THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

FACULTY GOVERNANCE UPDATE

Following each new year, many are struggling to uphold "New Year's resolutions". These promises may involve striving for improvements in our personal or public lives, such as re-formulation of our activities to align with our basic hopes for positive change in some aspect of our existence. Being human, we often make unrealistic resolutions that don't endure. By now, many resolutions have been quietly abandoned. What is important, however, is the pause for reflection and attempts to improve life through balance. In addition to periodic transitions, marked by calendar, academic, fiscal, or athletic years, times of challenge and change are also excellent junctures for contemplation of basic values and how to embody these.

In 2013, the University of Michigan will have two new, young and energetic Regents, and six equally wise but experienced returning Regents. At UM under the present system of 8-year terms, Regents have served between 1 and more than 30 years. Presidents have served between 1 and 38 years. In terms of longetivity, numbers, and full time connection to UM, faculty also represent a major aspect of continuity of the university community. The very dedicated tenure-track faculty, longing to continue doing well what they love best (teaching and research), are employees with immense stake in UM's longer-term vitality. The faculty are generally a collegial lot characterized by intelligence, specific internationally recognized subject matter expertise covering the universe of knowledge, and a willingness to engage in meaningful discussion of issues, especially those that affect university policy.

With the New Year, it thus seems appropriate to resolve that those university values that are held in common by Regents, administration, and faculty, be explicitly included in all deliberations. Different values may lead to different outcomes when creating policy, so it is up to the Regents strike a balance among competing considerations. Several values relate to the core university mission, namely excellence in education, student well-being, and the creation and application of new knowledge. Other intimately related values relate to process, such as freedom of speech, integrity, transparency, and shared governance. The Regents, administration, and faculty are all smart people with different insights, and our future together balancing our mutual values is best with continuing communication about pressing issues.

One dominant concern facing U.S. universities is affordability. A holistic examination of this is intimately tied to core values of inclusivity, diversity, community service, educational quality, and welfare of the entire university community. Because rank-and-file faculty care so deeply about their students, college affordability has emerged from multiple Senate Assembly committees this academic year. It is for that reason that during March the UM Senate Assembly will host all faculty from Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint to join together in a workshop to brainstorm new approaches to college affordability. Hopefully this will be auspicious in the nascent Chinese Year of the Snake, characterized by cleverness and tenacity.

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Kim Kearfott, Chair