Common Questions for Candidates – Bonnie H. Ownley

1. **What principles guide your administrative and leadership philosophy?**

   *Actively listen to stakeholders.* I believe that leadership at a public university is about *working with* the people you lead to achieve the mission and goals of the institution. When people feel that their work is valued and they have a voice in addressing issues of concern and sharing potential solutions, they will be more likely to engage and work together to find appropriate solutions to problems while fulfilling the mission and goals of the university, while also achieving their own professional goals. Listening to stakeholders about their concerns and seeking input on solutions is invaluable. I believe that when people agree upon values and are included in the goal-making process, and believe in those goals, we can work together to achieve more than we imagined. Although leadership styles vary, principles that focus on recognizing the value of everyone’s work and providing ample opportunities to voice concerns, opinions, and solutions should be applied to leadership at each unit level of the university.

   *Shared governance and two-way communication to build trust.* I am a strong advocate for shared governance, a unique partnership that gives voice to faculty and the final decision to administration, which is also accountable for the decision. To create effective shared governance, leaders must engage in two-way communication, which is critical to build the trust that is needed between administrators and faculty to develop new initiatives and solve difficult problems.

   *Inclusiveness and diversity.* At our university we need more perspectives from diverse voices, to develop more inclusive, well-considered plans and solutions. But first, leaders must ensure a robust culture of inclusion, in which people are not afraid to voice their opinion because they are a member of an under-represented group, or their position is not tenure-line, or they are not a full professor. When people are uncomfortable voicing their opinion, there is no inclusion, and it is unlikely that the diversity we value will be achieved.

   *Lead by example.* To create a culture of inclusion at every department or unit level, I believe that it is crucial to lead by example. Are faculty and committee meetings inclusive? Has diversity been considered when making selections for members of committees and task forces? Some mistakes are inevitable, communication is never perfect, and information crucial for decisions may be unknown. While admitting mistakes can be difficult, it is the right approach so that we can recalibrate, find better solutions, and move forward.

   *Change can bring opportunities.* I am not an advocate of ‘change for the sake of change’. But in recent months we have experienced a viral pandemic, over which we have minimal control, and at the same time, an urgent awakening about racial inequities, which have been perpetuated over generations. These challenges require that we re-examine our values as individuals and as a university community, provide a platform that allows all to be heard, actively listen to and empathize with one another, identify and eliminate policies and procedures that perpetuate bias and discrimination, make the changes needed, and be ready to revise and adjust as we learn how to accomplish goals differently and equitably.

   *Provide resources and professional development.* Leaders will be asking much of faculty in their roles as teachers, researchers, and outreach professionals, who are already facing challenges of personal and family health and social injustices. Leaders must be prepared to constantly touch base with faculty, address their concerns, celebrate their successes, and provide the resources and professional development that faculty need to be successful and achieve their professional and personal goals.
2. Address ways you would work to improve diversity, inclusion, and equity at UTK-UTIA with a set of tangible and measurable initiatives.

Improving diversity, inclusion, and equity at UTK-UTIA must begin at the department or unit level. Recently, Dr. Deborah Welsh and I co-chaired the Equity Committee of the Commission for Women to examine gender salary equity for tenure-line faculty. While we often think that lack of gender diversity is restricted to STEM disciplines, we found lack of gender diversity to be widely spread across fields of study and colleges with a third of the 69 departments lacking gender diversity in one or more of the professorial ranks. The Equity Committee recommended that the process that we followed be used to examine diversity and salary equity by race and gender, and the same be done for non-tenure track faculty. I want to see this process become an annual exercise, and for deans and department heads to be expected to develop a plan to resolve the inequities, or to explain significant salary differences. A process that would enable a faculty member to request a salary analysis, independent of the faculty member’s supervisor, should also be developed. These salary equity initiatives would help to retain faculty, especially from underrepresented groups.

The Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement is working with colleges to develop diversity plans (objectives, actions, and goals) related to the mission and values of each college. These plans are being developed with stakeholder engagement and will include assessment and data collection. When development of diversity plans is extended to the department/unit level, diversity goals can be aligned with requests for faculty lines. Development of diversity plans at the department level should engage all department members to develop the inclusive culture we need to improve diversity and equity.

Development of well-considered diversity plans will involve training of faculty on diversity and inclusion, through the university, their professional societies, and private entities. Seeking training and providing service to the university on diversity and inclusion is a measure of commitment to the university’s diversity and inclusion goals that should be documented and recognized.

3. Provide examples of your experience building relationships with faculty (both tenure stream and non-tenure track), the UTK-UTIA Faculty Senate, department heads, deans, and other stakeholders.

As a past UTK-UTIA Faculty Senate president, I had a unique opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, within and outside the university, whose common characteristic was a shared desire for the university to succeed, but they often held widely different views on how that could best be accomplished. I also had feet planted on both sides of the bridge, as a faculty member in UTIA with a research/teaching appointment and as a faculty leader of a larger constituency on the Knoxville campus. Overnight I became a member or chair of 30+ committees, councils, and commissions, and served on several administration searches. I interacted with two very different Boards of Trustees (BOT), and was fortunate to be the first faculty representative on our current Board. I have also worked with leaders from other Faculty Senates and served as president of Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFs), a statewide organization of faculty senates from the 10 public universities in Tennessee, and as Chair of the Steering Committee of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), a consortium of faculty senates from Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision universities from across the U.S.

Most recently I served on the UTK/UTIA Reunification Committee, which included students, staff, tenure-line and non-tenure track faculty, department heads, and deans. The committee was charged to reach out to internal and external university stakeholders across Tennessee and provide them with an opportunity to learn about the reunification initiative and to express their concerns as well as share their ‘big ideas’ to enhance the university’s service to the people of Tennessee through reunification and emphasis on the land grant mission. In a short period of time, we reached more than 2,000 stakeholders and surveyed about 5,000. Subsequently, I served on the UTIA/UTK Reunification
Academic Affairs and Shared Governance Working Group. The committee identified opportunities to enable UTIA and UTK to work together more seamlessly in academic affairs and shared governance. The interactions I have described often involved new initiatives, projects, goal-setting, strategic planning, and information sharing on how best to solve common problems. These interactions also involved developing shared values, collaboration, and compromise to reach our final goals.

4. **Address ways you would work to improve our hiring, evaluation, promotion/tenure, and faculty development policies and procedures providing examples of specific initiatives and areas of emphasis.**

**Hiring:** I have served on STRIDE since 2013, and have co-taught numerous workshops for faculty search committee members on implicit bias and best practices for equitable decision-making in faculty searches, as well as faculty mentoring and retention. In the beginning, STRIDE was focused on gender diversity, and the concept of implicit bias was new to many faculty members in our workshops. Women often reported that the published research we shared was transformative. I am convinced that STRIDE training has contributed to increased numbers of women in associate and full professor positions, and numbers of women faculty in fields that were traditionally occupied only by men. STRIDE has since expanded their educational message to include more examples from published literature on inequities based on racial and LGBT bias. Research in education points to the combination of relevance, meaning and emotion as being most effective to create learning. I believe that inclusion of interpersonal dialogues in STRIDE programs would serve to reduce bias and promote empathy, understanding, and inclusion.

**Evaluation:** In the last few years the lack of a unified reporting system for evaluation has prompted complaints from faculty for time expended and BOT members for lack of common data across campuses. While existing systems have been improved based on faculty input, there is still no unified reporting system for reunified UTK/UTIA. I would advocate for collaboration to develop one system with the flexibility to meet faculty reporting needs. For many years department heads complained about not receiving training on faculty evaluation. Recently the Provost Office offered training, which has been well received and I would advocate that the training on evaluation be required at multiple levels of leadership. Periodic Post-tenure Performance Review (PPPR) was not developed in the spirit of shared governance. The need for and goals associated with this evaluation tool are unclear, while the additional burden of time on faculty is very clear. Poor performance of faculty can be addressed with Enhanced Post-tenure Performance Review, and I would advocate to higher administration and the BOT that PPPR is duplicated effort and should be eliminated.

**Retention:** Retaining under-represented faculty is an important characteristic and measure of an inclusive culture. Best practices for faculty retention need to be developed and widely shared with department and college leaders. Learning why faculty leave is key to improve retention, and a consistent process to determine what led them to leave the university is needed.

**Faculty development policies and procedures:** Resources for leadership training of faculty need to be increased to provide meaningful experiences. Associate head opportunities and newly developed programs for Faculty Fellows are excellent opportunities for professional development of faculty. Careful consideration should be given to ensure that equity and diversity are given priority when faculty selections are made for development opportunities. Policies and procedures should be reviewed to identify those that do not promote equity or that disadvantage specific groups.

**Review titles of non-tenure track faculty:** Titles should be reviewed and aligned with position responsibilities. Career ladders should be clearly articulated for all groups of non-tenure track faculty. To promote 'community partnerships' with the university based on Extension presence in all 95 counties, as described in the Strategic Visioning White Paper, additional non-tenure track faculty titles for those providing programming at the county level should be considered.