The Academic Staff Representatives to the UW System met on November 6, 2015. Below is a summary of what was discussed.

**Health Insurance and Paychecks**
UW System administrators are starting the update in the payroll system that would make it possible to split up the health insurance premiums for employees earning biweekly paychecks so that the premiums would come out of both checks equally, not out of the first check of the month. Although the update is going to start in the next month, employees will not see a change for 18 months.

**FLSA-exempt rules: new federal guidelines**
New federal guidelines are set to go into place on January 1, 2016. These guidelines raise the salary threshold (from $23,000/year to $50,440 per year) for exempting employees from FLSA guidelines such as overtime pay. According to David Miller, UW System HR Director, if these guidelines go into effect, it would double the number of people who are not exempt in the UW System institutions. UW System is petitioning for an exemption to slow down the implementation of the rules. These rules do not apply to employees in instructional positions, such as faculty and instructional academic staff.

**WRS Changes**
Proposed changes to the WRS system include raising the retirement age and changing the calculations to the 5 highest years of earnings instead of 3. This would only affect employees 40 years and younger and/or vested in the system (administrators were not sure which).

**Civil Service**
Administrators do not think university staff would be affected under the current bill regarding reinstatement rights.

**Remission Money**
There is $5 million of remission money (including from veterans). It has been held by UW System but it is now being distributed to campuses. President Cross determined that the money would be allocated for faculty compensation on individuals campuses, allocated using the historical distribution model used by System to determine the percentage each campus receives. Cross reasoned that faculty compensation is where the largest compensation gaps exist. Initially, too much money was set aside for remissions and now it has been determined to be a good time to distribute the money instead of continue to hold it centrally.

**Code of Conduct**
A Rep asked if the academic staff would be required to have a code of conduct. System administrators said that individual campuses may do so if they choose but it will not be a requirement.

**Close a Campus?**
A Rep asked if long-term strategic planning includes considering closing any campuses due to decreasing
numbers of high school graduates and budgetary concerns. David Ward said that if a campus were going to be closed, the legislature would be the ones to make that decision, not UW System, and that such a decision would be unlikely. When the Medford campus was closed (it served about 100 students), there was chaos and political backlash. Buildings are financed by program revenue, so you lose those fees but still have buildings to pay for. Although our current number of campuses might not be the perfect number, it is unlikely to change. If you look at the accountability dashboard on System’s website, you will see that there is not a dramatic drop in high school graduates. Enrollment at institutions of higher education has decreased, but that is mostly in the technical colleges and private institutions.

**Drone Policies**

Many campuses have drones; should we have policies to address privacy issues that may arise from drones? David Miller, UW System Human Resources, said that if UW System were to pass a policy, it would be vague and give power to the campuses to determine what is best for their own campus.

**Compensation Study**

System administrators are in the preplanning stages of a compensation study. They are determining whether to hire an outside consultant or do the work internally. One of the Reps asked how shared governance will be involved; David Miller responded that all governance groups would be involved on the advisory council.

**Layoffs and Nonrenewals of Academic Staff**

A Rep raised the point that campuses are handling layoffs and nonrenewals due to budget issues differently on different campuses. What are the consequences of this? Should we be handling these issues consistently? System administrators said that it was up to the discretion of each campus on how to handle layoffs and nonrenewals due to budget issues. Individual campuses could use either one, and could use them concurrently. There are some positive aspects for the employees when using layoffs (e.g. institution cannot challenge the right to unemployment benefits, employees have reinstatement rights if the same position opens back up at the institution) but some positive aspects for the employees when using nonrenewals (e.g. longer notice period of not having a job anymore).

**Policy and Procedure**

A Rep asked if our Handbooks were still in place given the legislative changes made recently. System administrators said that yes, our campus policies and procedures are still in place. A Rep asked if the UPGs were still in place or if the Operational Policies were being used; System administrators said that UPGs were still in place but that the Operational Policies were the implementation of the UPGs.

**Listening Sessions**

Listening sessions around Wisconsin are now over and System administrators will look at the data to determine how to move forward.

**Legislative Changes**

A Rep raised the question about 36.21 wording changes that designate “faculty and chancellors” as having authority to terminate academic staff and programs. System administrators said that this
language was incorrectly carried over from other areas of legislation. The language will be fixed so that academic staff are consulted in these situations.

**Current Legislation**
Jeff Buhraudt, Director of State Relations, shared an update on the concealed carry legislation. He emphasized that there would be huge administrative issues if this legislation passed, such as in the residence halls, football stadiums, and police armories. It would create many practical issues of how to check in/out weapons.

Fetal tissue – the bill restricting fetal tissue use has been passed by both Houses but is in a holding pattern. System is working to create language that would address the concerns that have been raised about the use of fetal tissue while at the same time ensuring that research can continue.

**Task Forces and Other Administrative Updates**
Tuition-setting Task Force - This task force is charged with providing clarity on how tuition will be set after the tuition freeze ends. They will recommend policies and a framework for setting tuition. They will be considering national trends, literature and affordability.
Segregated Fees Task Force – This task force is looking at the cost of segregated fees. They will consider policies recommendations and determine how the processes should be.
GPR Allocation Work Group – This task force hasn’t gotten started yet. They surveyed budget officers and controllers already to get suggestions on moving forward, then they will survey other groups.
New budget system – System administrators are looking at a new budget system to provide for more budget forecasting capabilities.

**Academic Staff Reps**
The academic staff reps met separately and discussed how their campuses are handling budget cuts, among other issues. Campus reps reported a variety of strategies to address budget cuts, including regionalizing positions/units/departments (for example, some institutions are sharing Human Resources or Printing Services), restructuring units/departments, doing internal instead of external searches for open positions, laying employees off, not renewing employees’ contracts, and leaving positions unfilled when they become vacant.