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ACADEMIC SERVICES

FACULTY REGENT NEWSLETTER

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OFFICE OF THE DEAN

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by Ray Mendel

Honeymoon Proves Short-Lived

In retrospect, getting elected was comparatively easy. I simply stated publicly and candidly what many of us had been thinking. You demonstrated your appreciation for this direct approach by voting for me. Now my task is becoming more difficult. Some of what appears in this report, though I have tried to be equally direct, may not be as well received, at least not by as large a majority. Nevertheless, as your representative, I'll try conscientiously to share with you what is taking place in my role as your regent and what my position is on key issues as they arise. At least then, if you believe I am off base, you can and you should let me know. Please don't permit this preface to obscure the generally *good news* that I am very pleased to have to report.

Two controversies are likely to arise in the coming weeks: the fairness and wisdom of a predominantly performance-based pay compensation policy and downsizing Western. Both issues are on the table as a result of recent board actions, actions which in a significant way, begin to address our economic security concerns. First I'll report to you on events of significance since my last newsletter to you in November; then I'll comment on the above issues.

Since November, the board has met twice, on January 22nd and again on February 4th. Three issues arose which I believe are of particular importance to the faculty. The board approved 1)

the creation of new high-level administrative position (VP for Institutional Advancement) 2) the creation of an affirmative action office and officer, and 3) a three-year faculty salary improvement plan.

New VP Position

The new VP for Institutional Advancement's charge is to raise private money. Like many of you, I reacted to this proposal with a high degree of skepticism - what, another administrator! The proposal was tabled at our January meeting in order to allow the President an opportunity to better document his assertion that this position could indeed reasonably be expected to increase revenues beyond the growth in costs. I submitted to the President a number of very specific information requests. The data he provided I shared with Bart White (AAUP) and with Sally Kuhlen Schmidt (Senate). Both, though noting that they were speaking only for themselves, felt as did I that the President had made a reasonable supporting case. Accordingly, in the February 4 meeting, I supported the proposal subject to a sunset clause. The sunset clause provides that the position will be abolished if the promised increase in revenues do not materialize within three years. Believe me, I will make a concerted effort to monitor vigilantly this provision. To those of you who feel I let you down on this issue, I can only say that I am trying to be faithful to my commitment to be data-based. Sometimes those data do not support one's predilections.

AA Officer Approved

The affirmative action office/officer, for which the faculty has for some time been lobbying, was approved.

Three-Year Faculty Salary Plan Adopted

The salary plan approved by the board is a major step forward. The plan differs in two substantive respects from anything I've witnessed in my 21 years here. First, heretofore salary increases were always linked, tout de suite, to the amount of new dollars appropriated by the legislature. No new dollars meant no salary increases. This time, the salary problem is being largely addressed up front - just as you had a right to expect when the President indicated it was his number "1" priority. Significant salary dollars will be made available through re-allocation of existing funds. Second, we now have a detailed, multi-year plan which embraces the notion that at each rank this faculty's average salary deserves to be first among the Kentucky regional universities. This time, I expect and I am hopeful that, with the faculty's continued attention to the issue, the budget committee under the President's guidance will fully fund the salary plan. Now to the more sensitive topics...

Performance-Based Pay

During the faculty regent "campaign", as a member of the salary study committee, and as your faculty regent, I have fought vigorously for a close approximation to the three-year salary goals that have now been adopted. I will continue to promote adoption of our proposed seven-year goals, goals which will make our remuneration even more competitive. But, it is axiomatic that both the three-year goal and the seven-year goal are defensible only if this institution receives something tangible for this increased investment. That something is a faculty whose overall productivity grows commen-

surately with our salary growth. *Performance-based compensation* is the means by which rational and accountable organizations distribute rewards; and Western, if it is to prosper, must become an increasingly rational and accountable organization. Historically, even when we have had a "merit" component, the highly restricted range of this component has neutralized the constructive intent. This must change. Within departments, we must move toward an environment in which the variability in performance-based dollar increases more faithfully match the variability in individual job performance.

Most of us do our jobs well and therefore we deserve, and almost all of us will receive, varying amounts of the performance-based increases. Some faculty members are really exceptional; their teaching, research, and/or public service are such that they would be competitive at even the best doctoral-granting universities through-out the country. These persons deserve a meaningfully larger performance-based increase. Conversely, tenure, despite its positive attributes, is also subject to abuse. Very few, but unfortunately some persons, once tenured, reduce their job performance below a reasonable level. Until they improve their performance, these individuals are entitled to no increase in remuneration, not even a cost-of-living adjustment. For this one or two percent of the faculty, the compensation system should contribute to one of two objectives: a) lure these persons back by demonstrating that the vast majority who do meet expectations receive substantially greater remuneration or b) at the very least minimize their cost to the university.

I believe it is both the board's and the administration's understanding that, *in return for being more competitively compensated, we as a faculty understand the need for and collectively support an increasingly performance-based pay policy.* As I believe do most of you, I personally regard this linkage as both fair and responsible.

Problems in certain departments with the definition and measurement of performance must be addressed. The mechanism at the department level may need work over the next three years; but we should be clear that it is specific applications of the appraisal mechanism that may need refinement, not the concept of performance-based pay. Refinements in performance appraisal procedures rarely precede performance-based decision making; rather these refinements are typically undertaken only after significant decisions are linked to the appraisal process. Where necessary, the multi-year nature of the adopted salary plan allows adequate time for the correction of deficiencies in particular departments' appraisal systems.

Downsizing on the Horizon??

Over the next three years, locating the roughly seven million dollars needed to fund the proposed salary increases is a formidable challenge. But this is the magnitude of the commitment made by the board and by the President when the board adopted the President's salary recommendations. Finding the money, I believe, will mean deciding which useful services and worthwhile programs we can no longer afford. Many of you have already admonished me to ensure that the instructional mission is protected. After all, the easiest, though hardly rational administrative solution, is simply to freeze vacant positions. Since, especially at this time of year, the majority of the vacancies are faculty positions, the already disproportionately under-funded instructional budget would be further decimated. With your visible support, should this pattern emerge, I will do what I can to discourage this short-sighted response.

However, based on past experience it is possible there will be some casualties on the instructional side as well. I will make every effort to ensure a fair and rational standard is utilized to identify appropriate cuts. To this end I will need your input and your support.

Virtually every program and service on campus has a constituency. Those most directly affected will aggressively enlist broader support. Accepting more competitive salaries requires accepting some of its undesirable ramifications. To this end, I appeal in advance for your guidance and your support for my efforts.

Critical Incident Update

The critical incident data gathering initiative is showing signs of success. I've received over 50 incidents from across campus. Thank you to those of you who have responded. Patterns are beginning to emerge! Keep the forms coming. I should have enough data by the next newsletter to share with you some preliminary findings.

Shades of Hope

Let me close by again expressing my appreciation for the confidence you have placed in me. I am pleased with the progress we appear to be making and I hope it continues. Despite our budgetary problems, I sense a much more optimistic mood on campus. Some of it may be due to the success of our basketball teams, but I really believe it is because we as a faculty sense we are beginning to have a greater voice in the governance of the university. Your support for the Faculty Senate, for the AAUP, for the faculty regent, and your attendance at significant meetings are beginning to bear fruit, and with your continued support we can realize our mutual goals.

(Note - my office phone: 745-4420)