

Professor “X” Interview

Q: How did you feel about Jack Weiss’s appointment to the office of Chancellor back in 2008?

A: I understand that many of my colleagues were very unhappy that the Board of Supervisors imposed Jack on the faculty after the faculty had overwhelmingly voted against him. I understand also that they were even more unhappy when, at the first faculty meeting, Jack said not that he would try to win the faculty over but rather that he forgave them for voting against him. I find it ironic that Jack forgave the faculty for opposing him when he started his chancellorship but has apparently not forgiven them for circulating the no-confidence petition. Why the change in attitude? In any event, I believe that both Jack and the faculty would have been much better off if he had kicked off his chancellorship with humility rather than arrogance.

Q: How would you describe your working relationship with Jack Weiss?

A: I would rather not make this interview about me. The much more important issue that we are discussing here is the extent to which the relationship between Jack and the entire faculty was dysfunctional and how this problem can be avoided with the next law school dean.

Q: You signed the faculty petition urging for a change in leadership, citing a lack of confidence in the leadership of Jack Weiss as Chancellor of the LSU Law Center. Specifically, how did Jack Weiss fall short as the leader of the LSU Law Center?

A: I understand that many law school alums are unhappy with this petition. Jack was allegedly a successful lawyer at the time that he sought the Chancellorship and seemed always to maintain cordial relations with people who moved in his elite circles. But I think that they really need to hear the other side of the story – not just Jack’s. I’m guessing that they never have seen Jack’s dark side, the side that he consistently presented to me and to my colleagues.

In my, and I believe most of my colleagues’, view, Jack saw his role to be little more – and nothing less – than imposing his will on the faculty. Everything in his administration was top-down. (One small but revealing example: a former staff member told me that as soon as Jack replaced former Chancellor John Costonis, she was instructed to report to another staff member rather than to Jack himself.) He must have learned this autocratic management style from the law firms. The problem is, however, that an academic institution like LSU Law Center is very different from a law firm. Unlike law-firm attorneys, academics tend to view themselves not as “soldiers” embedded in a hierarchical structure taking orders from their superiors but rather as more-or-less equal partners in an enterprise dedicated to the common good.

I believe that the faculty often passed Jack's proposals not because they actually believed in them but simply because they were worried about him retaliating against them individually – for example, by denying them promotion or tenure or withholding summer grant stipends, which many faculty depend on – if they did not go along.

I have been repeatedly told that Jack could be vindictive. He first earned this reputation – at least a reputation for being callous and scornful – in spring 2008. My understanding is as follows. The faculty had voted to grant tenure to Alberto Luis Zuppi, who was then the Robert and Pamela Martin Associate Professor of Law at LSU and an expert in international criminal law, international human rights, international law, and international sale of goods. But Jack quickly overrode the faculty's vote on the grounds (pretext?) that Prof. Zuppi's teaching was sub-standard. (Some colleagues have told me that they thought that Jack opposed Prof. Zuppi simply because his foreign accent made it more difficult for students to understand him.) And the Board of Supervisors, Jack's loyal ally, simply rubber-stamped his veto. Importantly, Prof. Zuppi not only had a wife and children but also was suffering from cancer and was in the United States on a teaching visa. So by denying him tenure, Jack effectively forced Prof. Zuppi and his family to lose health insurance and leave the country. Needless to say, this story haunted non-tenured faculty members throughout Jack's "reign."

Q: Was there a specific event or incident that initiated this petition? If so, what happened?

A: I believe that the specific events that finally prompted some members of the faculty to circulate the petition included Jack's repeated claim that he did not have time during the worst of the budget crisis to do any significant fundraising, his repeated refusal to explain why he did not have this time, his alleged reluctance to address the diversity issue until it became public, his alleged microaggression against black law students (reported by Kyle Alagood '15 in the [Huffington Post](#)), his alleged bullying of Kenneth Barnes, Jr. '15 for reporting a racist incident at the law school to [The Reveille](#), his alleged bullying of various students on [The Reveille](#) staff after this article was published, his alleged (and arguably actionable) sexually inappropriate comments at a law review banquet and to some faculty members, and his alleged (and arguably actionable) indifference to several female students' and faculty's complaints about sexual harassment and stalking. I use the word "alleged" above for incidents that I did not directly witness but rather heard about from others or have read in public documents.

Q: Who initiated the petition?

A: I would prefer that these people identify themselves.

Q: Did you or any of the disgruntled faculty members ever discuss his or her dissatisfaction with the Chancellor directly or pursue formal avenues of registering their complaints?

A: Jack was not very welcoming of criticism and alternative approaches. On the contrary, I believe that if I had complained to Jack about his ideas or actions, he would have tried to retaliate against me. And I know that I was hardly alone among my colleagues in suspecting that such a conversation with Jack would not have been very productive.

Q: Why did the faculty resort to circulating a petition?

A: You would have to ask the people who circulated it. But I know this much: some of my colleagues told me that circulating a petition in earlier years would have been fruitless because the Board of Supervisors did not really respect the faculty's judgment and would therefore have sided with Jack. I believe that when the law school merged with the main campus in April 2015 and it was therefore no longer the Board of Supervisors but rather the LSU A&M Administration that had direct oversight over Jack, the LSU Law faculty finally had enough leverage to make its move.

Q: Many with ties to the law school feel that the faculty's choice to circulate a petition to urge Jack Weiss's resignation was a denial of "due process" for Weiss. How would you respond to this criticism?

A: I believe that it is just the reverse. Because the Board of Supervisors for years apparently respected Jack much more than they respected the law faculty, Jack had much more "due process" between 2008 and 2015 than did the faculty. It was not until spring/summer 2015 that the situation finally balanced out.

If Jack thought that he was being unfairly treated, I believe that he had the right to plead his case to the LSU A&M Administration. My guess, however, is that if he did plead or had pled his case, he did lose or would have lost because there were just too many complaints against him, including the vast majority of the faculty's general dissatisfaction with his performance (as evidenced by the no-confidence petition).

Q: In your opinion, what will be Jack Weiss's lasting legacy as Chancellor?

A: His legacy will be mixed at best. I think that the more humane grading curve (passed by the faculty in 2009) and the Energy Law Program are positive developments. But he also suspended faculty hiring for several years, he cancelled an extremely successful fellowship program that we started in 2010, and the law school's ranking dropped considerably in U.S. News & World

Report by the end of Jack's regime. I believe that Jack will also be remembered for a toxic, heartless management style that increasingly alienated the faculty, staff, and students.

Q: How can the Law Center avoid another “shake up” like the one that led to Jack Weiss’s resignation?

A: I think that we should treat future deans in the same way that we treat Presidents: impose term limits on them. The next dean should be hired for a term of four years. At the end of these four years, he or she will be evaluated by the law students, law faculty, and the LSU A&M Administration. If all three groups approve, the dean's contract will then be renewed for another four years. After this second term, the dean must step down and be replaced by a new dean. This process would be much more efficient and healthy than the process of waging a campaign to pressure or force an ineffective but recalcitrant dean to retire.

Q: Looking forward, what characteristics or traits should the selection committee focus on in their search for a new Chancellor of the Law Center?

A: Leadership at an academic institution requires the opposite of bullying, intimidation, and contempt: kindness, decency, courtesy, a willingness to listen and build consensus, and a resolve to directly and immediately attempt to correct any significant problems that arise and address any complaints that are made (unless clearly established rules dictate otherwise). The faculty and student body at LSU Law want – and deserve – a leader who fundamentally respects them even when he or she disagrees with them.

Ideally, the new dean will share the law faculty's view that the law school should not be regarded as a factory that pumps out fresh lawyers but rather as an academic enterprise that encourages learning as an end in itself, inspires curiosity, increases knowledge, and promotes the happiness and careers of all students and faculty.

Q: Is there anything else you would like the student body to know or understand about the events that led to Jack Weiss’s resignation from the office of Chancellor?

A: If Jack really has great affection for LSU Law, I would like to know why he has been trying to steer LSU Law alums against the institution. Both his angry, defensive, and misleading press release in early July and his alleged derogatory remarks about the LSU Law faculty during his recent “farewell tour” of Louisiana merely confirm the faculty's judgment that he was not the right person for the job.

I am also curious what kind of severance package LSU offered Jack. I believe that this number should be made public. Jack was already handsomely (and arguably excessively) paid for years, is not working here anymore, and – given all the problems and complaints against him – was hardly in a position to make any demands on LSU. Whatever sum he received, I believe that the law school was more deserving of it.