THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

RE: Initial Thoughts on Faculty Governance

On May 1, 2010, the annual change in the leadership and membership of the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) took place. Ed Rothman (LSA) was elected Chair and Gina Poe (Medicine) was elected Vice Chair for the 2010-11 academic year. Kate Barald (Medicine), Kim Kearfott (Engineering) and Rachel Goldman (Engineering) were elected to three-year terms on SACUA. Continuing members of SACUA are Bob Frost (Information), John Lehman (LSA), Steve Lusmann (Music), and Moji Navvab (Architecture).

SACUA will hold its annual planning retreat later this summer. Clearly, the year-long agenda topic priorities for SACUA are still being developed but SACUA believes a primary priority for SACUA and all of the University community should be the preservation and enhancement of the perception of the University as a top-tier university. To accomplish this, the University will have to attract and keep the very best faculty and students by maintaining a distinctly attractive environment for academic pursuits.

There are often opportunities for improvement and innovation at the interface between people and processes that may already work well. Our current emphasis on exercise and improved health, for instance, provides us with a potential opportunity. Increasing faculty participation in a vigorous exercise program may well reduce health care costs. The University of Minnesota currently provides funds to offset the costs of exercise at their university facilities for faculty. We hope to explore such opportunities here.

The University should expend even more of its resources attracting the very best students, especially those less affluent. While SACUA applauds the University for such progressive measures as the creation of many new undergraduate scholarships and the building of the North Quad residence hall, to some degree faculty should be utilized more in the admission, matriculation and retention of students. The matriculation process—moving students from acceptance by us to enrollment—can be very helpful, with faculty involvement, in increasing the yield of outstanding students.

Similarly, the University should prioritize and invest more of its resources in increasing its attractiveness to top-level faculty. Faculty have probably been under-utilized in fund raising events which, like the research dollars brought to the University by faculty, could become a significant, cooperative effort in the future. In any event, excellent faculty will be drawn to come to the University based upon the public image of the University and by the resources provided to faculty by the University. One important resource area is technological infrastructure and another area is the concept of total compensation of the University faculty.

Currently, the administration is investigating the practicality of rationalizing the University's technological infrastructure in terms of the next generation technological infrastructure. We applaud this effort. However, the University must create a vision that makes this rationalization process seen as a value to our faculty. A positive vision can create a force that drives the cost cutting side of the rationalization process. Furthermore, non-traditional concepts such as cell phone use in place of the existing land-lines should be encouraged.

Total compensation of faculty must play an important part in faculty decision making about their careers. In the coming years, the University will need to keep its competitive edge to maintain its current status. This means that, although the University has focused recently on individual cost-cutting measures aimed at benefits, total compensation of faculty and staff should be reviewed in its entirety. The use of benchmarking one simple aspect of compensation has limited value. While cost-saving is important, the primary concern of the University when establishing priorities must be the promotion of the University's long-range purpose. The University must remain an attractive place for scholars and open to all kinds of diversity, including cultural diversity.

SACUA has come to believe that the entire spectrum of the University's policies and rules for dispute resolution needs to be studied and addressed. While a recent joint effort by faculty and the administration resulted in the revision of the faculty grievance procedures is an important step in the right direction, formal grievance is not the only valuable means of addressing the disputes faculty experience.

SACUA believes in the value of shared governance at the University and believes that shared governance, at times, can mean criticism of one part of the University family. But, like a family, we are in this together, sharing a common cause, so criticism should remain collegial and within the family. Criticism does not have to be adversarial. Faculty do not look better if the administration looks bad and the reverse is true too.

(Submitted May 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.