

**FACULTY WORK-ENVIRONMENT  
IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**

**FINAL REPORT**

**July 15, 1999**

# FACULTY WORK-ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

## **Introduction**

In late fall semester, 1998, President Peter McPherson and Provost Lou Anna Simon, with the endorsement of the Executive Committee of Academic Council, proposed the formation of the Faculty Work-Environment Improvement Committee. The specific charge to the committee was to: "1) develop understanding of current faculty work-life concerns at MSU that are not specific to particular colleges or disciplines and are not largely within the purview of academic governance; 2) identify the current features of faculty work-life that are strengths; and 3) make recommendations (short and long term) to improve the quality of faculty work-life at MSU, including implementation of procedures to ensure continuing attention to work environment concerns."

The final report of the Faculty Work-Environment Improvement Committee contains seventeen issues, with related recommendations, that affect important aspects of the work environment of faculty. The issues were drawn from faculty comments on such areas as teaching, research, general support, and the physical environment; they emerged as committee priorities during extensive dialogue and deliberations, in meetings of both subcommittees and of the total committee, during the spring and summer semesters of 1999. (See the report's appendix for complete information on committee membership, issue identification, and priorities.) As noted in the Appendix, faculty identified many other important issues which were not included in the Committee's initial priority list. However, the Committee urges that the central administration not lose sight of these items as faculty work environment issues are addressed. The Committee believes that when the recommendations contained in this report are addressed, it will have a positive effect on the faculty work environment, and thus will improve faculty morale. Although the issues are presented in a rank order, it is important to note that all seventeen issues are considered high priority.

The Committee's charge was to focus on general university work-environment issues that largely fell outside the purview of academic governance. However, as the Committee's deliberations progressed, it became increasingly apparent that it was important to address topics in which academic governance does play a key role. Faculty compensation was one such topic; the Committee devoted considerable attention to it, rating it a top priority. The Committee discussed salary trends, salary comparisons with Big Ten institutions, and the benefits portion of the compensation package, as well as past efforts and approaches to improving faculty compensation. The Committee's recommendations on this issue support the University Committee on Faculty Affairs' approach to improving salaries on a phased basis, and recognize the important role and work of academic governance on it.

Although a majority of the Committee's issues and related recommendations are of a long-term, systemic nature that will need to be addressed over time, some of the recommendations

that the Committee assigned to the issues, with those deemed more important appearing higher in the graph. When two or more issues have the same relative significance, they form a cluster. Faculty Compensation and Research and Creative Endeavor Support and Facilitation are highest on the graph. After a gap, Budget Reallocation and Library Support follow. The remaining issues are clustered fairly closely together, after another gap. The following presentation of the seventeen most important issues adheres to this order.

## Faculty Compensation

### Issue:

There is strong faculty concern about their low salary ranking compared with that of faculty at peer institutions. For example, in the Big Ten, MSU is tenth of eleven institutions in weighted salaries for all faculty ranks.

MSU faculty salaries over the past five years have increased by 6 percent more than the change in the Consumer Price Index. Repeatedly, the University has pressed state government about the importance of this concern. The faculty salary adjustment figure in 1998 was higher than the State's appropriation allocation (4 percent versus 2.8 percent), and additional market adjustments have been made available to qualified faculty over the past several years. However, the status of MSU faculty salaries continues to be a problem for the institution and a source of concern to the faculty. In terms of total compensation (base salary plus benefits), MSU faculty's ranking compared with peers improves. For example, in the Big Ten, MSU ranks seventh of eleven institutions on an all-faculty-ranks basis. One future challenge is to explore how the relationship between base salaries and benefits informs decisions about trade-offs between each category. Another is to explore new benefit approaches (such as a cafeteria benefits program, in which one chooses benefits from a menu of options) of interest to the faculty.

Some faculty feel uninformed about MSU's approach to the problem, and specific peer comparisons. As salaries are merit based, some faculty are concerned about the relative fairness and effectiveness of merit-salary procedures. The faculty-elected University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) plays an important role in faculty-compensation matters within the academic governance system; recommendations provided below support a continuing, strong role for this committee.

### Recommendations:

#### Short-Term

The University should:

- Share information widely, using Web sites, and develop MSU News Bulletin articles, etc., about MSU faculty-compensation status, University initiatives, and the recommendations of the UCFA.
- Support to the fullest extent possible the April 13, 1999 UCFA salary recommendation, including its multi year approach to the salary issue.
- Engage in planning to introduce a mandatory unit-administrator program for faculty performance reviews that will assure fairer and more effective merit-salary recommendations.

The UCFA should:

- Continue to explore the relationship between base salary and benefits and related trade-offs in considering faculty compensation.

#### Long-Term

The University should:

- Sustain a broad-based communication program to inform the faculty about compensation matters.
- Work with UCFA to agree on a longer term strategy to address MSU faculty compensation.
- Obtain a UCFA recommendation on the best mix of salary and benefits as part of a faculty-compensation program.
- Require unit administrators to attend University workshops on best practices for merit-salary reviews.

### Measures of Success:

There should be:

- Better understanding among the faculty about faculty-compensation and University initiatives.
- This should include a better understanding that MSU faculty salaries are assessed on an annual basis.
- Improved faculty satisfaction with the compensation program.

## **Research and Creative Endeavor Support and Facilitation**

### **Issue:**

The University needs to improve its research culture and support structures. We define research in broad terms to include creative endeavors/scholarship. Faculty need a supportive environment in order to develop research programs and thrive. Assistance is often needed to identify and establish productive linkages with potential collaborators across units and colleges. Mentorship assistance is available to some new faculty, but others perceive a serious void in such support. Adequate resources to support faculty research will always be an issue. Many new faculty receive adequate start-up packages, but others are severely hampered by lack of adequate resources. Some faculty need to adapt to changing conditions at various stages in their career to remain productive. There is a perception that the current on-campus systems for providing support to faculty have not been adequately evaluated for effectiveness.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

- Many of the faculty's comments about the on-campus research environment that our committee received have been discussed in the Cooper Report, a Task Force Report on the Missions, Goals and Operating Procedures, for the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies (OVPRGS). We learned that some plans are currently being implemented to address these issues, including an improved peer-review grants program. It will be important to carefully monitor progress and evaluate the success of these programs. Many of our following recommendations are included in the Cooper Report. We reiterate them here because we feel that they are high priorities for improving the research environment in which faculty work.
- The University Research Council could be an effective group to facilitate discussion of many issues surrounding research culture and support for faculty. The fact that many faculty are unaware of the existence of the Council should be addressed. The Council should serve as a major vehicle to share information between the faculty and the administration. Faculty should have access to their college's Research Council representative. The representative should be responsible for reporting to his/her constituents the strategic goals for research initiatives adopted by the administration.
- The Provost/Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies should implement a review panel to regularly evaluate intramural University investments in research and to develop criteria for maintaining or curtailing these investments. This should include a comprehensive review of centers, institutes, and analytical and core facilities and services.
- The Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies/the colleges should improve the infrastructure that supports successful grant development, processing, and implementation. Examples include: identification of granting opportunities; training in the newly implemented, electronic grant-submission process; a workshop program to assist investigators on how to improve their grantsmanship; and continued efforts to improve the services offered by the grants and contracts office.
- Each college should encourage mentoring opportunities. Importantly, this should include "reverse mentoring" for those faculty members who desire to adapt to changing conditions.

#### **Long-Term**

The University should:

- Give new faculty adequate start-up packages, and tenured faculty access to the tools necessary to stay active in research.

## **Budget Reallocation**

### **Issue:**

The 1 percent withholding from departmental/unit base budgets, preceded by the Refocus, Rebalance, Refine (R3) policy, and coupled with inflation, has already expunged any discretionary funds that departments/units have had. We had three plus years of R3 with 5 percent yearly reductions. In the last five years, all units have suffered a 1 percent yearly budget reduction. Faculty, staff, students, supplies, and services are hurt. Many units have to cut positions to meet university demands, and this often includes those of rising stars. Loss of faculty due to these cuts hurts students, as well as other faculty who have to pick up the slack to the extent possible. Retiring faculty's positions are not filled, precluding new blood in departments. Most faculty are confused about whether and how the money has been redistributed. Departments don't know how they stand in the eyes of the University. Many feel that they have been slowly squeezed.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

The University should:

- Provide better communication about how money is distributed, and between higher administration and faculty regarding budget cuts and reallocations.

#### **Long-Term**

The University should:

- Determine other ways to finance new programmatic development.
- Become more innovative in achieving financial stability (e.g., creative money-raising programs).
- Continue working with the legislature to improve funding.
- Reconsider the tuition guarantee.

The Provost should:

- Make large cuts differentially. This may entail eliminating programs that are duplicated in other Michigan institutions.
- Let departments know how they stand in the eyes of the administration for their future.

#### **Measures of Success:**

- Faculty will have access to clear information about program allocation priorities.
- MSU will have more significant financial support obtained from multiple sources.
- The university administration will give serious consideration to alternative systems for program budget allocation.

## Teaching and Learning

### Issue:

Large class sizes occasionally make it impossible – and always exceedingly difficult – to interact with students. Many faculty members assigned to large classes resort to oral transmission of information, in place of the academic give-and-take, discussion, and analytic thinking upon which college-level learning depends. Many introductory classes that first-year students take are so large that students do not learn soon enough how to take part in those elements listed above. Large classrooms are not designed to permit faculty “connecting” directly with students. Many faculty members believe that large class sizes encourage the increasingly prevalent “uncivil” behavior about which so many complain.

### Recommendations:

#### Short-Term

- Colleges should pay particular attention to the quality of the educational experience of first semester students.

#### Long-Term

- Every student should have at least one course of 35 or fewer students each semester of the freshman year.
- Colleges, programs, and departments are encouraged to redesign their course offerings to provide opportunities for students to actively engage in disciplinary and professional issues early in their studies at MSU.
- The Committee encourages the Provost to sponsor discussions for the faculty to reconsider the overall structure and requirements of undergraduate education to facilitate the most effective undergraduate experience.

### Measures of Success:

- Every freshman, in his or her first semester, will have at least one regular course with 35 or fewer students.

## Recognition of Faculty Accomplishments

### Issue:

There should be broader and more frequent and effective internal/external recognition of a wider range of faculty accomplishments. The issue has at least three dimensions. First, many faculty perceive that formal recognition for faculty accomplishments in teaching, research, and outreach/service is not effectively acknowledged at the unit or university levels. Neither the central administration, college deans, nor the general public are aware of the significant accomplishments made by many faculty. Second, the processes and outcomes of mechanisms aimed at faculty recognition currently in place are inadequate for identifying faculty accomplishments, biased toward a narrowly defined set of accomplishments, and not always effectively communicated to the media. Third, there is wide variation in the mechanisms for faculty recognition at the unit level.

A pervasive perception is that some of the awards are gotten by individuals or units that are adept in going after them, while other deserving faculty without the time and unit support are overlooked. Internally, this lack of consistent support for faculty work through recognition and reward contributes to low faculty morale and feelings that there is a lack of respect and appreciation for their achievements. Externally, this issue invites missed opportunities to educate and to promote positive images of the faculty and the University to its stakeholders, students, and peer institutions. The lack of systematic oral and written recognition of many faculty accomplishments may eventually result in the extinction of valued (but often unrecognized) faculty contributions. As the adage states: "What gets rewarded, gets done!"

### Recommendations:

#### Short-Term

The University should:

- Create a new faculty-recognition panel that would celebrate faculty accomplishments. The panel would decide, based on faculty-at-large input, the nature and types of accomplishments deemed appropriate for recognition. The number of faculty to be recognized would be determined by the panel, with consideration of available resources. The panel would recommend awards/rewards for recognition, as well as publicity approaches. Due consideration of individual preferences for the reward/award/publicity should be given.
- One method that the panel might adopt would be a "word of mouth" excellence search. The panel would seek out and confirm, in place of the current nominations' strategy.
- Refocus the MSU News Bulletin, with faculty as the primary target audience.
- Organize dinners and receptions recognizing faculty who have been promoted, achieved tenure, published books, etc.

#### Long-Term

- The President and the Provost's Office should meet more regularly with faculty groups to develop and/or communicate a better understanding of the contributions that individual faculty members are making to the university, and share this information with the faculty-recognition panel.
- The University's Public Relations Office should provide consultation and services in support of the panel's desired publicity approaches.
- The faculty should evaluate the panel's effectiveness and need.
- The University should encourage unit administrators to do a better job of making their faculty members' achievements known.



## Communication

### Issue:

Many of the items brought to the Committee involve lapses in effective communication. These items can be grouped into three broad categories. First, faculty are generally unaware of or unclear about the major, current, academic-agenda items of the President and the Provost. Second, faculty currently lack effective mechanisms to share opinions with administrators and other faculty in an open forum and to create a dialogue on major academic issues. And third, information on a variety of topics – including, for example, classroom conduct and faculty safety, faculty accomplishments, and faculty development opportunities – is not available in readily accessible formats. Some caution is needed, because faculty already face information overload. Thus, there should be careful attention to the type and mode of information distributed.

### Recommendations:

#### Short-Term

The University should:

- Begin a process to have the President and the Provost communicate with all faculty by appropriate media, including e-mail.
- Encourage the MSU News Bulletin staff to seek and to publish opinions from faculty.
- Assign an administrator and a faculty member to evaluate the current status of information distribution to and among faculty.
- Introduce more effective information distribution.
- Possible examples would be a question-and-answer (Q&A) column in the MSU News Bulletin and a Web page to archive the Q&As. The archived Q&As could accumulate into a “how-to” guidebook.

#### Long-Term

The University should:

- Have communications from the President, the Provost, and faculty appear in appropriate media (e-mail, the MSU News Bulletin, etc.).
- Have information readily accessible for faculty.

### Measures of Success:

- Faculty will receive and read important communications from the President and the Provost that relate to faculty-environment and academic issues on a timely basis.
- Faculty opinions and counter-opinions will appear in the MSU News Bulletin.

There will be:

- Initiation of a Q&A column.
- Initiation of a Web page to archive the Q&As.
- Useful conversation and information exchanged.

- Evidence that the faculty has become familiar with Classroom Connection, and that there are updated stickers with contacts in all classrooms.
- Classroom descriptions (e.g., movable versus anchored desks) available on the Web.
- Visible improvements in the condition of classrooms.

## **Physical Plant Policies, Practices, Procedures: Speed, Cost, Effectiveness, etc.**

### **Issue:**

There should be a review of Physical Plant policies, practices, and procedures that addresses issues raised by faculty about their work environment. These include: 1) suitable workstations (including access to computer technology); 2) appropriate placement of financial responsibilities; and 3) improved quality, cost-effectiveness, and timeliness of desired workstation improvements.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

- The Provost and the Vice President for Finance and Operations should designate a unit with appropriate responsibilities to begin a major effort to establish work-environment standards for all faculty.
- The unit would consider esthetic conditions, heating and cooling, space to store resources, electronic/technology needs, etc.
- The designation would include the development of a three-year plan for addressing faculty-environment standards.
- The Office of the Vice President for Research should serve as an advocate for the faculty, to ensure that necessary modifications to their research environments are done in a cost-effective, quality, and timely manner.

#### **The University should:**

- Begin a process of reviewing the Physical Plant's policies and procedures for meeting faculty needs. This should include a study of university policy regarding outsourcing practices.
- Begin a process of improving dialogue between faculty and Physical Plant administration about the role, policies, practices, and procedures of the Physical Plant operation.

#### **Measures of Success:**

- There should be a better understanding of services provided and a higher level of satisfaction with these services.

## **Classroom Conduct and Faculty Safety**

### **Issue:**

Issues involving classroom conduct and faculty safety range from inappropriate classroom conduct, to harassment of faculty and students, intimidation, and threats of physical violence. Patterns of behavior by individual students may go unidentified at the institutional level because the victim is intimidated (graduate teaching assistants are most vulnerable) and does not report the incident, or because the chairpersons and deans address the issue at their levels.

We feel that the best place to begin to address this problem immediately is in student orientation, student and faculty handbooks, and students' introduction, in the freshman year, to the culture of appropriate academic conduct. The committee recommends that other issues, such as additional security, telephones, and student judiciary procedures, be addressed in the longer term.

An increasingly diverse student body means that students come to campus with a range of socialization and standards of conduct. More than in past years, students need to be introduced to appropriate behavior in the academic setting of the University. While other aspects of conduct extend to residence halls, traffic and parking violations, and student conduct at rallies and off campus, this committee feels that academic behavior is at the heart of the University's most critical functions: teaching and learning. Therefore, appropriate academic conduct should not be lost in larger discussions or treatments, as is presently the case in both student and faculty publications.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

The University should:

- Combine and update scattered references to student behavior and appropriate faculty conduct, now in the Faculty Handbook and Spartan Life, into a single handbook for both students and faculty. This handbook should outline and update all the procedures already in place for dealing with disruptive students and threats to faculty. It should also address academic standards, such as cheating and plagiarism, and should stress expected standards, how to obtain help, and potential sanctions and punishments for violations.
- Stress appropriate academic conduct for incoming students in orientation and in freshman classes.
- Keep faculty and students advised about avenues for help, recourse, and sanctions, such as the Counseling Center, the Department of Police and Public Safety's surveillance, and the University Student-Faculty Judiciaries.

#### **Long-Term**

The University should:

- Consider additions and revisions to faculty and student handbooks.
- Revisit earlier decisions about the privacy of criminal records of incoming students, for the protection of both students and faculty.
- Check for criminal offenses and determine appropriate steps.
- Increase accessibility of campus phones near classrooms for emergency calls.

#### **Measures of Success:**

There should be:

- Noticeable improvement in classroom conduct and academic standards.

## **Parking, Transit and Green Space**

### **Issue:**

Parking on campus is becoming increasingly difficult, traffic congestion appears to be growing, and there are concerns over loss of campus green space. The faculty is concerned that the traffic on campus has led to an unsafe environment for the campus community, and that there will be additional parking problems caused by the new Science Building.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

- The University should establish effective, campus-wide debate about trade-offs between parking, transit, green space, etc. It should encourage a high level of faculty participation in these discussions.

#### **Long-Term**

- The University should achieve an appropriate balance between parking and green space.

### **Measures of Success:**

- There should be an environment that balances parking and green space.

## **Realizing a Greater Sense of Learning Community at MSU: Availability of Settings on Campus for Informal Faculty Interaction**

### **Issue:**

There are few places on campus where faculty from different units and departments, along with administrators, can easily and readily come together to meet informally, have a cup of coffee or a snack, and discuss issues of common concern – including matters of intellectual merit. While there are many events on campus of intellectual significance that are open to all faculty, they tend to be set, formal, large, one-time events. As a result, there is a need to strengthen the sense of community among MSU faculty from different departments and units. One place that this can be accomplished is in informal settings, somewhat analogous to faculty clubs at other universities.

There are no places on campus that are currently designated to facilitate such interactions between faculty. The development of a vibrant, informal, intellectual climate at MSU could be supported, in part, by the existence of such facilities. The creation of these sites on campus could foster the development of campus traditions and programs devoted to promoting faculty interaction and collegial activity.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Short-Term**

The University should:

- Identify one or two pilot sites that already exist on campus. These places would have to meet certain criteria as potential gathering places: a reasonable number of faculty and administrators could easily walk to them; refreshments would be available. These environments could be refurbished and advertised for faculty use.
- Suggest and promote a series of programs to make sure that faculty are aware of these facilities and their intended purpose.
- The rooms could be used for brown bags, as well as teas or other social events that also promote discussion and interaction on academic topics and subjects that are important to the University community.
- Consider locating these sites in such areas as the new Cyber Café set to open in the Main Library in the fall, the Union, and the International Center.
- Promote and advertise the facilities until faculty committees are willing to take on the responsibility of coordinating events and opportunities for discussion of important campus issues there. Eventually, a clientele will be established, person-to-person, unit-by-unit.

#### **Long-Term**

The University should:

- Evaluate the sites for use and overall success of programming after two years, to determine if the sites are worth maintaining.
- If these environments are successful in facilitating a stronger sense of community among MSU faculty, continue to support them; this will help to establish a tradition of intellectual interaction outside the formalized academic disciplines that have tended to divide faculty interactions.

### **Measures of Success:**

- There should be set goals for the established sites. A small, inter-unit faculty group should periodically determine whether the goals have been met, and assess the extent of the sites' utilization and the need to adjust planning.

**FACULTY WORK-ENVIRONMENT  
IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**

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