

Board of Trustees Meeting

June 21, 2006

Faculty Senate President Welcome to the Board

Welcome to the Knoxville campus. Faculty and students appreciate the work you do on behalf of the University, and we thank you for the opportunity to be involved in university governance. We're so pleased that you recognize that having a faculty voice at all levels of policy and decision-making at the university inures to the benefit of the institution, the students, and the state.

Before making my remarks, I'd like to recognize the other Faculty Senate Presidents who are present today George Cook, UT Health Science Center, Robert LeMaster, UT Martin, and Richard Rice, UT Chattanooga. Furthermore, I'd like to note that Lou Gross, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics will be taking over as Faculty Senate President of the Knoxville campus in exactly 10 days & 11 hours and 58 minutes. And, they said lawyers can't count! I wish him the best.

The Senates have a number of concerns about the future and mission of the University and there are two that I'd like to highlight today.

Salaries

As I noted in my brief welcome to you at your October Board meeting, Faculty are indeed the core of any institution of higher learning. We devote much of our time to classroom teaching and working to stay abreast and ahead of the developments in our field. We conduct research, engage in creative activity, work diligently to obtain grant funding, awards, and fellowships. We spend hours outside of the classroom mentoring and tutoring undergraduate, graduate, and professional students about our areas of expertise and about their career and professional goals. We work hard to help mold students into the kind of people who can take their place in our state as responsible citizens. We write innumerable recommendation letters and serve as references. We hopefully build the kinds of relationships with students that benefit the students, their families and the institution. We frequently build lifelong relationships and develop

friendships with many of our students. Faculty, on the whole, are doing their jobs and doing them well.

Yet, once again, faculty members are deeply disappointed in a salary increase that has failed to keep pace with inflation and which is lower than nearly all other state employees. This year will find most faculty receiving only a 1% increase in their base pay compared to a 2% increase for the UTK Chancellor and his staff, a 3% increase for state employees and in an economy with a overall 3.5% inflation rate and 5.2% rate for May. I'm sure I don't have to tell you about the rising cost of fuel, rising interest's rates, and the myriad ways in which it has become more difficult to make ends meet. For faculty members who have been working hard for the institution and the state it's difficult to understand a process of salary increases that provides them with less than other state employees. While faculty appreciate the efforts of the President to increase funding for the institution and many applaud the concept of rewarding well performing faculty with merit pay the reality is that the pool of available funds is insufficient to apply the principal and, at least on the Knoxville campus, only 25% of those faculty whose performance has been evaluated at the highest evaluation level or "exceeds expectations" are eligible to receive merit pay. The result is those faculty who have met the expectations of their job and most who have "exceeded" the expectations of their job can probably expect only a 1% increase in pay. For many faculty whose base salary is \$50,000 this means a \$500 increase before taxes. Not only does this impact a faculty member's current financial standing and affect their ability to keep pace with inflation, it affects their retirement benefits, and adversely affects morale. The current approach of dealing with salary increases, in fact, does little to reward well performing faculty and does much to diminish the importance of the work faculty do for this institution and the state. Faculty request that a salary system that defines "merit pay" as an increase over and above the rate of inflation would do more to reward meritorious performance and retain faculty.

On a related issue, many faculty members are also are concerned about staff whose pay is at the very bottom of the pay structure and some Senates have advocated a move toward a living wage for these employees. These faculty members feel strongly

that an institution of higher learning has special responsibility to ensure that those whom it employees are able to meet their most basic needs through their full time pay. I hope you'll support faculty in their efforts in this regard.

Diversity

A second issue of concern to many faculty is diversity. I'm sure you'd agree that diversity is a compelling interest that furthers the educational goals of any institution of higher learning. Diversity in the student body, faculty, staff, and administration is a necessary component of a good university. It broadens knowledge and insights, provides broader perspectives and encourages creativity. As you know, we are at the five year mark for the court's review of the *Geier* Consent Decree. There are important questions to ask about whether the goals of the *Geier* case have been reached and whether it is possible to maintain any progress made toward the goal of a fully racially integrated institution. It seems unlikely that we have reached the goals of *Geier*, particularly with regard to the recruitment and retention of African American faculty. There are suggestions that there may be issues with regard to equity in pay for faculty of color and women faculty. Moreover, many would agree that there is considerable work to be done to achieve an inclusive and welcoming environment for African American faculty and other faculty of color in which a diversity of opinions, research, and creative expression is equally valued. I have had an opportunity to serve on Knoxville campus committees charged to examine issues related to *Geier* and diversity and have serious doubts about the commitment of departments and units to diversity and am deeply concerned about whether the institution is prepared to respond to a legal landscape in which the protections afforded it from court oversight are no longer provided. It is clear that there are many troubling issues surrounding diversity and many unanswered questions.

The loss of diversity would lead to a narrowing of perspectives. Without real and significant diversity in demographics, ideas, and scholarship, institutions become stagnant and advancement retarded. The University of Minnesota's Faculty Senate recently developed a statement on diversity from which we could learn. They note the importance of diversity in its people and in the acceptance and valuing of differing ideas and research. They note that relying on current standard metrics of excellence maintains the status quo and hinders the advancement of our institution. Moreover, traditional

standards limit and risk losing the essence of what a public research university should be a marketplace for diverse ideas, a place that values the expression of diverse and sometimes uncomfortable worldviews, a place where paradigm shifts stimulate discoveries that ultimately move humanity forward. They worry that the bond of trust between the University and the greater community is compromised and genuine public engagement becomes nearly impossible when the institution pays mere lip-service to diversity, and fails to respect, value, and be deeply and visibly transformed by it. We have much to learn from these words and like that institution, in order for UT to become nationally and internationally eminent, commitments and to diversity and inclusiveness must be central to framing its mission and concrete and transparent plans to diversify must be made. I hope that as the governing body of this institution that you will ask hard questions about where each campus is on achieving diversity in all aspects of their operations.

Thank you for your time and I hope your stay here is productive and pleasant.

Rm. 118 - 3:30 p.m.

Merit Resolution

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