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## How UMKC strife led to a chancellor's fall

By LYNN FRANEY *The Kansas City Star*



Gilliland

At first, Chancellor Martha Gilliland thought she might be able to survive mounting faculty unrest at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

She knew she enjoyed staunch support from community leaders. She prided herself on UMKC improvements, including a new dorm and \$133 million in private donations.

So when Gilliland first heard that professors in the College of Arts and Sciences planned to vote on a resolution expressing no confidence in her leadership, she told her provost in an e-mail message: "This could become a communications issue. ... On the other hand, I am a firm believer in 'what you resist persists.' Thus the best avenue may be to ignore it completely. No big deal and laugh."

While she was considering different strategies to quell the unrest — even contemplating a "leak" about one of her most persistent critics — her detractors were talking, exchanging e-mail messages and gathering in groups large and small.

In the end, more than 175 professors from five schools stated publicly that they lacked confidence in her leadership.

Gilliland, 60, announced earlier this month that she would resign Jan. 1, bringing to an end her effort to transform UMKC into a more visible, more respected university. It employs more than 3,000 people and enrolls about 12,000 students.

Gilliland and her provost declined to speak with a reporter for this story, but they did provide written responses to some questions. *The Star* also obtained e-mail messages between Gilliland and her provost and Gilliland and her boss, University of Missouri system President Elson Floyd, under Missouri's Sunshine Law.

By combing those messages and conducting interviews, *The Star* pieced together events of the 10 days — Nov. 9-18 — in which the battle unfolded between professors and Gilliland.

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**Tuesday, Nov. 9:** Dozens of arts and sciences professors gathered in a lecture hall for a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. A "white paper" from the provost's office suggesting radical academic restructuring — including dismantling arts and sciences — had deeply troubled many of them.

A few of the professors, including Professor Gary Ebersole, had been dissatisfied with Gilliland for some time. But they had worried about having enough support to call for her ouster. This day, they saw the other professors' anger over the white paper and decided to piggyback on it.

The professors set a vote for Nov. 18 on a resolution expressing no confidence in Gilliland.

"I'm clearing my calendar for the next 10 days," Ebersole vowed to a handful of professors gathered in his office. He intended to spend all his free time talking with professors across campus about why they should join in the criticism of Gilliland.

Ebersole, a tenured history professor, can cite dozens of clashes between faculty and Gilliland over how to run UMKC.

His most serious objection, he says, is that Gilliland undercut professors' traditional role in guiding academic matters.

One key area was the tenure process.

Professors cherish tenure; it allows them to speak their minds and study politically or culturally unpopular subjects without fear of being punished. But soon after Gilliland came in 2000, she began looking at changes in the way tenure is granted. Normally, faculty would lead that effort. But Gilliland appointed a committee of employees from across campus, instead of just faculty.

Some professors did not like the results. But Gilliland repeatedly has said she believes in everyone on campus having a voice.

Her willingness to change the campus culture endeared her to Kansas City business executives who saw her as a leader who would wake up the sleepy ivory tower and make it respond better and faster to community needs.

But internally, it sowed discord. The UMKC chapter of the American Association of University Professors, which fights to protect shared faculty governance, grew from just a handful of members when Gilliland arrived in April 2000 to about 100 now.

**Wednesday, Nov. 10:** In the morning, Gilliland read an e-mail message the faculty senate chairman had sent her alerting her to the upcoming arts and sciences vote. She forwarded it to her provost and a vice chancellor, adding her comments about possibly ignoring it.

But that thought evaporated quickly.

About 1 p.m., a professor sent a message to Gilliland's provost, Bill Osborne, telling him that professors in education, law and biological sciences also appeared likely to approve "no confidence" resolutions. Osborne told Gilliland.

Just before 11 p.m., Gilliland sought support from Floyd.

"Heads up," she wrote. "There is an 'upset' among some UMKC faculty about the white paper on reorganization sent from the Provost's office earlier this week. ... You may receive some email/voicemail traffic on this."

She explained to Floyd that she had broached reorganization as early as the summer and professors had asked for more exploration of the ideas.

"So I am completely miffed that the request for dialogue has created an upset. It is the faculty that requested it," Gilliland wrote.

She told Floyd she would work on a "communique" to faculty saying no decisions on reorganization had been made. She asked Floyd to tell any faculty who contacted him to tell them he had confidence in her.

**Thursday, Nov. 11:** In a morning e-mail message, Gilliland told top advisers she thought the votes were a plot involving Ebersole and others. "This too shall pass," she wrote.

Floyd's reply to the "heads up" message came in at 7:37 p.m.: "Thank you for the alert. I have received some electronic traffic on this matter, but, to date, it has been within the normal band of what I consider 'normal.' "

Gilliland worked to arrange a meeting with arts and sciences professors for the following Tuesday. She planned to serve pizza.

**Friday, Nov. 12:** At 6:30 a.m., Gilliland told Osborne that she planned to work on Sunday with Roshann Parris, a communication consultant, on the pizza lunch.

Later, members of the American Association of University Professors approved a resolution urging professors to vote no confidence.

At 8:22 p.m., Gilliland struck a positive note in a message to Osborne: "We made huge headway today, e.g. Elson is ok, we have a meeting set. ... Lighten up and sleep really well. I can assure you I will."

**Monday, Nov. 15:** A professor sent Gilliland a copy of the American Association of University Professors resolution from Friday, telling her: "There's a nasty movement afoot."

The head of the professors association chapter, tenured foreign languages professor Patricia Brodsky, sent an e-mail message at 10:10 a.m. to another professor saying she wasn't going to attend the pizza question-and-answer session planned for Tuesday. Others should boycott too, she said.

That professor sent Brodsky's message to another professor, who forwarded it to Gilliland.

Gilliland sent it on to Floyd: "This will give you an idea about the mean spirit of a couple of people," she wrote. "Very interesting from an anthropological and sociological perspective."

In the afternoon, the School of Biological Sciences professors voted 33-1 to express no confidence.

With the pizza session coming the next day, Gilliland sent a few professors messages seeking their advice on handling questions.

"I am a little lost as to what all the upset is," she said.

One advised her to withdraw the reorganization white paper and to "get some new advisors. Someone has been hurting you here."

**Tuesday, Nov. 16:** At the pizza lunch, professors peppered Gilliland with questions about her leadership.

Afterward, several professors sent e-mail messages commending her for keeping her cool.

"I know that you want the best for UMKC ...," professor Ray Coveney wrote. "And I certainly hope that on Thursday there will be a resounding rejection of the motion to censure you."

Another professor wrote to tell Gilliland she'd heard the questioning had been brutal.

Gilliland wrote back: "I appreciate this e-mail. I spoke from the heart and did my best."

**Wednesday, Nov. 17:** Ebersole was one of the professors who took Gilliland to task during the pizza lunch.

Before 7 a.m., Gilliland e-mailed Osborne with a request: "Please get Gary Ebersole's productivity data (classes, # students, research). We need to leak that internally and externally".

(In her written response to *The Star*, Gilliland wrote last week that she made a bad judgment call: "The email was written in the heat of the moment immediately following what felt like an unusually personal confrontation," she wrote. "...It was written in a moment of passion and, as we all know, a deep breath is often the best strategy in such moment. Absolutely no action was taken and I am grateful that we are rooted in integrity and hold each other accountable.")

In the evening, a professor in arts and sciences wrote to Gilliland suggesting that she withdraw the reorganization white paper.

She forwarded the message to Osborne, who replied: "Want to withdraw it tonight? I am opposed, as I think it looks like an act of desperation. If I were you, I would want to be seen as 'The Chancellor' and if I lose in that way then go out with my head up ... but this is your life and I will withdraw it now, if that is your wish."

Gilliland responded: "I see it just as you do. Exactly as you do."

**Thursday, Nov. 18:**

As they talked to professors in other schools, Ebersole, Brodsky and law professor Ed Hood tapped into resentment that some professors already felt over issues such as high dean turnover and their perception that faculty input wasn't valued.

The arts and sciences faculty met at 3:15. The vote against Gilliland: 97 to 29.

In law, professors' ballots came in 18-0 against her. And in the Bloch School of Business and Public Administration, it was 18-3.

Faculty leaders sent word to Floyd, who was in Rolla, Mo., with Gilliland at a Board of Curators meeting.

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Although civic leaders showed support for Gilliland, many of the UMKC employees who spoke with Floyd supported a change.

But on Dec. 3, education professors also voted against Gilliland.

At 11:36 a.m., she announced her resignation.

Floyd said he would be in Kansas City three days a week in January and February, overseeing UMKC.

Under Floyd's leadership, Osborne has withdrawn the white paper.

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**First glance**

- *The Star used e-mail messages and conducted interviews to piece together events of the 10 days — Nov. 9-18 — in which the battle unfolded between professors and UMKC Chancellor Martha Gilliland.*

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