

Stuart McAninch (with contributions by responding Senators and members of the Faculty Welfare Committee)

REPORT ON FACULTY RESPONSES TO THE PROPOSAL FOR ANNUAL ONE-TIME PAYMENTS FOR FACULTY

Last Fall, the UMKC Faculty Welfare Committee was directed by the Faculty Senate to conduct a systematic assessment of the opinion of the UMKC faculty regarding the proposal put forward by the Provost's office for annual one-time payments for faculty. On March 1, I sent an e-mail message to Senators asking for poll results and/or feedback from their units. In an attachment to that message, I included a brief description of the proposal, brief rationales for it, and a brief statement of arguments against it. I received responses from Senators in the College of Arts and Sciences and in the School of Biological Sciences. In addition, the faculty in the School of Education were polled after receiving hard copies of the attachment and after a brief presentation of the proposal during the March faculty meeting. I have not heard from any other units.

What follows is a brief report of feedback from the three units for which I have information.

THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES:

One-time payments were discussed at a regular business meeting of the College faculty on November 9, 2004. The sentiment of the meeting was to devote the dollars instead to the annual compensation pool. According to the minutes for the meeting, "an overwhelming number of the faculty [present at the meeting] wish to have the funds be used for increased faculty compensation rather than one-time rewards".

One Senator from the College shared comments he received from faculty:

"My feelings about any 'reward system' for the faculty is that the rewards go for those faculty who 'fit in' with the system. Who is to submit nominations? I think it is those who also wish to be 'rewarded'. Therefore it makes no difference to me what they do. You might add that studies have shown that those who receive good teaching evaluations are usually those who 'water down' courses to make the students feel good."

"One-time faculty payments are equivalent to an industrial bonus. I am completely against such a business time model. If the University wants to use the so called 'business model', then give the faculty the business equivalent salary. I vote 'No!!!!'"

"I just want to make one comment on the 'one-time faculty payment' idea. The case against it is very compelling. To a large extent, the quality of an institution is judged by the average pay to its ranked faculty. This is published every April by the Chronicle of Higher Education. By rewarding faculty by one-time payment, it makes UMKC much less competitive in Faculty Salary data as compared to say, administrative salary. This is not a good way to promote UMKC nor can it attract quality faculty in future."

“Let me give you a ‘more complete’ analysis, from my point of view, for you to present to the Senate.

“1) Just HOW does the person get nominate? No one has ever attended any of my classes to see what I do ‘in person’. I assume this is the case for ALL ‘potential nominees’.

“2) If no one attends the lectures then what are the criteria used to select a ‘suitable candidate’? There are two possibilities. First, a friend nominates a faculty member, perhaps to a committee for nominations or directly, or the chair nominates a faculty member. Both represent ‘subjective’ thoughts. The second is an ‘objective thought’ based, perhaps, on student evaluations.

“3) In regard to student evaluation, it is not certain exactly WHAT is being evaluated....

“4) The ‘interpretation’ of student evaluations is not unambiguous. If the class is very large then there is a good chance that there is a large diversity in the students. If the evaluation has a large standard deviation then we can either interpret this as the inability of the faculty member to reach (appease) ALL students or simply a reflection of the diversity of the student abilities.

“5) The interpretations of student’s comments are also ambiguous....

“6) I also point out that the standard deviation of student evaluations, no longer reported, would mean that there is NO DIFFERENCE between the evaluations of ANY faculty member. Any experimentalist who understood statistics would agree.

“Furthermore, studies have shown that one cannot compare one department with another department through student evaluations of professors. Those in the Arts, where memory is important, cannot be compared with those in the sciences, where math might be a central feature of the class. There is thus no ‘normalized’ means of evaluating teachers through student evaluations which place the teachers on the same playing field. It has to do with the teacher’s philosophy of how a class should be taught....

“I therefore conclude that student evaluations are not a valid means of identifying any good teacher. From my point of view a ‘good teacher’ does not adjust the level of teaching a subject to the lowest common denominator so that good valuations are obtained. Those whom I consider ‘good teachers’ probably will not be rewarded for their teaching.

“If one eliminated the student evaluations, then on what grounds does anyone say that one professor teaches better than another professor?

“Hence a ‘reward’ system has no objective basis.....”

“I am against ‘one-time faculty payments’ and would rather see the money placed in the salary pool.”

“I am completely against this practice of ‘one-time’ faculty payments for supposedly extra-meritorious service. There is not enough money in the regular salary pool now to reward professors adequately. If you want to really do some good, use this money to increase the salaries of professors who have been here many years and are, with few exceptions, grossly underpaid.”

THE SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES:

At the School of Biological Sciences faculty meeting on November 9, 2004 the topic of the proposed one-time awards as a mechanism of faculty compensation was brought before the faculty. After discussion about the merits of the proposal, the faculty voted unanimously to oppose the one-time awards. Discussion point included: 1) rewards for faculty achievement should be with permanent raises rather than with one-time awards, and 2) the potential exists for favoring faculty based on allegiance to administration rather than on scholarly work. The following resolution was passed unanimously at the meeting: The funds for one-time bonus awards for 30 faculty should be used instead to fund the general faculty salary pool.

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION:

I left ballots in the campus mailboxes of all voting faculty members and of full-time visiting faculty members (for a total of 35 ballots). The ballots included hard copies of the attachment sent to Senators. They included two options for checking: “Yes—I am in favor of instituting the proposed one-time payments”, or “No—I am opposed to instituting the proposed one-time payments”. There was space reserved on the ballots for comments. Prior to leaving the ballots, the proposal and issues regarding the proposal were introduced at the March faculty meeting.

Nine ballots were returned to my box. All nine respondents voted “No.”

The following comments were made:

“What more needs to be said than is said in items 1-5 under ‘Arguments against the Provost’s Proposal for One-Time Payments.’ These points are well-articulated and convincing.”

“I read the provost’s ‘reward plan’ and didn’t much like it. First of all, most of us aren’t incentivized by market incentives. But—more to the point—we should be rewarded on a merit pay system, not at the whim of an administrator.”

“With the exception of the Faculty Senate’s nomination of up to ten faculty members per year, both the nomination and selection processes are controlled under the proposal by administrators (who may or may not include faculty members of their choosing in the processes). This is unacceptable— if such a plan was to be instituted, faculty involved in nomination and selection would need to be chosen by faculty members directly or else chosen by their elected representatives in the units and Senate. Moreover, this plan is especially questionable at a time when there is so little money available for “merit raises” (which seem to amount for the most part to no more than full or partial “merit” cost-of-living adjustments). Let the University take care of basic compensation of faculty before taking on plans for one-time incentives.”