

Article published Nov 21, 2003

## Young-backed initiatives find favor and dissent in UF senate

At his next-to-last meeting of the University of Florida Faculty Senate, President Charles Young received both strong affirmation and a mild rebuke.

By unanimous voice vote, senators approved an initiative Young has been championing, which, if the board of trustees approves it next month, would give faculty members a greater say in how the university is run. Ever since Young came to UF in November 1999, he has said the faculty should play a bigger role in university decision-making - in particular on issues that involve the academic policy of the university.

So there was some irony in the very next vote at the meeting, which was premised on the idea that Young prematurely gave the university's endorsement to a proposed road project cutting through campus without waiting for faculty input.

By a 52-21 vote, with 8 abstentions, the senate approved a motion asking "the UF administration to withdraw its endorsements of the donation of right of way for a four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue through the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory and Preservation Area 1."

Young, who was at the meeting, voted against the motion and urged the senate not to approve it.

He said he didn't offer to donate the right of way or say that it was a done deal when he sent a letter on March 25 to Rodney Long, chairman of the Alachua County Commission.

The letter read, in part: "The University of Florida believes its contribution of a right of way to extend SW 24th Avenue to Archer Road will support the sustainable growth of Gainesville and Alachua County.

"The university, therefore, will recommend through its master plan amendment process that sufficient right of way be given to the city of Gainesville/county of Alachua to provide the necessary land . . ."

Segments of the faculty are up in arms because the proposed road would eat up part of a natural area teaching laboratory and others about the seemingly top-down nature of the endorsement.

Young told the Faculty Senate on Thursday that a university focus group is considering the road proposal and it will then go before several faculty committees before any final decision is made.

"I believe a process is under way and we should not now be trying to send signals

one way or the other . . . to the county that it's good or bad or we're for it or against it," Young said.

"I have explained many times, if that process comes out in the final analysis that this is not a good idea, it will not go forward."

Nevertheless, the faculty voted in favor of a resolution put forward by botany professor Jack Putz, who uses the natural area for teaching.

"We think that the process has been subverted by the repeated suggestion - strong enough that the county acted on them - that we were going to donate this right of way," Putz said.

It's unclear what effect the resolution will have, though.

Before the vote, Young told the senators that regardless of the outcome, he would clarify in writing to concerned parties that the university has not made a final decision on donating the road right of way.

A separate presentation by campus planner Linda Dixon made it clear, however, that under UF master planning rules, the university president has the final say over "minor amendments," meaning those that don't affect sufficient acreage.

In response to a question, Dixon said the 24th Street extension would be considered a minor amendment.

But as Young reminded the senate, he will be "long gone" before a final decision on granting the right of way is made.

Incoming President Bernie Machen, who starts work Jan. 5, will inherit the matter.

*Carrie Miller can be reached at millerc@gvillesun.com or 338-3103.*