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Consultative Committee

Campus Governance

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11-5-2014

## Consultative minutes 11/05/2014

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Consultative Committee  
November 5, 2014  
Prairie Lounge  
8:15 am

Present: Leslie Meek, Megan Jacobson, Lisa Harris, Rita Bolluyt, Sam Daniewicz, Jean Rohloff, LeAnn Dean, Jayne Blodgett, Julie Eckerle

Absent: Allison Wolf, Nancy Helsper, Michelle Page

Guest: Laura Thielke, Gift Funds Specialist; Janel Mendoza, Executive Accounts Specialist; Rebecca Webb, Web Editor & Calendar Coordinator

The guests were welcomed to the meeting before beginning their presentation regarding wage fairness and employee morale.

**1. Wage Fairness:** Janel Mendoza explained the issue of salary discrepancies for clerical staff on campus. UMM uses a step-based program for hiring and promoting clerical staff. It's generally accepted that new employees are paid on the Step 1 pay scale. Over the past 10 years, there have been exceptions to this system: in some departments, new employees with significant experience are hired on Step 1 and later learn that other equally- or lesser-qualified individuals were hired on higher Steps — even as high as Step 10, according to Rebecca Webb. Janel pointed out the extremely negative impact that this practice has on employee morale: giving unequal salaries to employees working comparable jobs or with similar qualifications sends the message that the University values some employees over others. The guests are in favor of a written policy to clarify hiring practices: either a policy stating that all new hires must begin on Step 1 or a policy with specific guidelines for placing new hires at an appropriate Step based on experience and other primary qualifications.

Furthermore, the Step system itself is flawed. Not only are there unfair differences in starting points, the pay increase from Step to Step is negligible. For instance, Lisa Harris pointed out that an employee in the 1826 class (an administrative office specialist) will see an increase of just \$1.50 per hour after moving from Step 1 to Step 6, a process that takes 6 years. Furthermore, once employees reach the final step, they stop receiving pay increases.

**2. JEQ Promotions:** Clerical staff at UMM only have one way to obtain a salary increase: through being re-classed. In order to be placed in a new, higher Class, staff members must complete a JEQ, or Job Equivalency Questionnaire. Filling out a JEQ is a time-consuming and laborious task, according to our guests and to the several members of the Consultative Committee with personal experience. Once the JEQ is filled out, it is submitted to the Twin Cities for approval, where it is evaluated on a point scale. The applicant is then sent notification regarding the success of their JEQ. If a JEQ is denied, the applicant receives no specific information regarding the reason for the denial.

In the past 10 years, UMM employees have submitted 60 JEQs. Of those, 40 were submitted by clerical staff. 10 of the clerical staff's 40 applications were denied. The clerical staff therefore has a denial rate of 25%, while other staff groups at UMM have a 0% denial rate. The clerical staff would like the Consultative Committee to request that Human Resources look into the issue to determine why such a discrepancy exists. Similarly, the clerical staff raised issues regarding the role of supervisors in the promotion process. Supervisors cannot promote staff; they can only encourage staff to submit a JEQ. In order for a JEQ to be approved, it is important that the applicants' supervisors actively support the application. The clerical staff fears that occasional interpersonal problems between applicants and their supervisors may result in the

denial of JEQs. The staff requests that the Consultative Committee consider ways in which this issue may be circumvented. Jayne Blodgett suggested establishing a panel on campus to review JEQs before they are submitted to the Twin Cities. Such a panel would prevent interpersonal conflicts from interfering with an employee's ability to secure a promotion. The idea was met with approval from the guests.

- 3. Low Salaries:** The final issue the guests discussed was the general issue of low salaries for clerical staff. The guests pointed out that the clerical staff at UMM are often highly educated, holding bachelor's or even master's degrees. Despite their qualifications, clerical workers are paid a low salary relative to what their counterparts in the private sector make. Rebecca Webb pointed out that others in her position make twice as much as she does here at UMM.

The guests also alluded to issues regarding benefits: though the University's substantial benefit package was often considered compensation for low wages, the package value has been significantly reduced. For example, a Step 1 employee who has worked at UMM for a year is eligible to move up to Step 2 and receive a \$.27/hour pay increase. However, with healthcare premiums set to increase on January 1, 2015, the actual increase in salary comes out to just above \$3 every two weeks. Ultimately, the low wages UMM clerical staff receive have failed to keep up with the private sector, have not increased to meet inflation, and are not offset by the benefits package.

Furthermore, the clerical staff feels as though the issue has been routinely ignored. While Chancellor Jacquie Johnson and other administrators often discuss the low salaries of campus faculty and other employees, they rarely acknowledge the issues that clerical staff face, like the fact that Janel says that she couldn't support herself and her children on her salary without having an additional income in the home. The lack of a livable wage has a significant impact on employee morale, as the clerical staff feel that the University does not value their contributions or their wellbeing enough to pay them a sufficient salary. Additionally, Webb points out that the union action has historically been unsuccessful, which she attributes in part to the group's reputation as a "women's union." Such a reputation, Webb says, means that administrators and even other unions do not take the union seriously. For instance, in the last two strikes, the union did not get support or attention from administrators until students joined in.

The guests thanked the Consultative Committee for their attention and assistance.

LeAnn Dean discussed the agenda for the next meeting, which will include a discussion regarding adjunct music faculty salaries (with a resolution expected sometime in the next two weeks) and minute-taking practices.

Meeting adjourned at 9:04 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Megan Jacobson