to their doing so exists; but rather that there has never been a time in the history of this institution, or the presence of Black people in this country, when obstacles did not exist. Confronting and keeping on in the face of “obstacles” is part of our existential condition. When has it ever been otherwise?

The current challenges facing the University on multiple fronts are not opaque to the Board, nor are many either new or unique to Howard, or the sole product of the current Howard Administration. The fact that, as Trustees, we choose not to indulge in the sort of negative hyperbole that too often envelops the campus, eroding trust among students, faculty and administrators who are better served by recognizing and understanding that our common condition necessitates common aims, is a conscious one. No one knows better the costs to the institution in foregone support and resources caused by this corrosive echo chamber than Trustees engaged in efforts to attract such resources to Howard, in order to provide the best for its deserving students and faculty.

While our primary obligation and responsibility as fiduciaries of Howard is to ensure its continuance, in perpetuity, equally important to and incumbent upon as us committed stewards are imperatives to ensure the quality of teaching available to our students, the preservation of our history, and the needed support for the creation of new knowledge, in each of which endeavors an engaged and motivated faculty are essential. On this much I hope we can agree. As Trustees, we will continue our efforts to attract the resources the University needs in order to address existing deficits and challenges that we know continue to exist here.

Sincerely,

*Laurence C. Morse*

Laurence C. Morse, Ph.D.  
Incoming Chairman (eff. July 1, 2020)  
Howard University Board of Trustees

cc: Stacey J. Mobley, Esq.  
Dr. Danette G. Howard  
Dr. Anthony K. Wutoh