

Campus Senate orders probe of UIS athletics program

Vote of no confidence for chancellor tabled

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The Campus Senate of the University of Illinois at Springfield on Friday ordered an independent investigation of the school's scandal-racked athletic department.

Cited were the resignations of three coaches within a one-week period last month and what the faculty called an "ongoing pattern of ethical failures and misconduct, a lack of effective oversight within the athletic department, and a lack of effective oversight of the athletic department by the UIS administration."

Chancellor Richard Ringeisen, however, avoided a vote of no confidence in his overall leadership. Discussion of such a vote was tabled.

Ringeisen attended back-to-back meetings of both the old and new Campus Senate. A standing-room-only crowd of faculty, students, coaches and administrators attended Friday's three-hour meeting of the outgoing Senate; senators serve two-year terms.

During both meetings, a resolution of no confidence in Ringeisen was postponed until the results of the investigation are reported to the Senate.

Ringeisen didn't give a timetable for the investigation and wouldn't say if the findings would be made public.

"The motion just passed, and I have to consider that motion to decide which way we might want to do what kind of review," he said. "There's a lot of time ahead."

The resignations of Joe Fisher, Roy Gilmore and Jay Davis will be central to the investigation.

Fisher, head softball coach and volleyball coach, and Gilmore, head women's basketball coach and assistant softball coach, agreed to resign March 20 after the softball team returned from a spring-break trip to the Rebel Spring Games in Kissimmee, Fla.

Davis, the men's and women's golf coach, resigned March 26 after he had been placed on administrative leave three weeks earlier.

No details have been released about the reasons for the resignations. University officials have said Davis' resignation was separate from those of Fisher and Gilmore.

On Friday, Kent Redfield, a UIS political science professor, brought up the issue of alcohol and the softball team on its Florida trip. Alexandra Kirschbaum, a student worker in the athletic department who has talked to players on the softball team, acknowledged that alcohol played a role.

Ringeisen refused to answer questions about alleged violations of the school's alcohol policy during the softball trip, but during the meeting did cite the policy that prohibits any athlete (even those 21 and older) from consuming alcohol during the season.

The resolution ordering the investigation passed after Pat Langley, a professor of women and gender studies and legal studies who presided over her final meeting as chair of the Campus Senate, cast the tie-breaking vote.

"We've been struggling with not knowing what's going on," said Langley, who is retiring after this school year. "That's true for faculty. It's true for staff. It's true for students. There have been all kinds of things that are simply not true.

"An investigation hopefully will provide everybody with the same factual basis. I'm hoping the results will be not just about what happened in Florida or what happened with the golf coach, but more importantly how we got there and how we cannot keep appearing with bad headlines in the newspaper.

"I've had faculty ask me, 'Would you send your 18-year-old daughter here if she were an athlete?' A lot of faculty have been asked that, and their answer is 'I wouldn't have confidence she would be safe.'

"That's terrible."

According to the Campus Senate resolution, the committee that will investigate the athletic department will include Ryan Williams, who chairs the school's Intercollegiate Athletics Committee; a faculty member appointed by the Senate; and an external consultant who will be agreed upon by the chancellor and the Senate Executive Committee.

Ringeisen, who has been chancellor at UIS since 2001, said after Friday's meetings that he doesn't think the ordering of an investigation or things that have been said about him have compromised his leadership. He said he's confident the Senate will not vote against him.

"If they do, that just means we have more work to do," Ringeisen said. "I don't report to the faculty Senate. I report to the president of the University of Illinois and the board of trustees. They've indicated to me relatively strongly the last several days I have their complete support."

Ringeisen said he stands by how the university, which is transitioning to National Collegiate Athletic Association Division II from the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, has handled multiple incidents involving coaches and athletes in the last couple of years.

"I specifically asked our NCAA visitors, 'Do our procedures need to change?'," Ringeisen said. "Their answer was, 'You have good ones.'

"The object is not to have anything happen. We're going to look at what we do and how we do it to see if there are ways to prevent this kind of behavior, but as long as God makes human beings, there are going to be people who misbehave. When people misbehave, you've got to enforce your policies, and that's exactly what we did."

Ringeisen admitted, though, that the public image of UIS has been damaged.

"That's unfortunate, but we will build it again," he said. "The people involved have received our apologies. Whether we need a public apology to the whole world, that's not as clear to me."

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