UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS' COMMUNICATION

Item for Information

Subject: Faculty Governance Update

The beginning of the school year brings with it a great deal of anticipation. As a youth, I viewed this very positively. My warm feelings were engendered not only by brand new school supplies and the opportunity to select a new lunch pail, but by the promise of inspiring teachers and the as-yet-to-be revealed hidden treasures of knowledge buried within my course selections. This was all nicely complimented by opportunities to forge new friendships determined by the seating plan dictated by the concert band director, which was partially based upon a rather painful audition-based process.

As a university professor, I also approach each new academic year with excitement. While most of my office supplies come through a re-use program, I am treated to a new yellow pad of paper, marked either "University of Michigan or "Diverse Earth". This brings me a sense of pride. As a faculty member I am delighted to claim somebody else's vintage stapler, or turn off lights when I leave, to preserve precious resources for our broader educational missions. Also, I am lucky to work at one of the top universities in the world, with its truly diverse faculty and students.

The fall affords opportunities for faculty members to forge new relationships. Due to UM's commitment to excellence in faculty hiring, many will have brilliant new colleagues. This is trumped only by the predictable influx of exceptional students. When teaching large sections of seniors and taking breaks from lecture and assignment preparation, I study students' admissions photographs to memorize their names. The first day of class, I am amazed that many of these students have physically transformed beyond recognition during the intervening three years. This gently reminds me of the incredible mental and emotional growth of students during their university years. Such reflection deeply humbles me because of the professoriate's key role in shaping student experiences during this critical time in their lives.

The new seniors every year are, on average, the same age as the seniors the prior year. This makes me even more seriously aware, that each year I am a year older. Except for turnover in positions, UM faculty and staff age at this rate of one year per year. Health care and retirement benefits are thus of increasing concern to UM personnel, a tough problem during times of difficult university financial sustainability. The value of time itself becomes even more poignant with age, particularly among faculty with strong professional

drives towards endowing lasting societal contributions.

In September, new memberships in faculty governance committees, created under Regent's Bylaws 4.06 and 4.08, will be voted on by Senate Assembly. These committees, concerned with the full range of issues confronting UM, are the life-blood of UM's faculty governance system. Three-way balance engaging Regents, administration, and faculty governance becomes most crucial for a healthy university during challenging financial and political times. As Chair of Senate, Senate Assembly and SACUA, my greatest joy to date has been the astounding willingness of busy talented faculty to supplement teaching and research responsibilities with committee service. My hope is that faculty efforts within the structures of the elected representative governance system at UM will be fruitful. Volunteers on faculty governance committees sincerely desire to creatively apply their intelligence and subject matter expertise to help the university through their labors side-by-side with the Regents and administration.

The new academic year literally represents a clean "slate" for innovative solutions to problems and empowering ways of operating. There is no greater symbol of this than the upcoming football season. We know there might be tough moments, but as you read this we have the chance for the Rose Bowl.

Submitted: September 2012

