



Representing Wayne State Faculty and Academic Staff

NEWSBRIEFS

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Budget Battles: Shared Governance or Personal Rule?

By The Executive Board, AAUP-AFT

We face trying times. With another round of budget battles commencing in Lansing, Wayne State must confront the hard realities forced on our university by the state's fiscal crisis. We can do so on the basis of a shared commitment to academic goals guided by a realistic and collaborative assessment of short- and long-term prospects. Or we can continue with the current top-down micromanagement that substitutes personal rule for shared governance.

The immediate context is grim enough: public universities have endured dramatic cuts in state support over the years, forcing sharp increases in tuition to partially cover the short-fall. Governor Granholm has recognized this situation and has said to the state legislature that it must not cut higher education any more if Michigan is to come out of the present economic crisis with the kind of educated workforce that can drive future growth.

If the Governor prevails, we can survive the coming year with a modest tuition increase. Prudence dictates, however, that we develop a realistic and thoughtful assessment of how we preserve the core academic activities of the institution and provide for sensible programmatic development. At present, we are failing miserably in addressing this challenge.

Bad Budgets Are Bad Policy

Last year, President Noren initiated a Strategic Planning Process that was remarkable for its irrelevance. Under his leadership, the vice presidents, deans, directors and some faculty members engaged in hours of speculative planning based on patently unrealistic budget assumptions. The result was the proposal that the University should hire over 200 new tenure-track faculty members in the next few years.

This is an appealing pipe dream, but since there is no prospect of increased funding from the state, the only way to finance President Noren's expansionist vision is student tuition. Accordingly, the stated goal was to raise WSU's tuition to the level of Michigan State University over a five year period with annual tuition increases of 15%. The major goal of the President's Strategic

Planning Process was to convince the Board of Governors (BOG) that this was a good idea.

The BOG is highly unlikely to raise tuition at anything like the rate President Noren wanted. He has retreated somewhat from his expansionist fantasies, but has not reversed course. The goals, he now insists, are relegated to a distant future, when the state economy improves and students are supposedly able to afford the higher tuition.

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In the meantime, there is no credible vision of the University's future to guide the budget process in the long or short term. In effect, we are told simply to do what we are presently doing, but less of it.

Budget Myopia

President Noren has told the deans to prepare budgets for next year based on 5%, 10%, and 15% cuts. He directs them to examine the teaching-load policies of the departments with an eye to having tenured and tenure-track faculty teach more courses, but he has otherwise laid out no basic principle or goals to follow in his letter to the deans. When asked, he has said he is waiting see what cuts they will come up with.

This style of budget making leaves the deans in the dark as to what goals are to be accommodated. All they have is the sure knowledge that their budgets will be subject to the personal decisions of the President, based on their personal relations to him and, inevitably, the degree to which they cater to his wishes. He is presently in the process of meeting with them individually so that they can show him their wares.

A collaborative process would produce better budgets. For example, suppose the Senate had been consulted on what instructions to give the deans. The deans could have been told to consult with their budget and governance committees to help evaluate programs and goals. All concerned might then have proceeded with a shared agenda that preserved the academic integrity of this research university.

Some deans may follow this sort of approach despite not being asked to do so by the President. What all will know, however, is that the President has not provided professional standards for judging their budgets, and that he will personally decide their financial future.

The opaqueness of President Noren's budget-making process forces one to speculate on his personal goals. For example, he seems to be strongly

committed to involving the University in the Detroit Public Schools. Shortly after arriving at WSU, he appointed his own committee to develop a proposal that WSU take over and run 40 Detroit schools. This remarkable proposition, coming out of nowhere, had the now familiar trademarks of President Noren's approach: fanciful and expansionist goals that are, a) based on unrealistic assumptions and, b) magically appear with little input from the Academic Senate, the Board of Governors, or even his own Strategic Planning Process.

The Consultation Process

The WSU Academic Senate is the body that is designated by the Board of Governors Statutes to represent the faculty and academic staff in academic matters and to give advice to the BOG. It is a body made up of 83 senators, elected for three-year terms by the nearly 2,000 faculty and academic staff at the University. The Senate in turn elects eight members of the Policy Committee to serve as an executive body. The Provost chairs the committee and serves along with the President of the AAUP-AFT in an ex officio capacity, without vote.

Members of the Policy Committee organize, and recruit chair,s for the various Senate Committees dealing with the university's budget and academic mission (research, curriculum, faculty and student affairs, etc). These committees each have liaison members (without vote) from the Administration, the Union, and the Policy Committee.

The President has often expressed his disdain for the Policy Committee and, by implication, the Senate that elects it annually. Dissatisfied with the occasional opposition to his proposals expressed by members of the Senate, he has appointed his own Budget Committee and a senior and junior research committee to act as a counterweight to the Senate's Committees.

It is difficult to see how the President can argue that committees appointed by him are more representative than those established by the Senate.

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Faculty Rights in Grading Students

Professor Robert Arking, Faculty Contract Implementation Officer

Over a year ago, a graduate student in the College of Nursing (CON) took a computer-based test, available to her for over a week, at the last available minute. She did not save her answers in accordance with syllabus instructions and so failed the test. The student appealed her grade following the CON's written procedures.

The appeal process confirmed that the student did not pass the disputed exam, but it was decided nevertheless that she should have her grade changed from C+ to a B- and retain her status in the graduate program. The two faculty members who team-taught the course accepted this decision. The student was not satisfied, however, so she appealed to the Provost's Office. The matter was referred to Dean Mark Wardell of the Graduate School.

The two faculty members met with their AAUP-AFT representatives to discuss their rights in the matter. I subsequently met with Dean Wardell to discuss the case and met with him again accompanied by the two faculty members. Dean Wardell asked various questions, which were fully and vigorously answered by the faculty members and supported by the independent data they produced.

Dean Wardell later wrote a letter to the student involved stating that he was "recommending" that the grade be changed to a B+ because of certain unspecified "inconsistencies" in the case. He also sent

a memorandum to the faculty members "recommending" that they change the grade of the student to a B+, though in this and subsequent communications with the Union, he failed to identify the alleged "inconsistencies."

Provost Nancy Barrett reviewed the case and wrote the student that she was upholding the decision made in the appeals process within the College of Nursing. The provost's actions upheld the academic freedom of the faculty to grade students according to their professional assessment, consistent with University regulations and the guidelines contained in the syllabi.

Provost Barrett will soon leave office and return to the faculty. She will likely be replaced by someone who shares the uncertain views of President Jay Noren and Dean Mark Wardell towards the faculty's right to academic freedom. There may be future cases where upper management "recommends" that faculty change a grade for unexplained reasons, then writes a letter informing the student of their intervention. We all need to speak up against such unwarranted interventions.

The only organization on campus to which such a faculty member can turn is the AAUP-AFT. We will intervene to defend your academic freedom—regardless of whether administrators up to and including the President approve or not. We have your back.

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President Noren's committees have a constituency of one. The Academic Senate, in contrast, answers to the nearly 2,000 faculty and academic staff who elect its members. Perhaps in some political systems, President Noren's shadow committees could be called democracy, but few would give much credence to such a claim.

Personal Rule

When he was interviewed for his present job, President Noren waxed eloquent about the need to have the Provost at the center of the university's policy-making process, particularly with regard to the budget. Once in office, however, it did not take long to see that either he had been dissembling, or has since changed his mind.

One indication of his changed attitude is that the current advertisement to fill the provost position makes no mention of managing the budget, only overseeing the budgets of the schools and colleges. He has taken almost all the power over the budget from the Office of the Provost and moved it to himself. He now must approve personally almost all aspects of the budget, from new faculty hires to set-up costs for new faculty laboratories.

As President, he has had very few checks on his impulse to have a say in almost every institutional matter which comes to his attention. His intrusive and unwarranted micromanagement has produced a pervasive atmosphere of chaos in administrative circles.

His now legendary outbursts of temper add an element of fear to this environment. No administrator who has either viewed, or directly experienced, a Noren tantrum wants to risk being the object of his next one. Provost Nancy Barrett was the one cabinet officer who was willing to voice reservations about one or another of the President's dysfunctional and uninformed sallies into micromanagement. With her forced departure, there is no one in his cabinet who fills this role.

On March 8th, President Noren sent an email to the Wayne State community that lays out a complex series of faux consultations on the budget process. They range from his appearances before the Academic Senate, to the sending of several of his vice presidents to meet weekly with the Senate Policy Committee and meetings with the BOG Budget and Finance Committee. In none of these encounters has there been any substantive consultation on the overall goals to which the President is committed. He does not spell them out in his email, nor anywhere else. One cannot consult on his goals when they remain obscure and unknown, perhaps even to him.

Budget decisions should involve consultation at every step, rather than the current process in which the Senate will finally be presented with a fait accompli. In the present procedure everything lands on the president's desk after an almost entirely unguided process of proposed cuts. President Noren may be the decider, but the quality of his decisions will depend on the quality of the process that precedes his decisions.

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