



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

NEWSBRIEFS

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Provost Nancy Barrett Steps Down President Noren is Now on His Own

By Charles J. Parrish, President

It was announced on November 18th that Provost Nancy Barrett will step down from her position at the end of the academic year. This ends months of speculation that President Jay Noren was intent on pushing her out of the post she has held since 2003.

Rumors that the President had fired the Provost have been rife on the fourth floor of the Faculty Administration Building for several weeks. It appears that the sharp conflict between the President and the Academic Senate over governance issues finally brought the matter to a head. Throughout her years as Provost, Dr. Barrett has enjoyed a warm and productive relationship with the Senate, the deans, and the faculty and academic staff. (See the article on page 3 summarizing her achievements.) Her amicable relationship with the Senate seems to have been a particular source of irritation for President Noren since his tenure in office began some 16 months ago.

The circumstances of Provost Barrett's resignation highlight key issues that now confront the university community. These are: 1) the increasing centralization of academic decision making in the office of the President and his

Cabinet; 2) the President's escalating conflicts with the Academic Senate over governance issues; 3) the

President's proposed dramatic and, some say, naive and unrealistic plans to expand the University; and 4) the anticipated funding of these plans by sharply raising tuition over the next five years to match the tuition charged by Michigan State University.

President Noren Centralizes Decision Making

When President Noren was interviewed for his current position, he was questioned by members of the faculty and academic staff about how he would treat budget issues. In response, he reiterated over and over that that the budget of the University should be under the Provost.

Once he became president, however, he discarded his announced position and wasted little time in taking power and discretion away from the Provost on a wide range of matters, including the budget. In alliance with Robert Korhman, the Budget Director, he began to centralize budget decisions in the Office of the President and, in the process, undercut the Provost, Korhman's ostensible boss.

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This centralization of budgetary authority has a direct impact on academic decision making. The most recent budget document presented to the Board of Governors, for example, includes a proposal to capture unfilled academic positions from the Schools and Colleges and put them under the direct control of the President and the Budget Director, who would jointly decide on their reallocation. Moreover, in consultation with his Cabinet, the President now insists that he must personally approve all expenditures of \$100,000 or more, including faculty hires. He has also taken personal control over all set-up funds for new science and medical faculty, usurping the role previously played by the Provost—as the chief academic officer of the University—and the Vice President for Research.

The Cabinet has its place in the leadership structure of the University, but it is hardly qualified to make decisions on academic policy. Outside of the Provost and the President, only one other member of the Cabinet has ever held a faculty position. It is a little short of astonishing for the Budget Director to play a central role in the reallocation of faculty positions from one academic program to another. He has never been a faculty member and does not have the educational qualifications necessary to hold a faculty position.

The President's Conflicts with the Academic Senate

The President's displeasure with the questioning of his decisions by the Academic Senate Policy Committee (the Senate's elected executive committee) and its Budget Committee was the immediate context for the firing of Provost Barrett.

One point of contention centers on the President's decision to appoint his own Budget and Research committees to parallel—and, in fact, circumvent—the corresponding committees elected

by the Senate. Despite the fact that the Board of Governors' Statutes state clearly that the Academic Senate is the vehicle for conveying faculty views to the Administration and the Board, President Noren seems intent on presenting his own appointed committees as the true representatives of faculty opinion.

President Noren reacts with annoyance when reminded that Senate members are elected by the faculty and academic staff as their representatives for purposes of shared governance in the University. The Senate, in turn, elects the Policy Committee to represent them when the Senate is not in session. Rather than accept these elected representatives, the

President has attacked the Policy Committee by asking directly, and through others, "How can eight people represent 1700 faculty members?"

President Noren obviously thinks that he is the best judge, not the elected members of the Academic Senate, of who should represent the faculty and academic staff—a philosophy that Mussolini would well have embraced had he been a university president.

The President might well have also asked how eight members

of the Board of Governors can represent the 10 million or so Michigan citizens they are elected to represent. Perhaps he thinks that they should be dismissed and he should be charged with selecting the representatives of the citizens of Michigan.

President Noren also sought to change the way that faculty and academic staff are selected to serve as representatives on University committees. For over fifty years, the procedure has been for the Policy Committee to choose a balanced slate of nominees in accordance with the relevant factors (particular expertise, experience, school or college, gender and other diversity factors) and send to the President twice the number of candidates as there are positions to be filled.

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Provost Barrett: A Record of Accomplishment

Provost Barrett came to the University in 2003 from the University of Alabama, where she had been Provost for 7 years. Prior to that she had been Provost at Western Michigan University under President Diether Haenicke. All in all, she has been a successful university provost for some 20 years.

While at WSU, she has had some notable leadership successes:

- She presided over several reorganizations of the University, merging the Colleges of Science and Liberal Arts and overseeing the establishment of the Honors College.
- Her office made substantial strides in the research enhancement program, the expansion of activities to raise undergraduate retention rates, and the management of the University Budget.
- When Dr. Barrett came to Wayne State, there were no merit scholars enrolled in the University; now there are 55.
- She established the successful Medstart Program in which outstanding high school seniors are admitted to the University and guaranteed entry into

our School of Medicine if they maintain a high grade point average.

- She started the successful Wayne Scholars Program in which exceptional high school seniors are recruited to the University.
- She negotiated several contract extensions and multiple-year contract renewals with the AAUP-AFT, resulting in an era of amicable labor relations in which there were no strikes. The Union always found the Provost to be a tough, but fair, negotiator on whose word they could always rely.

A positive feature of Provost Barrett's tenure at Wayne State has been her constructive relationship with the faculty, academic staff, and deans that she led. Academic decisions were transparent. The Provost believes in genuine consultation. Relevant information was a resource to be shared. Faculty input was not viewed as a nuisance to be tolerated but a source of useful ideas and alternative perspectives. No provost since Diether Haenicke in the 1970s has had as positive a relationship with the faculty and academic staff and the general university community as has Provost Barrett. She will be greatly missed.



Settlement of Grievance 305: The Interim Dean of Medicine

On October 7, 2009, President Jay Noren and the Union agreed that 1) Dr. Valerie Parisi would be appointed for three years as Interim Dean and 2) that she and the progress of the School of Medicine (SOM) would be reviewed under the terms specified in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Before President Noren's initial appointment of Dr. Parisi for three years as Interim Dean, he had met with the SOM's Senate Executive Committee and discussed her as a possible candidate, along with others. The Union filed Grievance 305 because of the unprecedented length of the interim term and because the President had ignored the contractually specified role of faculty and academic staff in the appointment and review of deans.

The President argued that he needed to appoint Dr. Parisi to a multiple-year term to strengthen her bargaining leverage with outside institutions. Because the Union was primarily concerned with preserving the contractual rights of the faculty and academic staff in the review process, we offered a compromise: we would agree to the appointment of Dr. Parisi as the *regular* dean for a three-year period if the Administration, in turn, would agree to the formal review of her performance

by faculty and academic staff in the final year of her term, as called for in the CBA. The President rejected this for unexplained reasons and we prepared to go to arbitration.

After further discussion of these issues before the SOM Faculty Senate, during which AAUP-AFT President Charles Parrish laid out the Union position (he had previously met with the SOM Executive Committee), the President agreed to accept a portion of the Union's proposed settlement. He did not, however, want to appoint Dr. Parisi to the regular position as dean, and he preferred an unspecified form of review. After further negotiation, he finally agreed to the formal review process specified in the CBA.

The President can, after this review, appoint Dr. Parisi as the regular dean or appoint her for another year as interim dean if a proper search for a permanent dean is initiated.

We are pleased to announce a settlement of this matter and we extend to Interim Dean Parisi every good wish for success in an extraordinarily difficult job. The Union's goal in filing the grievance had nothing to do with her abilities. We have acted according to our organizational commitment to protecting the rights of faculty and academic staff across the University and in the School of Medicine.

Labor's Changing Face

The face of the union movement has changed dramatically over the past 25 years, a new report shows. In 1983, more than half of all union workers were white men, few union workers had a college degree and nearly one-third were in manufacturing.

Today, almost half are women, more than one-third have college degrees and only one in 10 work in manufacturing. The report is "[The Changing Face of Labor, 1983-2008](#)," by the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

President Noren's initial position was to bypass the Policy Committee and personally get the members of the Senate to send directly to him the names of nominees from whom he would choose committee members. He has retreated from this position, but he continues to ask members of the Senate to send names of nominees to him as well as the President of the Senate.

The Senate voted overwhelmingly at its November meeting to endorse a memorandum from the President of the Senate to its members reiterating the bylaws regarding appointments to committees. President Noren came onto the floor of the meeting immediately after reading the endorsed memorandum. He interrupted presentations by his own administrators and angrily denounced the Senate vote. Several Senate members respectfully engaged in interchanges with him, but he would not be mollified.

The President of the Senate, Seymour Wolfson, seeking to end the confrontation, suggested quietly that the two of them could meet privately to try to resolve the matter. President Noren rejected his proposal and asserted that he wanted this out "in public." He then left the meeting, still in an agitated state.

President Proposes A Dramatic Expansion in the Face of Economic Peril

The loss of the Provost comes at a particularly difficult time for the University. Over the past two years, higher education in Michigan has been protected by the Federal Stimulus Program, which banned cuts to higher education. Next year, the stimulus program will lapse and knowledgeable leaders in Lansing are saying that higher education, if the revenue situation remains the same, may be cut by 15% or more. When all the cuts and the increases in costs are added in, the University may be facing a deficit of \$40 to \$50 million next year, amounting to 10% or more of our entire budget.

Instead of addressing the coming budget crisis, however, the President is proposing a dramatic expansion of the University. He is currently leading a "Strategic Decision" process with a series of task

forces on various aspects of university life (Teaching and Learning, Research, Quality of Campus Life, Urban Environment, Financial Resources and Enrollment). The President has been overseeing task force presentations to his Cabinet, the Academic Senate and, in poorly attended public presentations, to the general campus community.

The plan contemplates hiring 126 new tenured and tenure-track faculty (21 each year for the next five years), a dramatic expansion of our research effort (another 70 or so faculty to be hired, mostly in the School of Medicine), new, deep and potentially expensive involvements with the Detroit Public Schools, the expansion of the student body to 35,000, and other new activities.

Since President Noren understands that Wayne is unlikely to get new funds from Lansing, the money for this proposed expansion is to come almost exclusively from increases in tuition of about 11% a year for each of the next five years.¹ The President's objective, which he clearly stated in his "Strategic Decision" retreat of senior administrators and members of the Senate Policy Committee in November, was to increase Wayne's tuition level to that of Michigan State in five years. This would amount to an almost 100% increase in the total tuition income (now about \$261 million) and an almost 50% increase in our overall budget.

The frenetic task-force activities led by the President over the past months are apparently intended to persuade the Board of Governors to support this sharp increase in tuition. It will be a tough sell. To advance such an expansionist program at this time seems to many of us to be a fanciful undertaking, at best, and is unlikely to impress members of the Board of Governors who are much more in touch with political realities than is the President.

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[1] Slide 7, "Goal #5—Financial Resources," Powerpoint presentation "Enhancing and Diversifying Financial Resources," by Robert Korhman to the "Strategic Decisions Retreat," Schoolcraft College, November 3, 2009 and Campus Forum, October 29, 2009. The graphic shows WSU projected to reach the same tuition level as MSU in five years. This and other materials available for public discussion have since been removed from the Budget Office web site.

Consulting Board members earlier in the “Strategic Decision” process might have injected a healthy sense of reality into the proceedings. Absent their sobering counsel, some of the meetings seemed more like pep rallies than serious forums for discussion. One workshop leader even suggested, and got, a round of “Atta Boy Rob” applause for Budget Director Korhman’s championing of expansion in the face of the state’s economic catastrophe. At other points, both direct and indirect criticisms were directed at members of the Board of Governors for not falling into line and agreeing to dramatic increases in tuition.

Uncertain Economics, Uncertain Leadership

Many public universities around the country are responding to the economic recession by strategic cuts in their programs. Tuition increases generally are being used to cover losses in state support, not for expansion. The President of Michigan State University, Dr. Lou Anna K. Simon, has announced a plan to cut some 600 positions and a number of programs in a retrenchment effort that is intended to position MSU to face the hard times ahead.

We certainly are not recommending comparable cuts at Wayne. But the hard realities of the current economy call for hard decisions, not

endless meetings charting chimerical maps of expansion. Political leaders in Lansing, including those who have traditionally been supportive of WSU, may not be very understanding if Wayne announces a huge expansion when Michigan is experiencing an economic depression, when students are struggling to meet current tuition costs, and when other public universities are cutting back sharply.

In times like these, it is unfortunate that the University has lost the voice of the single administrator among the vice presidents who has wide credibility and respect among the deans, the chairs, and the faculty and academic staff.

As President Noren’s fingers are forced down onto the Braille of economic reality he will, of necessity, have to reassess the policy directions he has been pursuing. Provost Barrett could have been of great help to the President and his dutiful administrative clique in this process. Instead, he will be on his own, depending on a Budget Director and a Cabinet that few in the university community think qualified to make academic policy.

Regrettably, there are no strong internal candidates available to replace the Provost, and her departure also eliminates the one senior administrator with the experience to be an interim president, should one be needed.

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