THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION
ITEM FOR INFORMATION

July 2006

Subject: Improved Communications with the Regents

On June 24, 2006, SACUA held its annual retreat to plan actions and governance objectives for the coming year. Top items considered were grievance procedures, retirement and health-care benefits, the tenure process, undergraduate academic performance and admissions qualifications, oversight of information technology, unit governance practices, and communications with the Regents. SACUA members recognized that the faculty share responsibility with the University's administration and governing board for maintaining the high quality of the institution's faculty and students.

SACUA assigned key priority to fostering renewed and effective communications with the Board of Regents. Regents' Bylaw 4.04 assigns to the elected representatives of the faculty who sit on the Senate Assembly and its executive committee, SACUA, "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." SACUA takes this responsibility with utmost sense of duty. During the coming year the Regents will be asked to formulate or codify policy changes within the University which will seriously affect the mission of the University and the well-being of its faculty, staff and students. Momentous decisions with institutional implications require a decision-making process as transparent as possible that includes meaningful and thorough consultation with the allied elements of the University community: faculty, students, staff, and administrators.

Important decisions that affect the University community have in recent years been made without adequate involvement of the elected representatives of the faculty, with the prospect of detrimental unforeseen consequences. SACUA is thus exploring models for enhanced, beneficial interactions with the governing board. One example is the model that exists at the University of Minnesota.

About ten years ago, changes to the tenure system at Minnesota proposed unilaterally by some members of the governing board created adversarial relations and nearly prompted unionization of the tenure-track and tenured faculty. The situation arose owing to a virtual vacuum in communication between the faculty and the Regents at Minnesota. In remedy, formalized interactions were established. Meetings are held quarterly involving representatives of the Minnesota Regents, the president, provost and president's "chief of staff", as well as the chair, vice-chair and staff of the Minnesota equivalent of SACUA. According to reports, the representatives of the three groups "meet for about an hour, privately, and talk about whatever is on their minds--the legislature, major issues before the faculty/the senate, personnel stuff, whatever. Entirely off the record..." Whether this model or some other is best for the University

of Michigan remains to be learned, but SACUA stands ready to fulfill its important advisory role and asks the members of the Board of Regents to remain receptive to communication initiatives that have the best interests of the University at their core.

(Submitted July, 2006)

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