Faculty prerogatives are being infringed upon by a new directive establishing an earlier deadline for faculty to submit their textbook orders. Such orders are now to be submitted simultaneously with course schedules:

"Textbook submission process to change
Beginning with courses scheduled for fall, 2011, UNI will take a different approach to collecting and sharing information about the textbooks required for courses.  The federal Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL110-315) now requires that universities provide students with textbook information at the time the student registers for the course.  So, our new SIS is being configured so that textbook information will be submitted directly into the system at the same time that class information is submitted.  The bookstore will access information about your textbook needs from SIS rather than from you directly.  If bookstore staff have questions, they will contact you directly.  If it is not possible to provide the textbook information at the requested time, we can list "to be determined" in place of the information, but wholesale use of "to be determined" will not satisfy the requirements of the law.  Each academic department will determine how the course and textbook information will be collected from within the department and submitted to SIS."

Reading the relevant Act (see Supporting Information A), it becomes clear that the issue hinges on the interpretation of the passage in the law that says textbook information must be supplied to the extent “practicable.”  So the question is what is meant by “practicable.”  More to the point, the real issue for us is WHO at UNI gets to decide what is meant by “practicable.”  As far as any communication we’ve received would indicate, this determination has been entirely in administrative hands, specifically the Dean of Students and the Registrar.  This issue impacts quality of instruction and therefore it is a matter of educational policy, one of the specific charges of the UNI Faculty Senate.

Regarding quality of instruction, two issues come to the fore immediately.  Others may emerge as the Senate turns its attention to this matter:

1. An earlier deadline impedes our ability to integrate the latest scholarship and instructional materials into our teaching.

2. Many of us teach the same course in one semester following another.  An earlier deadline requires us to decide on the next semester’s books before we’ve had sufficient opportunity to determine how our current texts are working out in the current semester.