

NTU committee's failures exposed

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The furor over National Taiwan University's (NTU) presidential appointment has continued, despite the Ministry of Education's decision on Saturday to reject the election committee's selection of Kuan Chung-ming (關中明).

In its explanation, the ministry stressed that higher standards are needed, given that a university president is the navigator of a school's direction, not to mention that NTU leads the nation's institutions of higher education.

The ministry also focused on Kuan's failure to disclose a potential conflict of interest involving his role as an independent director of Taiwan Mobile, while the company's vice chairman, Richard Tsai (蔡啟芳), was a member of the election committee.

The committee accused the ministry of interfering with school autonomy, insisting that it had adhered to regulations throughout the election process and yesterday vowed not to select another candidate.

While much criticism has been leveled against Kuan for his refusal to offer a clear, firsthand explanation of the allegations against him — which also include academic misconduct and teaching illegally in China — it appears that the committee is also at fault for not facing up to its own problems.

And what are its problems? Its perfunctory and slovenly attitude in the selection process, and its dubious handling of the controversy.

Ever since the conflict-of-interest allegation surfaced, the school has insisted that the committee had done nothing wrong in the selection process by citing the Enforcement Rules Governing the Operations of the NTU Selection Committee and saying that no candidate had ever requested Tsai's removal from the committee.

The school is obviously and deliberately attempting to let the case slide through the cracks by

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omitting mention of the Operational and Organizational Guidelines for the NTU Presidential Election Committee, which state that members should be relieved of their role in the committee if evidence shows any bias in the application of their authority.

The committee's explanation also gives the impression that it was trying to justify Kuan's alleged plagiarism, which is absurd and runs counter to the academic spirit of seeking truth from facts.

Of all the selection criteria, possessing a "noble integrity" was listed first, yet the committee has seemingly lost sight of this requirement, as well as the meaning of education.

While the allegations surrounding Kuan might be his own personal problems, the controversy has exposed a more serious issue — the committee's incompetence.

School autonomy should be upheld and a school's decision on the selection of its president should be respected, but it begs the question: What has become of the committee that it would make light of allegations surrounding its candidate and find it acceptable that he withheld information on a possible conflict of interest and refused to defend his integrity?

On NTU's Web site, it clearly says that the school's motto is "integrity, diligence, fidelity and compassion." The word "integrity" is placed ahead of the others — does this not mean that the school attaches primary importance to the cultivation of virtue?

Members of the committee are advised to revisit famed 19th-century educator John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University* and bear in mind the original *raison d'être* of higher education.

If all members of the committee engage in introspection and ask themselves what a university is for, then they could decide on a candidate who is more suitable to lead NTU and who could exemplify the school's motto.

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