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Big Changes Frustrate Faculty at Kean U.

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Union, N.J.

People here can agree on one thing: Before Dawood Farahi took over as president of Kean University, the campus looked like a dump. A rusty, chain-link fence enclosed the grounds, the walkways were trampled and muddy, and without a comfortable place to hang out, students spent time between classes just sitting in their cars.

Now the four-year public university bordering the gritty city of Newark is an oasis replete with pink and purple flowers. A quaint set of secondhand trolley buses purchased from an upscale Jersey shore town move students around. There's a new Starbucks in the library and a bold, state-of-the-art science-and-technology building. Students and their parents have been impressed: The university's enrollment has risen by nearly 25 percent since Mr. Farahi took over in 2003.

"This is the new Kean," the president says on a whirlwind tour of the campus one evening, explaining that first-generation-college students, who make up the bulk of the 16,000 enrolled here, need to be inspired just like those who attend the Ivy League. "This is the Dartmouth and the Harvard of working-class America," he says.

But faculty members say the campus's appearance isn't the only thing that's been transformed. President Farahi, they say, has remade Kean into his own fiefdom—micromanaging everything from the color of the flowers to the work habits of faculty members.

In his seven years as president, Mr. Farahi has made several headline-grabbing changes that run counter to academic tradition. He's required faculty members to be on the campus at least four days a week, paid students to take classes on Fridays and Saturdays, and eliminated academic departments headed by professors—creating new schools with administrators in charge.

He's also tried to catapult the university from a teachers' college into a "world class" research institution. But along the way, say

professors, Mr. Farahi has run up Kean's debt and led the institution away from its core mission: offering a basic education to low-income students who need lots of help.

The president's moves have earned him a faculty vote of no confidence and drawn an inquiry from the American Association of University Professors. They have also made him the target of vigorous attacks by the Kean Federation of Teachers. The faculty union charges that the president's tight relationship with a local politician has led to graft, and some professors have taken to calling the place Soprano State U. (For more information on those allegations and the university's response, see article below).

"The collegial model, in which you hire people with expertise and consult with them and build a consensus, has served higher ed pretty well," says Charles H. Murphy, a professor of meteorology at Kean. "But that has been traded in here for a corporate model."

Mr. Farahi's supporters, however, believe he is the best thing to happen to Kean in decades. "He is a very decisive change-agent kind of president," says Frank J. Esposito, who is in his 40th year as a professor here and served as interim president before Mr. Farahi was named in 2003. "A lot of what he's dealing with is critical for the institution. This is not a time when we can stand pat anywhere in higher education."

Once One of Them

Ironically, Mr. Farahi himself spent 20 years here as part of the faculty, including as chairman of the department of public administration and leader of the University Senate. He was even active in the same faculty union that has now declared him the enemy. But Mr. Farahi says his inside view of the faculty only made it clear to him what had to change once he became president. "I saw what needed to be done," he says.

To stay competitive with the state's other public four-year institutions, he says, Kean needed a makeover. And the first step, he says, was wresting it from the hands of a self-indulgent faculty.

"If you design a higher-education institution to keep faculty and staff employed, you will not succeed," says Mr. Farahi. "But if you structure the environment to serve the students, you will excel."

The president has been one of Kean's most ambitious leaders, raising more than \$30-million in the university's first successful capital campaign and even taking steps to open a Kean campus in China (the plan is now stuck in red tape). Mr. Farahi has the backing of Kean's Board of Trustees, which just gave him a new

contract that lasts through 2014. "The president saw the flaws in the system," says Eugene C. Enlow, the board's chairman. "He saw what needed to be fixed."

But the faculty union argues that the president has ignored American higher education's long tradition of giving faculty a lead role in how universities are run. Faculty governance—a hallmark of the American system—typically grants professors authority over designing the curriculum, performing research, and setting the boundaries of and expectations for faculty work. One of the most attractive aspects of faculty work is its flexibility. Professors are not required to be in their offices from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Indeed, most set their own schedules and come and go as they please, doing much of their work in laboratories, libraries, or at home.

With Kean facing state cuts that have led to a \$17-million budget deficit, however, administrators say the university couldn't afford to conduct business as usual. It had to get more out of both its faculty and its infrastructure, says the president, so it could boost enrollment and bring in more tuition revenue. So university officials pushed through a course-schedule change that increases professors' office hours and requires them to be on the campus four days a week.

Under the change, classes that had been offered two days a week for 80 minutes, for example, are now offered three days a week for 50 minutes. And classes now meet on Fridays and Saturdays, when the campus was a virtual ghost town. (The university even sweetened the pot, offering students who took Friday and Saturday classes \$100 per credit on their campus "Cougar Cards.") With classes spread out over six days, the university has raised its enrollment by 2,260 students.

In addition, professors must now hold eight office hours a week instead of five, and they don't get to decide when it's most convenient for them. Administrators set office hours according to a schedule that ensures that at least one professor in a discipline is available during the week to advise undergraduates. "Higher ed is good at telling the rest of the world how to order its affairs, but it can be very conservative when it comes to examining itself," says Mark Edward Lender, interim vice president for academic affairs at Kean. "I loved being a department chair and setting my own hours. But that's not necessarily why we have a university."

The changes not only raised enrollment, they also alleviated a parking crunch and made professors more available to students,

who administrators say had complained about being unable to find faculty members in their offices. "You can't run a business in just three days a week," says the president. More than 600 classes now meet on Fridays, compared with just 174 in 2008, and 121 meet on Saturdays, up from 70 in 2008. "We made tough decisions, not necessarily popular ones," President Farahi said in his opening address to the campus this year. "We stopped saying, 'We don't do it that way,' and we embraced innovation. We changed how we do business."

Doing More With Less?

Suzanne Bousquet, executive director of the School of Psychology, says the changes have made her job easier. "I was having such issues scheduling classes Monday through Thursday, bulging at the seams during popular times," she says. And no longer are professors allowed to keep odd hours, says Ms. Bousquet, as one of her colleagues did—teaching evening classes at 7:30 p.m., giving office hours at 10:15 p.m., and never showing up on the campus during the day.

Raymond J. Lesniak, the Democratic state senator who represents Union County, applauds Kean's attempt to standardize faculty work. "They don't understand that times have changed and that in higher education, in government, and in private business you have to do more with less," he says. "They are trying to do less and get more."

Some professors at Kean, though, are insulted by statements like that. The changes here were more about giving the administration control over the faculty, they say, than about improving the university's finances. Cracking down on "lazy professors," they say, is simply a cheap way for the administration to earn points with lawmakers and the public. "When the president is seen to be getting tough against the faculty or introducing corporate-style efficiency, the board thinks that's good," says James A. Castiglione, a professor of physics who leads the Kean Federation of Teachers, which is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers.

The schedule changes have actually hurt students the most, says Mr. Castiglione. The average Kean student is a working-class kid whose parents didn't attend college. Students enroll here because they want a four-year university experience but can't afford to leave home. Most work and live with their parents while commuting to the campus. Some have families of their own. The schedule change has forced them to cut into their work and family lives to travel to the campus an extra day each week. Nicola G. Marrone, a 24-year-

old who studied chemistry at Kean, dropped out and joined the U.S. Air Force after the schedule change. "I live 45 minutes away, and when they changed the times it required me to go to school more," he says. "That was a hassle. Some days I did it, some days I was lackadaisical and I would just sit home and read my book and learn the same stuff."

An Unorthodox Move

Last spring, just as Kean was adjusting to the new schedule, the university introduced another sweeping set of changes. This time it eliminated 38 academic departments and consolidated them into 18 broad schools, headed by executive directors who are part of the administration. The consolidation merged disciplines like economics, sociology, and political science into a School of Social Sciences, and the departments of chemistry, geology, and part of biology into a School of Natural Sciences. The move is saving the university about \$2-million since former department heads are back in the classroom full time and the university does not have to hire as many adjunct teachers, says Mr. Lender.

In addition, unlike department chairmen, the new executive directors work five days a week year round—something President Farahi says is important for students. "You need a system that is available 12 months a year, whenever students come," he says. "We do 20 course-registration sessions now in July and August, and the faculty were not here in the summer."

But leaders of the Kean faculty union say the administration never asked them what they thought of the changes, which were announced last spring and put into effect this fall. "There ought to be democratic principles at work at a state university," says Cathleen M. Londino, a professor of media and film, "but we tend to be treated like junior-high-school teachers."

Some professors say eliminating departments is an unorthodox move that harms the university's academic integrity and violates principles of faculty governance. "How do we market high-quality programs to students if there isn't a department, if there isn't some structure working specifically for that discipline?" asks Mr. Murphy, the meteorology professor.

The University Senate, which is made up primarily of faculty members, held open forums on the reorganization last spring and then wrote a letter endorsing the changes. But the senate cautioned that a "hastily implemented plan" could have "unintended repercussions," and it suggested the administration continue

seeking faculty input.

Barbara E. Lee, an associate professor of special education who heads the University Senate, says her training as a school principal taught her that "your better decisions happen when you bring people in from the ground up." But, she says, she realizes the university had to make changes quickly because of budget problems. "We try to see things from a positive point of view," she says of the University Senate.

But the faculty union hasn't been quite as understanding. In May it held a vote asking professors whether they had confidence in the president. Sixty-one percent of Kean's 348 full-time professors voted, and of those, 83 percent voted no. The Kean Federation of Teachers has taken out ads in a local newspaper, charging that the administration has "rammed through" changes that are bad for students and faulting the president for "misguided fiscal and educational policies." Chief among those, says the union, is that Mr. Farahi's campus improvements have run up the university's debt to more than \$325,000. (In its latest rating, Moody's Investors Service gave Kean a "stable" financial outlook.)

After the no-confidence vote, the union asked the AAUP to get involved, and it did. "The faculty needs to be assured that it will be afforded a meaningful role in the significant decision-making processes affecting the future health of the institution," B. Robert Kreiser, associate secretary of the association, wrote to the president in May.

In a conversation with *The Chronicle* last month, though, Mr. Kreiser said he was still investigating whether faculty members at Kean had been adequately consulted. "Some of these changes, while I would find them difficult to deal with if I were on the faculty," he says, "are not matters on which the AAUP is at the moment prepared to say are impermissible."

Mr. Kresier was swayed in part by a letter in August from Mr. Lender, who assured the AAUP that the charge that Kean "has been attacking faculty rights ... is simply not true." While "veteran" professors may be upset, wrote Mr. Lender, the university is now hiring a new type of faculty member—"teacher scholars" who are more engaged in research and are pleased with what's happening at the university. "Kean faculty are now more productive," Mr. Lender wrote, "and academic standards have never been higher."

David A. Joiner is one of those new faculty members. He won two grants from the National Science Foundation to bring in a

supercomputer cluster that is the fastest at any public university in New Jersey. This year he got another NSF grant that will allow him to build a 3-D "cave" that researchers can walk into and use to explore their data.

Mr. Joiner, an assistant professor of computational mathematics and physics, says the course-schedule change, the increase in office hours, and the elimination of academic departments haven't made much difference to him. "Academics like to complain," he says.

Mr. Farahi isn't fazed either. What he's most proud of is what he's done for students. The president identifies with undergraduates here: He emigrated from Afghanistan in 1972, with just \$200 in his pocket, to enroll as a Fulbright student scholar at the University of Kansas.

Even in Kean's crown jewel, the \$48-million science-and-technology center, Mr. Farahi designed spaces for students. "I saw these in Bavaria, Germany," the president says of some unique chairs that allow students to turn sideways and use a padded armrest to hold a laptop. "They are an efficient way of bringing distinction."

Up on the rooftop of the six-story science center is a terrace that can hold large events, including fund raisers. But the president clearly considers it just one more place where students can be inspired. The sun is setting, and you can see the Manhattan skyline in the distance. "If you want to be somebody in that place," says the president, pointing toward America's most-famous city, "you can get there from here."

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