UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS' COMMUNICATION
Faculty Governance Update

SUBJECT: Tenure Clock Maximum Extension

[Below is the content of a January 26, 2011 SACUA letter to Provost Hanlon providing SACUA's and Senate Assembly's response to the administration's proposal to increase the maximum tenure probationary period from eight to ten years. A special meeting of the full University Senate will be held on February 21, 2011 to discuss and debate this issue.]

Dear Provost Hanlon:

Because SACUA was asked in December to keep the proposal to increase the maximum tenure probationary period confidential, there has not been a complete vetting of the proposal in Senate Assembly or in Senate Assembly's committee structure. However, it is also our understanding that you asked SACUA to obtain information about faculty opinion.

However, SACUA has had more time to discuss this and has the following reservations about the proposal:

1) First and foremost, SACUA is very concerned about any proposal that would set a precedent of changing Regents' Bylaw 5.09.
2) Circumstances have not changed since this proposal was convincingly rejected by faculty five years ago. Even then, changes to tenure procedures would have been determined by each school individually.
3) Current existing options already provide adequate flexibility in the probationary period.
4) If there are any work-around issues involving transparency or fairness, these should be addressed directly. Perhaps an individual's tenure clock could be based upon % effort.
5) Only a small fraction of junior faculty in very few schools could possibly benefit from increasing the probationary period, yet such an increase could cause many unintended consequences across the entire University.
6) The family-friendly aspects of increasing the tenure clock have not been adequately demonstrated. In fact, the increase might prove to be anti-family in the long run.
7) An increase in the probationary period will either increase the expectations placed on junior faculty or it will lower the standards to achieve tenure.
8) Increasing a probationary period does not relieve the tension created by the probationary status.
9) Imposing a longer probationary period than peer institutions would cause great harm to recruitment and retention efforts.
10) The proposal to increase the probationary period does not address the many issues that do exist related to the tenure process such as rising and unclear tenure expectations but merely masks the problems.
11) It seems there may be a cost savings by extending the probationary period, such as holding junior faculty at lower pay scales longer or having to provide "set up" funds less frequently, but this should not be a motivating factor.

12) If there is indeed evidence of a "productivity slump" at the associate professor level (evidence for this contention has not yet been provided), we believe there are more effective and efficient ways to address such a problem than by extending the tenure probationary period.

Furthermore, Senate Assembly passed the following resolutions at its January meeting on Monday 24 January 2011:

Resolution #1 (56 for, 1 abstention)

"Resolved, that at the University of Michigan only tenure track faculty as a body are eligible to make final decisions of the faculty in matters involving tenure including, but not limited to, the tenure process as described in Regents' Bylaw 5.09 and its procedures, as well as individual decisions to grant tenure."

Resolution #2 (54 for, 1 against, 1 abstention)

"Resolved, that the January 23, 2006 Action of the Senate Assembly (No. 012306-1 attached) expressing significant reservations about any changes to the existing Regents' Bylaws governing tenure is hereby re-affirmed."

Finally, SACUA is concerned about media reports and other claims of election results showing faculty support for the proposed increase. One media report from the University Record that concerns SACUA is the misleading implication that the American Association of University Professors supports the increase in the probationary period. Another report raising concern is that you might make a decision on this matter this week. If there is truth in that report, we ask that you preserve objectivity and postpone your decision at least until other groups in the University have had an opportunity to respond. Also, SACUA has seen no evidence of any elections supporting an increased probationary period. A poll mentioned by the Medical School Dean's office included a majority of non-tenure track respondents (see Resolution #1 above), and it was not an election. As you see from the votes in Resolution #2 above, SACUA actually has seen votes with a completely different result. Senate Assembly is an elected and representative faculty body that voted nearly unanimously against any change to Regents' Bylaw 5.09. There were fourteen Medical School representatives participating in yesterday's vote.

It is SACUA's sincere desire that the Medical School resolve its tenure issues, which are still not clearly defined, in a manner other than changing Regents' Bylaw 5.09.

Sincerely,

Edward Rothman, Chair
Gina Poe, Vice Chair
Bob Fraser, Interim Secretary
Kate Barald
Bob Frost
Rachel Goldman
Kim Kearfott
John Lehman
Steve Lusmann
Mojtaba Navvab

SUBMITTED: February 2011

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.