THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION
ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Subject: Faculty Governance in 2008-2009 – David Potter, SACUA Chair

As the end of this SACUA term approaches, it is a good time to reflect on accomplishments of the past year and look ahead to areas where important initiatives are coming to fruition.

In looking backwards, we can point with pleasure to David Lampe's efforts to respond to the request of SACUA and the Committee on the Economic Status of the Faculty that the advantages of Ann Arbor are more broadly advertised and the accomplishments of individual faculty more readily recognized.

We note that, while there will remain discontent with any cost shifting in the Benefits program, and the degree of consultation, we do feel that the voice of faculty governance was heard in these discussions. Although some feel that the new system of brackets does not go far enough in equalizing the burden of health insurance for those with lower incomes, we have made a major start in having the principle of equity introduced to these proceedings. This is a major advance.

In November, we noted that communication between central faculty governance, the Provost and the President was excellent; we note not only does this remain excellent, but also that SACUA has become an ever-livelier venue for the discussion of University affairs. We are especially pleased the Deans and associate Deans from various units have followed the example set by the President, Provost and the Regents in meeting with us to discuss issues of general concern. These include the proposed shift to a continuous enrollment plan for Rackham (we support the cautious approach of the Rackham Executive Board in endorsing the principle of changes in the tuition structure if the finances can be made to work), the use of instructional technology and the new system of review for research faculty. The fact that the President and Provost also have come (or will be coming) to Senate Assembly twice this year has been a tremendous enhancement of overall communication within the community. The openness with which they have dealt with questions from the Assembly—as well as in their regular meetings with SACUA—has also set a tone for cooperation across the University.

Finally, in a year of extraordinary financial challenge across higher education we note that the "Michigan Model" of cautious stewardship of University resources while maintaining excellence is becoming ever more widely recognized. At the Committee on Institutional Cooperation meeting of faculty representatives that SACUA hosted in November, representatives of the other CIC schools remarked positively at the way that Michigan was managed; we note that this point has been picked up in the *New York Times* (12/31/08; 3/17/09), and at institutions outside the Midwest. The extraordinary accomplishment of the Michigan Difference Campaign is a matter of pride to us all.

Looking ahead a number of issues will carry over to the next year. The most significant of these are the definition of academic freedom and the grievance process.

In the wake of recent court cases limiting academic freedom, the University, which maintains the highest standards of academic freedom for its faculty should take this opportunity to renew its public commitment to these standards. In so doing it should

take the lead in offering a definition of academic freedom that takes account of the complexity of the modern academic world, for it is precisely the failure of earlier definitions, limited solely to teaching and research in the environment of the 1950s, to protect faculty in the complex research world of the present that has led to these challenges.

One of the most serious constraints upon academic freedom is a dysfunctional grievance system. We anticipate the promulgation of new procedures—the committee is hard at work—at the same time, however, we remain concerned that any system may be hampered by failure to understand and implement its procedures on a local level. We have seen cases where ill-feeling has escalated to levels that might never have been reached if effective conflict resolution procedures had been in place within units. Likewise, in some cases—one including a Grievance Review Board that contained two former members of a unit's dean's office—members of these boards do not seem to understand the nature of their task, and are far too quick to determine that an issue is "not grievable." In some cases the reasoning has seemed to us to be capricious at best (e.g. citing rules that were not published at the time that an incident took place and could not, in practical terms, be implemented). This is especially unfortunate since central Academic HR maintains a very high degree of professionalism that should be a model for conduct at the unit level.

We should not conclude on a negative point. We want to reiterate the excellence of the communication between faculty governance and the administration, and our feeling that the efforts of the President and Provost to lead open discussions of the state of university affairs, and their vision of the way forward, has strengthened community as a whole. We have also valued our meetings with members of the Board the past year, and look forward to continuing them in the future.

(Submitted April, 2009)

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.