THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION
ITEM FOR INFORMATION

SUBJECT: CIC

The Faculty Senate Leaders of the CIC, the consortium of Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago, gather annually to learn how better to serve the faculty of their universities, to raise awareness of the pressing issues and to dialogue. The group met in Ann Arbor in 2008; in November, 2009 the University of Minnesota hosted the event.

A Regent of the host institution led the first session. Her interest was to provide perspective of the value of our differing roles. Regents, for example, are accountable to the public while faculty members are accountable to their institution, to their discipline, and to their students. Faculty should understand the value Regents bring with this public accountability, with their connections and with their experiences. Regents come to their office with limited understanding – and often misunderstanding – of the value and role of the faculty. It serves the interests of both Regents and faculty to get to know each other better. One example she provided: the Regents of the University of Minnesota once viewed tenure as a problem; mediated and unmediated communication with the faculty allowed the Regents to come to an appreciation of the critical value of tenure.

The discussion that followed brought to light practices intended to foster mutual understanding. The chair and vice chair of one faculty senate, with the support of their president, were taking the time to visit each Regent in his or her place of business. They spoke only for the faculty, not for the institution. At another university, three to four Regents would breakfast with senate leaders before the monthly Regents' meeting. A third system built in to their routine a lunch meeting that included the senate leaders of each of the campuses.

Compliance issues provided the grist for another session. Universities are compelled to comply with ever-increasing federal and state regulations. Most of the institutions represented had or were developing and integrated and comprehensive approach to compliance. The devil is in the details and in the balance between risk and compliance; imbalance can harm the university. One state requires all state employees to document their work effort in 15-minute segments and some state officials thought this should apply to faculty members. Some Institutional Review Boards go well beyond the letter or spirit of the law in their constriction of research projects. One audit demonstrated that 40% of research time is spent on compliance. The message was clear: compliance is important, but being totally risk-averse can result in paralysis, diminishing the impact the University could provide. Faculty involvement in determining the appropriate balance is vital.

University administrations are inviting their faculty to participate in the response to the economic distress. Michigan has formed a Prudence Panel and invited faculty and staff members to brainstorm. Another university has provided a CD to the faculty senate with over 8,000 pages of financial data, offering not only transparency and promoting understanding, but inviting substantive and particular recommendations for both savings and excision. Deans were supplying detailed spreadsheets to the faculty of their schools. A common concern is the misunderstanding at the state level that undesignated general funds provided by state support of higher education can be replaced by

equivalent sums of designated research funds. State support remains critical for healthy public universities. The University of Michigan is to be commended for its fiscal management. While similar economic conditions confronted all the CIC universities, Michigan seemed to be unique in its comprehensive, long-term preparations enabling its response to be more to the economic challenge than to a cataclysm. Other universities are cutting programs and personnel, imposing involuntary unpaid furloughs, and mandating significant percentage budget cuts of every unit. While the compensation of the faculty and staff of Michigan has been affected by the economy, the impact is modest compared with many of our peers.

Among other subjects discussed was means to broaden access to the publications of our faculty. The rise of digital repositories has provided universities with an opportunity to make available the ideas of their respective faculties to their own institutions and to the world. The senate leaders of the CIC are drafting a recommendation for the faculty governance of their own institutions to support the development and implementation of means to increase the dissemination of the research of our faculty in a way that respects the tenure process and increases the value of our institutions to the globe.

(Submitted January, 2010)

Regents' Bylaw 4.04. The Senate Assembly shall serve as the legislative arm of the senate…The assembly shall have power to consider and advise regarding all matters within the jurisdiction of the University Senate which affect the functioning of the University as an institution of higher learning, which concern its obligations to the state and to the community at large, and which relate to its internal organization insofar as such matters of internal organization involve general questions of educational policy.