

*Faculty Senate  
1995-96*



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**WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY**



**FACULTY SENATE**  
**communications committee**  
**NEWSLETTER**

**XIX NUMBER 2**

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**Committee Members:**

**Bart White, Chair**  
**Marv Leavy**  
**Glenn Lohr**  
**Richard Patterson**  
**Charles Smith**

## An Invitation to a Discussion

At the February Faculty Senate Meeting the Professional Responsibilities and Concerns Committee reported on their deliberations concerning the *Statement on Faculty Ethics and Professional Responsibilities*. As they reported, the reactions they have received to the document are mixed. At the meeting there was a lively discussion in which a wide variety of viewpoints were presented.

That discussion is, I hope, a prelude to a larger discussion in which many more of us should get involved. This statement is likely the most important matter that the Senate will have to deal with this year. At this time neither I nor the committee have a clear idea what form the statement of ethics should take. Certainly the present draft is only a starting point for discussion. Even its general structure is open to revision.

It is important that each of us takes some time to give our input on this matter. To reflect on the standards we believe should govern our professional lives is a useful exercise for all of us. To present such standards in a code of ethics is important for our self-understanding. We are professionals, committed to our vocation, and to state that commitment in writing is a sign of reflective maturity.

More than self-understanding, a statement of ethics and professional responsibilities will serve as a basis for informing others about our commitment to teaching and learning and other aspects of the academic life. We serve a community/society that needs to be informed, and at times convinced, of our professional commitment. A statement articulating our commitment can have a significant role in convincing others of the seriousness of our dedication to learning and teaching.

So, let me encourage you to participate in the discussion. The Center for Teaching and Learning is going to be holding some hearings on the Statement. Get to one or both of those meetings if you can. If you have reflections on the document, write or talk to the committee members who are studying and will revise the current draft. It is your opportunity to make a difference!

Arvin Vos  
Chair, Faculty Senate

Times for the forums on the *Statement on Faculty Ethics*:

- Forum #1: February 27, 2:30 p.m. Grise Hall Auditorium
- Forum #2: March 12, 3:30 p.m. Grise Hall Auditorium

Announcement: From the Search Committee for Vice-President for Academic Affairs:

The resumé's for the candidates who are interviewing for the position are available under the Senate home page, as well as in all college deans' offices. If you have comments or reflections on any candidate, please pass them on to a committee member.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH ABOUT WKU FACULTY SALARIES?  
"Truth is Perspectival"

In President Meredith's January 26 memorandum to faculty on the current budget process for 1996-97, he stated "that Institutional Research reports that the average salary for our faculty is now over 99% of the average salary of our benchmark institutions." That statement requires examination, as it can be dangerous to leave the impression that our salaries are indeed competitive to benchmark, the very schools we compete with for new faculty.

What Institutional Research had previously reported to us was that the average salary of Western's faculty this year (\$44, 643) is 99.9% of the median faculty salary for the twenty-six universities identified by the Council of Higher Education as our benchmark schools. The median, however, is not the mean. Other data establish that our average salary is 95.6% of our benchmark's mean (or average) salary. Both of these statements need to be hedged by noting that salary data for some of the twenty-six schools is only preliminary.

Quite aside from differences between medians and means (and between preliminary and final data), one can justifiably put different "spins" on our faculty salary situation. Negatively, we could note that Institutional Research reports that Western's salaries for Full, Associate and Assistant Professors in 1995-96 are 96.6%, 97.5% and 96.6% respectively, of benchmark medians for those ranks; our salaries range between 93.6% (for Professors) and 97.1% (for Associates) of the benchmark means for those ranks. The salary advantage of Instructors here relative to those at our benchmarks (at 110.9% of the median salary) is what brings us closer to the benchmark mean and median, and has done so for the past three years.

Positively, one can view Western's efforts to enhance faculty salaries here over the past two to three years to have actually improved the position of the average faculty member relative to the mean and median salaries of the full benchmark, although perhaps not relative to those nineteen schools accredited by both AACSB and NCATE. Also, the President is correct in noting that only one Kentucky regional institution's average faculty salary exceeds Western's, but that has been true for three years running. Between last year and this, the gap between our overall average salary and that of faculty at Eastern Kentucky University closed from 95.3% to 96.7%. That may be "dramatic" to some but certainly not to others.

The looming question once again appears to be, will the Board commitment to achieving benchmark parity in the area of faculty salaries (thus keeping us marketplace competitive) be remembered? Time will certainly tell.

## FAÇULTY SALARIES: A PERSONAL OBSERVATION

In my opinion, comparing our salaries with the twenty-six "benchmark" schools outside of Kentucky deflects our energies. Included in this "benchmark" are many regional universities (such as Miami of Ohio and Ohio U.) which are classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as Doctoral Institutions. Also, our benchmarks are located in areas with widely differing costs of living (e.g., Cleveland, Ohio and Cullowhee, N.C.). Is it suprising that average salaries at the Ohio-based schools invariably rank at the top of the benchmark salary heap every year?

Of course, we **may** want to reach parity (i.e., be at 100% of this benchmark mean or median faculty salary), and better yet, to do so at each faculty rank. In fact, it is Board of Regents policy, and one could argue that Western has mobilized its efforts accordingly over the past two years. What we must recognize is that we are always chasing a moving target! Faculty at our benchmark schools are trying to improve their salaries, too. To increase Western's overall rank and its percentage of the mean or median salary among benchmark schools requires not only **our** enjoying a nice increase, but also that fiscal difficulties be so severe in one or more states like Missouri, Virginia, or Tennessee, that salaries in regional state universities therein are static or even cut. Would that make us happy? Why not just focus on enhancing our situation here, one over which we have at least a little control, and let the "comparative" chips fall where they may? (That is the attitude, I imagine, which we would encourage Murray and Morehead faculty to have regarding salaries at Eastern and Western!)

Put another way, if you had the option, would you prefer that faculty here (a) enjoy an average four percent raise while faculty at our benchmarks do likewise (thus, "all boats rise"), or (b) enjoy an average three percent raise while the faculty at several benchmark schools, due to fiscal stringency, are stuck with no raises? In the former scenario, our percentage of benchmark mean/median salary would not improve and our benchmark rank would be stationary; in the latter, we would move toward parity and our rank might rise a couple of notchs two among the schools. I know which option I'd prefer! I'd be the first to acknowledge a weak background in economics; thus, I am aware that my viewpoint is open to reply.

----- Marvin Leavy

AVERAGE SALARY AND COMPENSATION: WKU AND BENCHMARKS  
(1995-1996)

	PROF	ASSOC	ASST	INST	ALL*	OVER ALL**
WKU	\$53985	\$44165	\$36141	\$30602	\$44643	\$44643
Appalachian State	\$53143	\$44656	\$38199	\$30772	\$46820	\$44973
Austin Peay	\$52914	\$40331	\$33596	\$24138	\$40999	\$41955
Ball State	\$57653	\$45855	\$36089	\$24412	\$42946	\$45883
Cleveland State	\$65356	\$50722	\$42281	\$31270	\$52748	\$52396
East Carol.	\$58782	\$44933	\$40518	\$33597	\$47065	\$48124
East Tenn.	\$54144	\$45390	\$39123	\$29434	\$43286	\$45653
East.Ill.	\$50532	\$43403	\$34060	\$24476	\$40922	\$41956
Ill. State	\$59681	\$45837	\$39529	\$28472	\$48993	\$47544
Ind. State	\$53842	\$42208	\$36383	\$24886	\$44470	\$43576
Kent State	\$68281	\$49584	\$40608	\$27573	\$53097	\$52462
Marshall	\$50020	\$40481	\$32607	\$24392	\$41516	\$40634
Memphis	\$61071	\$45825	\$38943	\$26286	\$47586	\$48123
Miami U.	\$65349	\$50335	\$39468	\$28140	\$51050	\$51273
Middle Tenn.	\$56071	\$43456	\$35625	\$26733	\$43221	\$44764
NE Mo. St.	\$53921	\$44330	\$36022	\$29967	\$40951	\$44566
NW Mo. St.	\$54469	\$42545	\$36136	\$28121	\$40713	\$44170
Ohio U.	\$68780	\$52368	\$42528	\$33775	\$54461	\$54474
ODU	\$64245	\$47748	\$40012	\$30823	\$47799	\$50584
Radford	\$53157	\$41384	\$36998	\$28692	\$44050	\$43632
SE Missouri	\$52992	\$45333	\$37399	\$30711	\$44219	\$44880
SW Missouri	\$54447	\$45305	\$36843	\$26265	\$45593	\$44859
Tenn. Tech	\$58545	\$44540	\$37333	\$26229	\$47286	\$46392
West. Carol	\$55215	\$46535	\$37938	\$ 0	\$46101	\$47916
West. Ill.	\$53886	\$44908	\$37051	\$26434	\$44899	\$44606
Wright St.	\$66653	\$49280	\$38318	\$25544	\$48721	\$50966

Excluding WKU:

Weighted Average	\$58184	\$46249	\$38021	\$27097	\$46523	\$46947
Arithmetic Average	\$57686	\$45492	\$37744	\$27964	\$45980	\$46655

\* All Ranks includes 4 ranks and is computed using each institution's respective distribution.

\*\* OVERALL Figure - - Does not include Lecturer or No-Rank and has been computed using a Paashe Index in which the distribution of faculty at the requesting institution is used as weight.

HOW FAR BEHIND ARE WE? HERE'S THE DOLLAR AMOUNT BY RANK

Based Upon IPEDS Reports for 1995-1996 Academic Year

RANK	BENCHMARK MEAN	WKU MEAN	N	DIFFERENCE	\$\$ DEFICIENCY
FULL	\$57686	\$53,983	210	-\$3,701	-777,210
ASSO	\$45,492	\$44,165	135	-\$1,329	-\$179,415
ASST	\$37,744	\$36,141	134	-\$1,603	-\$214,802
INST	\$27,964	\$30,602	56	+\$2,638	+\$147,728

Total Amount of 1995-1996 WKU faculty salary  
underfunding (less fringe).....\$1,023,699

(Next time you think these discussions don't affect you, just  
look at this data!)

## The Dumbing Down of America's Kids

Bart White

According to the 1995 Annual Accountability Report Series of Kentucky Higher Education, the state's colleges and universities have "lost touch with the full needs of business and industry today" (*College Heights Herald*, January 23, 1996). The Council for Higher Education is naturally concerned about this conclusion and would like to make higher education more responsive to employers. Supposedly, Western's "Moving to a New Level" plan will help WKU meet the challenge of providing such accountability to statewide constituents and employers.

As we all know from endless departmental meetings, the process has started and, predictably, our reaction to the cry to produce greater accountability is one of "showin' 'em what we got" and proving that we actually have it and can test for it. And all because of some well-intentioned focus groups revealing data that we have known all along. In addition to rightly desiring graduates who are functionally literate, employers have always wanted "better prepared" entry-level employees who can jump start themselves, often in lieu of a deficient employee training program. If new hires are not up to snuff, employers find it easy to finger-point at the universities as the source of the problem.

Perhaps the finger-pointing--some of which is undoubtedly justified--is wagging toward the wrong target. After all, we educate and eventually graduate students who, for the most part, are graduates of public school systems whose curriculums have been gerrymandered to fit the new psychology of the 90's. That psychology is essentially one of making kids feel good about themselves, even if they can't read or write.

Charles J. Sykes has put it all in perspective in a new book whose title cuts to the core: *Dumbing down our Kids: Why America's Children Feel Good about Themselves but Can't read, Write or Add*. Sykes explains that it all started back in 1987 when California radically changed its reading curriculum to embrace a concept called "whole language." This new approach was a "literature-based" approach to reading that de-emphasized "skill-based" programs. Kids were taught to read by having them somehow experience the wonders of literature rather than requiring them to go through the boring process of reading mechanics, like sounding out words or learning to understand phonics.

Additionally, this "whole language" method fostered a new approach to teaching, one that dealt with confronting the feelings and emotions of students as the basis for growth. All well and good, but it seems that joy, self-esteem, and concepts of intrinsic worth were prioritized over science, math, history and reading. The new curriculums dealt, not with the mechanics of reading, writing, spelling, and grammar, but with making kids feel good about themselves, even if they ended up graduating dumb. The focus centers on self-gratification, not the acquisition of knowledge. In other words, children must be made to feel good about themselves, no matter what. As an example, the practice of "invented spelling" has been discovered in many school districts. It's not wrong; it's creative. There is no right or wrong answer, as that approach will make those with the wrong answer feel badly when compared with those who have it right.

Such new approaches also have no penalties for late, sloppy, incomplete or poorly one homework, because no student fails. In an "outcomes based" educational philosophy, all students are given as much time as they need to finish their work and it can always be redone if it is incomplete or sloppy. The students set the pace, not the teachers.

And what about some of the teachers? In a Wisconsin school district using this "whole language" method, a mother and father recently confronted school district administrators when their child kept coming home with sloppy papers, filled with grammatical and spelling errors, that were never corrected. The parents wondered why the child's teacher would write, "Wow!" and award an above average grade to a paper that read: "I'm goin to has majik skates. Im goin to go to disenlan. Im goin to bin my mom and dad and brusr and sisd. We r go to see mickey mouse."

Administrators assured the parents that the child would eventually learn spelling and grammar and that the teacher was not incompetent, but merely practicing "invented spelling" which was a more holistic approach to language.

Wow! And what exactly are the results of this approach in California? In 1995, a national reading survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service found that fourth-graders ranked dead last in their reading abilities...tied with students from Mississippi. (But at least they feel good about themselves!)

There is no time to deal with the topic of dumbed down text books, grade inflation, the role of the family in the dumbing down process or even whether KERA is giving us a better student than California. All I know about are the seniors I have (yes, they are a minority, but they're there!) who have yet to distinguish between a verb and a noun and the quips about President Meredith's comment of "cranking it up a notch"--a comment well taken, but a policy that might significantly lower our graduation rate.

The positive spin is that we live in a state where something is being done about K-12 education. In recent *Courier Journal* interviews (February 18, 1996), KERA was strongly endorsed for its "emphasis on problem solving, teamwork and individual responsibility for learning." Let's hope that when we soon begin seeing students in our classrooms that are KERA products, we can truly move to a new level that is more than perception based.