February 21, 2012

Dean James Burchfield
College of Forestry and Conservation
The University of Montana

Dear Dean Burchfield,

I am writing to communicate my decision regarding the future of the Forester’s Ball. Please forward this to all who are involved in planning and overseeing the Ball, including student leadership, faculty, and alumni engaged in the event.

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciate the outpouring of letters from individuals who are or have been involved in the Ball. Essentially every letter encouraged us to continue the Ball. Clearly, the Ball provides a tremendous learning experience for those involved in a leadership role; it serves to showcase the excellent academic programs in Forestry; it reminds us annually of the deep traditions associated with an industry and lifestyle critical to Montana and the region; it raises money for scholarships. The students, faculty, and alumni who plan and execute the Ball take great pride in their work, with many indicating that the Ball was truly a formative experience in their lives. The benefits of the Forester’s Ball are not in question.

However, those benefits are being overshadowed by the behavior of many who attend the Ball. There is ample evidence that some attendees see the Ball as little more than a party with the goal being to consume as much alcohol as possible. The number of attendees who see the Ball in this light is simply intolerable and their subsequent behavior serves to destroy the positive attributes of the event. Your public comment, “…we will not see another Ball like this one…,” was right on the mark and I fully support your position. I know that you are committed to working with students and other to continue the tradition of the Ball in a responsible manner. While I was impressed by the number of letters in support of the Ball, I was also dismayed that so few of them acknowledged any indication that a problem exists.

Furthermore, as you are aware, we have been contacted by the Risk Management and Tort Defense office of the State of Montana with the message that unless substantial change occurs in the Ball, the State will no longer cover it from a liability insurance perspective. For the University to be in such a position is unacceptable. That office has indicated that they will need to review a plan for change prior to approving future Ball events.

We will permit the Ball to be held next year and in subsequent years under the following conditions:

1. The leadership of the Ball will make a powerful statement by preparing a written plan for fundamental change in future Balls. These changes must be designed to minimize...
the inappropriate behavior so prevalent in this most recent event. This plan should be student-driven, but it must include input and feedback from the faculty of the College, the newly formed Forestry Scholarship Association, the UM Office of Public Safety, and yourself as Dean. I will not be overly prescriptive in terms of what changes should occur, but will note that the meeting we held on February 10, 2012 gave me considerable comfort that the student leadership is serious about changing the image of the Ball. Their suggestions were on the right track. At a minimum, I expect to see substantive change in these areas:

- The time of day that the event starts and finishes. I will not approve an event that last into the late hours of the evening.
- Elimination of exhibits or venues that encourage inappropriate behavior, i.e. the Passion Pit.
- A design that is attractive to, and appropriate for, audiences that include families and school-age children for at least part of the function.
- A focus on an event designed to be educational as opposed to a party.
- Controlling the attendance to a more manageable size.
- A clear plan for controlling the admission of individuals under the influence of alcohol.

2. The plan must be presented to me no later than April 15, 2012, and I expect to see endorsement by the Faculty and the Alumni (perhaps through the Forestry Scholarship Association). You, Provost Brown, and I will review the plan. We will submit the plan to the Office of Risk Management and Tort Defense. If necessary, we will go through iterations of the plan with the leadership until we are satisfied that we are looking forward to a successful event next year. If we cannot come to agreement on the plan by the end of Spring Semester, the Ball will not happen next year.

I trust that this memorandum conveys the seriousness of this matter. Fundamental change in the Forester’s Ball is needed. I look forward to working with you and the leadership to restore the Ball to an event that speaks clearly to the outstanding education our Forestry students receive and to the grand traditions of Forestry at the University and in the great state of Montana.

Sincerely,

Royce C. Engstrom
President
The University of Montana

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C: Perry Brown, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
   David Aronofsky, Legal Counsel