Introduction

I was elected to the Penn State Board of Trustees more than two decades ago, and served on it as an alumni Trustee for twelve years — from 1988 to 2000. I came onto the Board thinking that it was a deliberative body such as one reads about in civics books. It is not.

It took me years to understand what was really going on. In what follows, I hope to shed some light on the inner workings of the Board, as well as to explain both why the Board remains so secretive, and why it has offered so little public leadership to the University since the Sandusky scandal erupted.

The simple truth is that it is not simply one bad apple that has brought about the humiliating situation we face. Rather, it is the way the Board of Trustees has structured the whole governance of the University that has made this scandal not only possible but almost inevitable.

Ben Novak, ‘65
Jan. 8, 2012
Part I. Who Runs the Board

To understand how the Board works, one must understand how one set of Trustees runs it. The thirty-two-member Board (actually forty-eight members when one includes the sixteen Emeritus Trustees) consists of four separate groups, which I call the Power Group, the Praetorian Guard, the Emeritus Trustees, and the Sheep — with the latter divided into two subgroups.

The Power Group

The Power Group is a self-selected group of the wealthiest and most powerful members of the Board consisting of from three to five Trustees who consider themselves the real Board. They hire and fire the president; set the salaries of the top administrators (and their retirement packages and benefits); meet or talk with the president frequently; fly around in the president’s plane; attend meetings around the country on behalf of the University; and approve of all the policies the president sets. They do this with little or no input from the majority of Trustees.

While the president of the University is a member of this group, he remains president only so long as this group considers him one of them. Indeed, there is almost no distinction between this first group and the administration itself.

Praetorian Guard

Around this first group are seven to ten other Trustees whom we shall call the Praetorian Guard; they are so-called because, like the original Praetorian Guard of the Roman Emperors, they form the cohort around the Power Group. They are often consulted by the Power Group, always support whatever the Power Group decides, and generally
consider themselves to be part of the Power Group although they are not in the president’s company as much.

The Praetorian Guard is mostly made up of the richest members of the Board, but some make it into this group by reason of long association with major components of the University.

**Emeritus Trustees**

The third group consists of the Emeritus members of the Board, who usually number about a dozen, but presently number sixteen. This is a special club of former Board members who have served at least twelve years on the Board, and are found to be “distinguished,” i.e., rich and compliant. If a member asks too many questions or wonders about following rules, one will not be given Emeritus status, even if one serves twelve years.

Emeritus members cannot vote, but they can speak at meetings, and can serve on all committees, just as though they were still on the Board. Emeritus Trustees are the cheerleaders for the Power Group and the Praetorian Guard. Their age, experience, prestige, and wealth are meant to charm or intimidate all new members to “get with the program.”

(Personal disclosure: although I served on the Board for twelve years, I was not offered Emeritus status, which is too bad because Emeritus members are invited to attend all meetings of the Board even after their terms as Trustee are over — with their travel and hotel costs paid by the University.)

**The Influential Ones**

These three groups together — the Power Group, Praetorian Guard, and Emeritus Trustees — constitute the Influential Ones. The
Chairman of the Board appoints almost all the membership of special committees of the Board from these three groups. Members almost always nominate each other as the Board’s officers; members of the Executive Committee; and presidential selection committee. They approve or disapprove whatever policies the president chooses to implement — or formulate them with him. They are the gatekeepers of all University business.

**Sheep**

Next come the twenty or so other Trustees who can only be called Sheep. They receive information about meeting agendas a few days before each meeting, and are expected to approve whatever is on them. The Sheep, however, can be subdivided into two subgroups.

**Sheep I — Trustees with a Project**

The first subset of Sheep are those who come onto the Board with a special project in mind. This might be to set up a new, or expand an existing, program such as in hotel and restaurant management, or to get involved in a particular University area, such as the new colleges of Communications or Information Sciences and Technology.

These Sheep are utterly dependent on the good will of the president to get anything done. They often spend long hours in meetings with administrators and faculty members working on setting up the funding or parameters of their special interests. These Trustees tell many stories of the bureaucratic hurdles they had to overcome to get anything done. At the end, however, they often have a real feeling of accomplishment. In return for the privilege of doing all these things for Penn State, all they have to do is to unquestioningly rubber-stamp everything the Influential Ones want.
Sheep II — Poor Little Sheep

The second group of Sheep consists of those poor naïve souls, such as I was when first elected, who believe that the Board is actually a deliberative body to guide the University in keeping to its original purposes — who believe that they are called “Trustees” because the care and welfare of the University and its thousands of students and faculty are entrusted into their hands.

This second set of Sheep is bound for nothing but heartache and disappointment. Their opinions will rarely be asked for. Since they are never told much of what is going on, except to receive the meeting agendas a week or so before the meetings, there is little for them to do but to attend the meetings and approve whatever is on the agenda. If they raise any serious question, they are told to meet with the appropriate administrators who will answer their concerns — after the meeting is over.

Example: The Appointment of a President

The Influential Ones never tire of repeating that the appointment of the president of the University is the single most important act the Board does. If there is any doubt, therefore, that the majority of the Trustees are treated as Sheep, consider the appointment of Graham Spanier as president of the University in 1995.

The previous president, Joab Thomas, announced a year before his retirement that he would not be renewing his contract. In the ensuing year, the Board discussed at several meetings, and even had an all-day work session to discuss in generalities, the qualities that they were seeking in the next president. But when it came time to actually consider candidates for the job, the whole process closed.

A search committee of the Board, composed of Influential Ones was appointed by the Board Chairman. From that point on the rest of
the Board was excluded from any involvement. Not the slightest word of
whom they were considering leaked to the rest of the Board. Eventually
the committee of Influential Ones selected Graham Spanier. A week or
so before the meeting at which their choice was to be approved, a
notice was sent to all Trustees advising them of the selection, and the
next day the newspapers were profiling Penn State's next president.

A day or so before the meeting at which the Board was to vote, I
spoke with the Board secretary and asked if the rest of the Board would
have any opportunity to meet the nominee before the election. She
advised me that nothing like that was planned. I suggested that this was
strange, and that at least we ought to be able to say we shook the next
president's hand before we voted for him.

A few hours later, I received a call from the chairman of the
Board, who began by cheerfully telling me that the Board secretary had
spoken to him of my call, and gee, that was a good idea. So, the
chairman wanted to personally inform me that I should be at the
meeting site an hour early, since a cocktail hour was now scheduled at
which Graham Spanier would be present for all the Trustees to meet
him.

At the cocktail hour, the entire Board, a majority of whom, like
myself, had never heard of Graham Spanier until a few days before, had
an average of barely two minutes each to say hello and shake his hand.
Immediately after the cocktail hour, the Board filed into the next room
and, as the first order of business, dutifully voted him in as the next
president of The Pennsylvania State University.

Baaa.
Part II. How the Board Governs the University:
The Prohibition Against Knowledge

As the Sandusky scandal goes on and on, many people wonder what responsibility the Board of Trustees has in all this. The answer lies in how the Board has set up the University to be governed. In a nutshell, the Influential Ones, most of whom are businesspersons, have set it up to be run as a business corporation on the model of Enron, concentrating all the power and information flow in the hands of the president.

To understand how they have done this we must delve into the documents by which they have structured the deal. While the discussion that follows may seem detailed and legalistic, it is simply a situation where the old saying applies: “the devil is in the details.” We shall be concerned here specifically with Standing Order IX entitled “Governance of the University.”

(Anyone may follow the detailed discussion of these Standing Orders by reading them for himself or herself. Simply visit www.psu.edu/trustees and click on “Charter, Bylaws & Standing Orders,” then scroll down to Order IX. Or you can download a copy from my own website here.)

The Board’s Removal of Itself from Responsibility for Policy

Section (1)(a) of Standing Order IX recognizes the Board of Trustees as the “corporate body established by the charter with complete responsibility for the government and welfare of the university.” This means that the Board is responsible for what goes on ... but not really.

Section (1)(b), entitled “Guiding Policies” almost completely absolves the Board from any responsibility, because subsection (1)(b) (1) delegates not only the “day-to-day management and control of the
University” to the president — which is normal — but also delegates the “establishment of policies.” Thus, the Board effectively removes itself from responsibility for policy; it is delegated to the president. So, if there is a policy that Emeritus Professors can use the showers, then that is no longer the responsibility of the Board — the president did it.

This is why there is never any substantive discussion of policy at Board meetings; all policy-making is delegated away. Down further in Section (1)(c), the Board retains the power to determine the “major goals of the University,” but only to approve the “policies and procedures for implementation of such goals.” Thus all policies come to the Board already fully formulated by the president and the Power Group.

This delegation of policy-making to the chief executive may not seem totally unusual to business Trustees, since many boards of directors of corporations-for-profit do the same. The idea is that a board of directors hires a CEO and says, “the whole corporation is yours to lead; all we expect is that you will produce profits.” This is why CEOs command such high salaries: they are paid to produce results. For the board of a profit-making corporation this makes things easy — all it needs to judge the CEO is look at the profit and loss statement. But for a non-profit institution entrusted with the education and care of thousands of young people it is near to a dereliction of duty.

The Impossibility of Oversight

But it gets worse. Even if the president-CEO is charged with making all policy, the Board could still exercise considerable oversight. But the Influential Ones have set up the flow of information so that it is impossible for a Trustee to get any independent information about how the University is being operated or how its policies are working.

Subsection (1)(b)(2) entitled “Reports and information required” says — and this is deserving of bold letter treatment — “This
delegation of authority requires that the Board rely on the judgment and decisions of those who operate under its authority.” In other words, those operating under the authority of the Board do not do so under the direction of the Board, but rather the Board simply hands over the whole institution to whomever they appoint, and relies on their judgment.

Now let us see how Standing Order IX forecloses any meaningful oversight. The next two sentences of Subsection (1)(b)(2) are truly Orwellian. The first says, “However, this reliance of the Board must be based on its continuing awareness of the operations of the University.” But how shall the Board members maintain “continuing awareness”? The following sentence makes this impossible, for it establishes that the president is its sole source of information. It reads, “Therefore, the Board shall receive and consider forthright reports on the affairs of the University by the president or those designated by the president.”

Thus, if the Board wants to know how the president’s policies and procedures are working, the Board has no independent way to find out. Rather, the Board’s very rules require it to ask the president. Not even profit-making corporations are this careless; they require independent verification. Not so for the Penn State Board of Trustees; like the Board of Enron, there are no independent sources of information except the very officers the Board appoints to make the policies in the first place.

The Prohibitions Against Any Independent Sources of Information

Further, Standing Order IX positively prohibits Board members from getting information from any other source. Section (4) dealing with Faculty has a subsection (c) entitled “Communication with the Board” that provides: “Official faculty communication to the Board of Trustees shall be made through the president.” Section (5) dealing with Students has the same language in subsection (b): “Official student communication to the Board of Trustees shall be made through the president.” What these two provisions mean is that no one on the
faculty, and no student leader, may attempt to provide information to the Trustees except by sending it through the president.

In practice this means that if any faculty member or student leader contacts a Trustee to inform them of what is going on, and that Trustee attempts to check out the information through the president’s office, that faculty member or student will be contacted by the president’s office and reprimanded for violating Standing Order IX. I know: for, early on when I dared to mention the source of my information to the president, that source received such a call. It has also been reported that several student leaders and faculty members over the years have been warned by the president’s office to avoid contacting Trustees.

The same is true if a Trustee wants to investigate anything by talking to an administrative employee. Employees are directed to report to the president’s office before giving information to a Trustee. I have several times walked into administrative offices to request an appointment and watched the frantic calls reporting my presence to the president’s office.

Nor is this prohibition on giving information placed solely on the sources. Standing Order IX actually prohibits individual Trustees from seeking information. Section (1)(f) entitled “Expectations of Members (referring not to what the members of the Board expect, but what is expected of them) specifically provides in subsection (12) that individual Board members shall “Respect established channels to acquire information.” Since the only established channel is through the president’s office ... well, you get the point.

Thus in summary, although Subsection (1)(b)(2) majestically proclaims the need for each Board member to maintain “continuing awareness of the operations of the University,” these other sections and subsections make that impossible.
Part III. Why We Hear Nothing from the Trustees: The Silence of the Lambs

Ever since the Sandusky scandal erupted, members of both the University community and the public have been puzzled by the silence of the Trustees. Many find it hard to believe that all thirty-two of the individual Trustees are in favor of firing Joe Paterno, and they naturally wonder why none of them has spoken out. When any other type of governing body is called to deal with a problem, individual members usually offer their ideas as to how it should best be handled. But there has been not one peep from Penn State Board of Trustees members. Why is that?

The answer lies in the rules of the Board, specifically Standing Order IX, which contains without doubt some of the most amazing rules you will ever read governing the conduct of democratically elected representatives.

Section (1)(f)((5), for example, requires that members are expected to: “Speak openly within the Board and publicly support decisions reached by the Board.” While the first part of this sentence — “Speak openly within the Board” — is laudable, the second part — “and support decisions reached by the Board” — is not. What the second part means is that no member of the Board may publicly speak against a decision of the Board once it is adopted. Thus, the silence of the individual members on the Board is guaranteed by the rules of the Board.

To get an idea of how ridiculous this is, imagine that the United States Congress had a rule that once Congress adopted Obamacare, no member of Congress could thereafter speak publicly against it or urge its repeal. Yet, that is exactly what the rule governing individual members of the Penn State Board of Trustees states. One of the constant mantras that I heard repeatedly while on the Board was that the “Board acts as a Board, not as individuals.” What this was meant to
enforce is that any dissent from a vote of the majority of the Board is considered speaking against the Board itself.

This rule is further buttressed by two others. Subsection (1)(f)(10) requires the individual Trustee to: “Maintain confidentiality without exception.” Thus individual Trustees are enjoined from ever reciting the arguments he or she disagrees with. Think of the scene of the entire Board sitting as silent as stones behind John Surma as he announced the firing of Joe Paterno — and you will have some idea what this rule means in practice This rule is further employed to get Trustees to agree to unanimity after-the-fact, because even if they oppose an action before its adoption, they are bound to support it after it passes.

Subsection (1)(f)(11) requires that each Trustee shall “Advocate the University’s interests, but shall speak for the Board only when authorized to do so by the Board or the Chair.” This could be interpreted reasonably, but it is not.

How the Influential Ones interpret it is that no Trustee may publicly give his or her idea of what is in the University's best interest unless he or she first gets the permission of the Board or the chairperson of the Board. Of course, no permission will be given to speak against any action the Board has already taken. Thus, once the Board acts, every individual Trustee is required by the rules to remain silent — which is exactly what the public has seen since the Sandusky scandal erupted.
Part IV. The Root of the Problem: The Centralization of Power in the President

The root problem with the Penn State Board of Trustees arises from the centralization of all the powers of the University into the hands of the president. This occurred in July 1970.

The Old Model: Tripartite (Three Part) Governance

Prior to this, the University was not a single-headed Behemoth, but consisted of three parts, each with their own responsibility, scope of action, lines of authority and ways of doing things. These were the faculty, the student body, and the administration.

**Faculty.** The academic side consisted of a whole plethora of largely independent departments, loosely presided over by department heads, who were in turn loosely overseen by deans of the colleges, as well as a variety of relatively independent programs such as Agricultural Extension Services. The amount of their independence was striding, but so too was their ability to work in concert. Their seat of authority was the Faculty Senate.

**Student Body.** The second part consisted of the student body, roughly organized as the Student Government. Believe it or not, in many respects and at various times the student government had slightly more authority over its organizations — such as the fifty-six independent fraternity houses, its thirty-three independent sororities, the house governments in the dorms, and the multitude of independent student organizations that existed on and off campus — than the Faculty Senate. Indeed, back then the student body organized more university-wide activities than the faculty did.

**Administration.** The last loosely organized part of the University was the administration, which was supposed to be directly, but was actually only loosely, under the control of the president of the University.
I say "supposed to be directly (but was actually only loosely)" for three reasons.

First, because there were often conflicting lines of authority. For example, before 1970, the chief administrator in charge of student affairs was the Special Assistant to the President for Student Affairs. But he had no authority to promulgate policy regarding student affairs — that was vested in the Faculty Senate. Thus neither the president of the University nor the chief administrative officer had any direct authority over student affairs. The same lack of direct authority held true for many other sectors of the University.

Second, because nearly all employees in administration could exercise a large degree of discretion in how they handled their responsibilities. Their goal was not to obey orders but to bring people together to solve problems. Policy was set by different parts of the University, and administrators worked with them all.

The third reason is that the first two communities were like states of the United States, each with their own governor and legislature — the Faculty Senate and its president, and the student government and its president. Each had its own realm of power and activity separate from the others.

Thus, before 1970, the president of the University had limited powers. Power was diffused throughout the community. In other words, the president did not rule the others but presided over them like a chairman. This was the essence of tri-partite (three-part) government and it was based on government from below.

**How Government from Below Works: The Difference between Power and Authority**

Although the president had little real power, he had a lot of authority. The difference is this: that while power is exercised from
above, authority is given from below. Thus the president of the university could rarely order what he wanted done from on high. But his prestige was such that deans, department heads, program directors, and student leaders tried mightily to get together from below in order to go in the direction the president pointed.

Prior to 1970, therefore, the president's real prestige and authority did not come from a Standing Order of the Board of Trustees, but rather from the general understanding that we — students, faculty, and administration — were all united in working for the good of the whole institution. This is what held us together and made Penn State so dynamic. This was the source of our great Penn State pride: We did things, not because we were ordered to, but because we wanted to. We were tremendously proud that we all had a part in determining where Penn State was going and what it was aiming to become.

The more a president inspired Penn Staters to do things on their own for the betterment of Penn State, the more authority he had.

At that time, too, there were a lot of men and women who, although they had no power that you could see on an organization chart, were nevertheless so highly respected that their opinions carried weight far beyond their job descriptions. They had no power on an organizational chart, but their words still mattered.

As a result, there were hundreds of checks and balances throughout the university system. Nobody could get away with much for very long because there were too many people watching. Everything was everybody else's business because we were all in this together. Everyone kept one eye open for what was best for the University as a whole ... and the other eye open for what was not.

Before 1970, a Jerry Sandusky would have been out on his ear at the first whisper of improprieties. This would have occurred at the lowest level and few above would need to know about it. The problem simply would have been gone before anyone had to think about it —
and the kids would be — and indeed were — infinitely safer than they are today.

This is because Penn State back then was not an organization of mechanical parts, but was an organic whole, where the slightest pain in one limb was instantly communicated through the whole body.

**The Change to Power from Above**

After 1970, all this began to change. Not suddenly but gradually an entirely new mentality began working itself through the Penn State body. It said: all that matters is who has the power — and this is determined by organization charts. Whole new positions and offices grew up to make regulations telling everybody how to do their jobs. Turfs were no longer decided by what was best for the University, but by who had the power. Revered professors found themselves of no more account than a junior administrator. Countless rules were issued that made no sense to those who had to enforce them, but were ordered from on high. Penn State was slowly becoming a machine.

Let’s now give an example that ties this all together with what is happening now.

**Example: A Veritable Epidemic**

In the 1990s while I was serving on the Board, several nurses from Ritenour Health Center were upset because they believed that there was a veritable epidemic of venereal disease — herpes, gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, AIDS, etc. — on campus. They came to me because tall their attempts to get administrators at Ritenour or higher to do something about it had been fruitless.

The problem that I faced was that the nurses were afraid to allow their names to be used because they were afraid of losing their jobs.
Therefore, I could not name anyone that administrators could go to in order to confirm what I told them. Nevertheless, I talked about the issue without naming any names with administrators who shrugged their shoulders; and with other Trustees who listened politely and said, “this is the president’s problem, he’s in charge;” or “We can’t talk about this kind of thing at the Board of Trustees level.”

By the 1990s, no one below the president had the power to institute, or even investigate anything, no matter how serious it was, unless his or her immediate superiors knew that the president approved. So, no word ever went out to the students about what some nurses at Ritenour thought was a major health problem.

(Personal confession: Perhaps I should have done more. I don’t know how many students now go through their lives bearing the scars of venereal disease. Maybe I am the Joe Paterno and Mike McQueary of a similar issue in an earlier age; if so, I know exactly how they feel. But I also know that even if I had stood on the rooftops shouting it, it would not have made any difference to administrators — it would have been shouting into the void.)

**The Moral of the Story**

The point of this example is to show how the 1970 decision of the Board vesting all power in the president has played out. The moral is simple: Nothing happens anymore at Penn State unless and until the president says so. In this type of atmosphere, it is no wonder that a Jerry Sandusky could haunt the showers for years with no one taking action.

Under the previous system of governance, when someone of the stature and integrity of Joe Paterno reported to the heads of Police Services and Athletics in 2002 that a former emeritus coach was engaged in sexual activities with boys in the showers, these two people would have done everything in their power to make sure that the
problem was taken care of—and then prayed that the president of the University would never hear of such a disgusting thing!

But no, in a world where only presidential power matters, the only thing that Curley and Schultz did was to tell the president. Then everyone sat around for the next nine years waiting for the president of the University to tell somebody what to do. Since he did not tell them, (or told them not to do anything) Curley and Schultz did little more with what Paterno and McQueary told them.

So, the moral of the story in the Sandusky case is the same as it was when the nurses at Ritenour believed there was a health problem. When all power is centralized in the president, *Nothing happens anymore at Penn State unless and until the president says so.*

Because of this principle of governance, Sandusky could go to the showers with boys for nine more years.

Because of this, Joe Paterno — the greatest Penn Stater since Our Founders Strong and Great — has been rudely kicked out of Penn State.

Because of this, the reputations of the University and America’s most famous football coach have been scarred forever.

Because of this, our football program and our University are in shame and disarray.

Because of this, two good men, Tim Curley and Gary Schultz, are charged as criminals.

Because of this, Happy Valley is now sad.

This is the root of the problem and the key to understanding how this whole humiliating affair has happened. And this, my friends, is the system of governance that the Board of Trustees set in place in 1970.
Part V. The Theater of Board Meetings and Responsibility of Media

No discussion of the ignorance in which the members of the Board are kept would be complete without mentioning the Board’s meetings, which can only be described as dog-and-pony shows.

The meetings are planned solely as a backdrop for publicity aimed at the general public or the Legislature, at which the administration presents whatever good news and statistics they have in order to show that everything is going swimmingly — except that the Legislature is never appropriating enough money. The agenda is tightly packed with housekeeping functions, such as approval of building plans or real estate transactions, and information presentations by various colleges or programs of the University — all telling of great promise or success.

Never, never is anything raised as a problem area in which the Board is invited to give advice or input as to policy. Policy is only presented to the Board for approval after it has been fully formulated by the president together with the Power Group.

The annual budget, for example, is one of the more important things the Board must regularly approve, along with annual increases in tuition and fees and major changes in college or program funding. But this is never on the agenda to be discussed during the year until the proposed budget document, which is quite lengthy and detailed, is sent to the Board a week or so before the July meeting at which it is to be approved.

In this theatre of the absurd, any Trustee who seriously questions what is going on is subtlety placated, cast as a “loose cannon,” or otherwise marginalized. For the majority of the Board who are not permitted to know anything other than what the president tells them,
and who are expected to approve whatever is set before them, there is only one word: Baaa.

The Responsibility of Media

What was most disheartening in the past were the press and media. Undoubtedly that is changed today, now that the media senses scandalous stories that attract controversy and readers. But before the Sandusky scandal it was quite different.

If a Trustee raised a serious question at a meeting (unless he or she is was member of the Influential Ones) that Trustee would definitely not be sought out afterwards for interviews on his or her issues, and would not even be mentioned in the news releases about the meeting. It is like he or she never said anything — except when the issue had previously been a subject in the media; then the dissenting Trustee was merely grist for the media’s pre-digested mill.

Reporters would go to the press briefing after the meetings, and the president or public relations vice president clearly indicated what they were to cover — and the journalists and media representatives dutifully filed their stories in a manner even more sheep-like than the Sheep on the Board who cast the votes. So, for a single Trustee to take a principled stand contrary to the administration or the Influential Ones was to shout into the void.

Example: The Naming of a University Building

The Board of Trustees once had a written rule that no University building could be named after a living Trustee. Then one of the Power Group gave a very large donation for a particular building, and the agenda for the next Trustees meeting contained a resolution for naming the building after this Trustee, who was still serving on the Board. While I had no particular objection to so naming the building, I felt that it would
be an interesting test to see how the Board deals with a clear violation of its own rules. So, I raised a procedural objection, and asked the secretary of the Board to read the rule, which she did. 

At that point, the chairperson of the meeting asked for a ruling by the Board's legal counsel as to relevance. Legal counsel spoke around the bush for some minutes until he dutifully ruled my objection out of order. I knew legal counsel personally; he looked at me sheepishly after his ruling, as though imploring me to understand why he had to do what he had just done. The resolution naming of the building after the living Trustee was then called to a vote and adopted. 

During this entire exchange, the press corps looked thoroughly bored, and not a word of what had just transpired appeared in the media. It was a non-event.

The Opportunity for Media

Now, of course, the press and media now have an insatiable desire to cover Penn State. Unfortunately, it has taken charges of pedophilia to get their attention. If the media would only responsibly cover what is going on — as it happens, rather than after a crisis — it is likely that the University and its various parts could be run more responsibly.

I’m hopeful that today, after such a sea change in the landscape of the news media and in its delivery mechanisms, we will see an improvement in how the Board of Trustees and the activities of the administration and its president are covered for all of us on the outside. 

Careers can be made — and lives changed, or saved — if young reporters were to adopt a more skeptical and discerning eye toward the seemingly boring details of boring men and women on a boring Board of Trustees, and administrators to whom they’re happy to defer.
Part VI. What is Needed Today

While there are calls for the entire membership of the Board to resign in unison, they are unlikely to do so. Therefore, the loyal Penn State community — students, faculty, alumni, townspeople, and all true friends of Penn State — must band together to replace them. The first goal is electing new Trustees who will speak out both to and for the entire Penn State community.

In just a few days, the Board will be sending out an announcement for the election of three alumni Trustees. Each alumnus and alumna may nominate someone by writing in his or her name on the nomination form and sending it back. It is vital that alumni nominate people dedicated to restoring Penn State’s honor.

In May, the agricultural societies in each county will have the chance to elect two new Trustees. It is imperative that loyal Penn Staters involved in agriculture throughout the state begin now to make sure that two new members who are deeply committed to restoring Penn State’s honor are elected to these positions.

Every loyal Penn Stater has a role to play in helping Penn State recover from this disaster. Keep thinking through the kinds of reforms that will be necessary to enable us to get back on track again. Keep sharing with others in the community the deep love that binds us all to our Alma Mater. Reach out to help one another. Most of all, keep your faith in Penn State shining brighter than ever.
About the Author

Dr. Ben Novak served on the Board of Trustees of the Pennsylvania State University from 1988 to 2000. Born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania on Feb. 15, 1943, Novak graduated from Penn State in 1965, having served as president of the Undergraduate Student Government in his senior year and as a brother at Tau Kappa Epsilon.

In 1968 he graduated from Georgetown University Law School. From 1968 to 1970 he served as a Captain in the U.S. Army, Infantry, including a year in Viet Nam where he won the Bronze Star.

In 1968 Novak was admitted to the Bar of Pennsylvania. He practiced law in Pennsylvania for more than 30 years with his own firm in State College and Bellefonte.

While living in Centre County for more than three decades, Novak was widely involved in the community. He was, at various times: founder of the Mount Nittany Conservancy; president of Lion's Paw Alumni Association; a Ph.D recipient in philosophy and history from Penn State; and an adjunct professor and assistant dean of students at Penn State.

In 2000 he retired to Bratislava in Slovakia, his family's ancestral nation. In 2008 he returned to the United States to advise students at Penn State, and has earnestly sought a renewal in University life according to the vision of Evan Pugh and the Founders of Penn State for many years.

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