NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

SLU president to retire amid turmoil

Brian Roewe | May. 6, 2013 NCR Today

The longtime president of Saint Louis University, Jesuit Fr. Lawrence Biondi, announced Saturday that he would step down from the position he has held for more than two decades at the Jesuit school.

While on its surface, the revelation, made during his 25th anniversary gala, might present his departure as placing a period on an impressive résumé of a figure, as the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* puts it [1], largely credited with revitalizing not only the school but midtown St. Louis.

?Just as I helped lead SLU?s transformation when I arrived here more than 25 years ago, I know it is now time for the next transformation to begin,? Father Biondi said in a statement [2].

But in reality, his retirement culminates an academic year of turmoil on campus, where faculty and student groups issued votes of no confidence in his leadership.

The *Post-Dispatch*, which has extensively covered the play-by-play of the transgressions at SLU, has created a timeline of the events [3] that have arrived at Biondi's exit.

A quick summary:

In August, the faculty learned of a proposal to the university?s tenure system, one which would review faculty every six years. The plan was proposed by a vice president of academic affairs, Manoj Patankor, with whom faculty had butted heads in 2009 when he headed the restructuring of the graduate school.

Though the tenure proposal was ultimately abandoned, the faculty senate issued a vote of no confidence in him and pushed Biondi to fire him. Biondi refused, and the faculty proceeded to file two votes of no confidence in him ? one from the College of Arts and Sciences and another from the Faculty Senate. Shortly thereafter, the student government issued their own no-confidence vote.

In December, Pantankor resigned from his vice presidency role, but the act did little to stunt the growing discontent on campus. As the spring 2013 semester began, students and faculty held strong to their positions that the campus needed a fresh vision, and with it a new leader.

Critics of Biondi presented him as an authoritarian who operated with little input from faculty when it came time to decision-making, the tenure dispute a final draw for many. Despite his past contributions, they alleged that his style has brought a climate of fear to the campus, and has impacted the university?s reputation and standing in national rankings. The outgoing president has refuted both claims.

Though he is leaving, Biondi did not offer a definitive date, and stated that he would remain as long as it took the Board of Trustees to find his replacement. A release from the university said the board will begin its search in the fall, and that it intends to communicate plans for the process with the community over the coming weeks and months.

[Brian Roewe is a 2011 graduate of Saint Louis University.]

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[1] http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/critics-are-relieved-as-biondi-announces-he-ll-step-down/article_14f9e827-90c4-5874-a7fe-7581510e6002.html
[2] http://slu.edu/an-leadership_changes-55
[3] http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/timeline-of-biondi-s-struggles-with-slu-faculty-students/article_e17640ac-78a2-52d7-941a-13cd1aafb129.html