

From: Spurgeon McWilliams, M.D., Member of FAMU Board of Trustees

To: FAMU Board of Trustees

Re: Major Position Statement

Date: November 6, 2014

The rapidity with which the University appointed a search committee to find a replacement for head football coach Earl Holmes, and the personnel named to serve are both positive developments. It is troubling, however, if this action denotes an intention by the university to proceed with “business as usual” and to ignore the widespread outcry regarding actions by Athletic Director, Kellen Winslow.

Over the past several years, under the control of successive presidents and athletic directors, our athletic program has regressed on multiple fronts. Boards of Trustees, rigidly adherent to a policy of non-interference, beyond their perceived spheres of responsibility, have largely observed this decline from the sidelines.

At the last FAMU Board of Trustees meeting, I presented commentary on an AGB statement on Board Responsibilities for Intercollegiate Athletics. The document had been distributed to the BOT prior to the meeting. Although this document was dated April 3, 2009, there had been no prior presentation of this information by the University to the BOT. The document, however, presented a much broader sphere of BOT responsibility for Athletics than the FAMU BOT had previously apparently perceived.

Under the section on Personnel, for example, it was stated that “Boards should not be directly involved in the process of hiring and firing coaches or other Athletics Department personnel, but Boards are ultimately responsible for the integrity of the hiring process”. Note also, among questions to consider was “are thorough background checks conducted on perspective Athletics Department Employees”? The Board’s fiduciary responsibilities are discussed throughout the document. In other words, although the president selects a candidate for hire, the BOT has the responsibility of assuring that the candidate’s prior experience, prior performance, and character are consistent with the contractual resources requested of the University. The Board, then, must bear some responsibility for the current state of affairs; one that appropriate oversight of the vetting of both Mr. Winslow and Mr. Holmes would have likely prevented.

That said, I strongly feel that the BOT must respond to the public’s concerns about Mr. Winslow. Not to do so would not only be irresponsible, it would appear uncaring. I have heard from former FAMU presidents, elected officials, alumni, students, and in general, a support base that is far too broad and disturbed not to be taken very seriously. The state of Florida does not support athletic programs. The viability of our athletics programs is largely dependent upon public goodwill and support. The University is best served by an agent who demonstrates the ability to develop a strong and mutually respectful relationship with our support base. It should

be clear to the president and to the BOT by now (as it appears to be to practically everyone else), that Mr. Winslow has failed to demonstrate that ability.

As regards the “Homecoming” firing of Coach Holmes, I agree that it was untimely, disruptive, insensitive, and offensive (you may add more). My concern, as I discussed with President Mangum, however, is was it intentional? If unintentional, an offence, though severe, may be minimized (or forgiven) with admission of error, and a gesture of remorse. To my knowledge neither has been forthcoming, thus a Board response is indicated.

But the primary reason for this statement is that Mr. Winslow saved his most egregious act for a bigger stage, and this time it was clearly intentional, grossly disrespectful, and thus, from my prospective—UNFORGIVABLE. As many of you know, after arising at Homecoming convocation to introduce our football team (which he should have known was not present) Mr. Winslow sparred with the audience, unhappy with his prior actions, and further enraged by his arrogant onstage behavior, until President Mangum stepped in. This was a Homecoming crowd, mind you—former FAMU Presidents, Trustees past and present, elected officials, alumni and student leaders past and present, corporate representatives, students, faculty, community leaders—the FAMU family. This didn’t seem to matter to Mr. Winslow. This Board must remind itself, that these are the soldiers who have sustained this university—and as Dr. John Lee so brilliantly reminded us—many battles lie ahead.

I’ve been here a long time—through segregation, sit-in’s and marches, but I have honestly, never before seen anyone in this city in an official capacity “Black or White” to use an “old school” term, display that level of disrespect for this great university. On a personal level, I was also very disturbed to see Mr. Winslow show such disrespect for the President who had given him an opportunity to serve.

Dr. Mangum should be commended by the Board, in that she handled the situation with grace and dignity. The crowd was also commendable in that it greeted the President with applause, and remained quiet and attentive throughout her admonition. As a governing Board, however, we “dodged a bullet”. Hopefully the BOT will take whatever action it deems appropriate to assure that neither the President, the Board, or any FAMU supporter who witnessed this ordeal, will ever have to do so again.