June 9, 2010

Senator Ben Nevers, Chair
Education Committee, Louisiana Senate

Representative Austin Badon, Chair
Education Committee, Louisiana House of Representatives

Dear Senator Nevers and Dear Representative Badon,

I write today on behalf of several major organizations representing the voice and the interests of higher education professionals in Louisiana: The LSU (Baton Rouge) Faculty Senate, of which I am the President; the LSU System Council of Faculty Advisors, of which I am the Chair; and the Association of Louisiana Faculty Senates (ALFS), a statewide organization for public and private college and university educators. Together, these governance and professional organizations represent several thousand of Louisiana’s most highly educated leaders, teachers, and responsible citizen-voters.

The many and diverse members of the higher education community are collectively concerned about one bill presently under consideration by the Louisiana Legislature: HB1492 (and any subsequent versions of that House bill that may come before the Senate). Educators throughout Louisiana—who are frequent and reliable voters in almost every district of the state—regard this bill, which confers sweeping powers on the Board of Regents, as dangerous, counterproductive, and contrary to the best traditions in higher education. Knowing of your commitment to quality education in Louisiana, we, the people who work in universities and who carry out the hands-on education of Louisiana’s most promising young scholars, ask that you campaign for either the withdrawal or the defeat of this bill.

There are several reasons that rank-and-file academic personnel oppose
HB1492. First, concentrating policymaking power in a single and largely unmonitored agency, the Board of Regents, may indeed allow for a few short-term solutions to our economic and administrative problems. Over time, however, the proposed centralization of authority will encourage arbitrary rule and thereby discourage innovation. Second, higher education is unique among public institutions in its productive cultivation, indeed its reliance on, local institutional customs and entrepreneurial thinking. Neither of these are promoted by a monolithic administrative structure. Third, the proposed strengthening of the Regents’ authority undermines traditions of faculty governance and collegial responsibility that are, in large measure, responsible for the astounding achievements of the western university tradition and that, time and again, have proved the best approach to overcoming challenges like those that Louisiana presently faces. Fourth, the aforementioned dilution of faculty influence contravenes national standards for the management of educational institutions and will adversely affect the ranking and standing of our campuses while also drawing criticism from accrediting associations, professional organizations, and granting agencies. Fifth, the “top down” management style that would result from the concentration of power in the Regents’ office contradicts the principles endorsed by our governor, who advocates small government and grassroots-level control of state agencies.

The faculty members of Louisiana’s higher education institutions understand that our legislators are working vigorously and tirelessly to overcome unprecedented economic adversities. However, faculty members are equally convinced that HB1492 (or any similar legislation) will intensify rather than solve the problems that we face. This legislation would demoralize faculty, damage programs and institutions, and discourage the economically productive research and pedagogical projects that define the excellence of a Louisiana education. Please do all that you can to defeat this troubling bill.

With the best wishes,

Kevin L. Cope
President, LSU Faculty Senate and Chair, LSU System Council of Faculty Advisors