THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

FACULTY GOVERNANCE UPDATE

In the July Regents' Faculty Governance Update, a faculty governance initiative currently described as "life-long faculty engagement" was introduced. In this initiative, the feasibility of expanding retirement choices for faculty so that retirement, if desired, could be flexibly incremental is being investigated. This differs from, but would not replace, phased retirement, which is gradual retirement over relatively few years while the incremental retirement could continue indefinitely. The incremental retirement option is not intended to replace any already existing retirement options or artificially result in more or fewer faculty retirements. This initiative is a work in progress.

The life-long faculty engagement retirement option would offer the opportunity for faculty, department chairs and deans to consider restructuring faculty appointments in terms of effort and function to any degree mutually agreeable. This would likely include a reduction in overall time/effort but could also include quite different functions for the faculty member. Ideally, new functions and new assignments would draw upon the faculty member's strengths and interests and would allow the faculty member to engage in new academic pursuits such as teaching freshman seminars, undergraduate advising, leading study groups in international learning experiences, teaching at sister university programs (e.g. Shanghai Jiao Tong or in Dubai), or conducting groups of students engaged in humanitarian service efforts both at home and abroad.

As a benefit for the administration, any increases in a departmental budget, corresponding to the amount saved by the faculty member's reduction in effort (which would not have existed otherwise), could generate money for a new, tenure-track faculty position. Similarly for the administration, this greater flexibility would allow long-range planning and room, through negotiation, for almost any form of mutually agreed upon role of the faculty.

Separate studies conducted by University Human Resources and the Center for the Education of Women (CEW) have shown that University faculty desire to strengthen and maintain their connection to the University at all stages of their careers, including retirement. Without losing sight of their important current roles, retirement-eligible faculty should also be considered for new or increased roles in admissions, matriculation, development, community outreach, academic advising, mentoring, undergraduate research opportunities, and faculty and student recruitment efforts.

This initiative was motivated, in part, to give retirement-eligible faculty due recognition while increasing their retirement options. Another outcome would be enhancement of the undergraduate student experience by exposure to distinguished and accomplished faculty.

In addition, there are practical and economic reasons for exploiting a precious resource—the contributions of engaged and active life-long faculty. Nearly half of all faculty are eligible to retire. Without more flexible options than now exist, the University is at risk of unexpectedly losing key faculty or experiencing a sudden and dramatic increase in faculty retirement rates. The life-long faculty engagement initiative could retain experienced faculty, to the degree they wish to remain involved, at a fraction of the cost of their remaining full-time faculty. It could also improve the University's faculty to student ratio in a very cost-effective way.

An absolute essential element of this initiative is the belief that this greater flexibility must enhance and protect the interests of every party involved in the process.

To obtain University-wide reactions and advice about proceeding forward, with particular attention to acquiring knowledge about how specific programs and units would be affected and benefited by such an endeavor, there have been initial communications with Senate Assembly, the President, the executive vice presidents, and many other key administrators including other vice presidents. The reaction has been uniformly positive and no major obstacle has been identified. From the faculty governance perspective, several principles have emerged, which include:

1) The increase in retirement options must not increase the pressure for retirement.
2) Along with remaining completely optional, there must be mutual agreement to the specifics of the incremental retirement by all parties (faculty member, department chair, dean) involved.
3) To the extent possible, the conditions of the incremental retirement must be adjustable and reversible.
4) A tenured faculty member's cost savings to the department due to the use of an incremental retirement plan must remain with the department and on a tenure track line.
5) Additional issues including those of office and research space should be discussed.
6) This would be an option available only to retirement-eligible faculty.

Submitted October 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 questions of educational policy.