The faculty representatives met in Madison on Friday, October 31st. Much of the morning session focused on what items Rep Chris Sadler (UW-Stevens Point) should present to the Regents at the November 6th meeting. [The presentation focused on the difficulties uncompetitive salaries pose for retention and especially recruitment of faculty.] Among the major issues discussed during the day were the following:

1. The “Star Fund.” Some reps expressed skepticism about the fund’s effectiveness in retaining faculty; some reps expressed concern about lack of input from shared governance on the fund’s distribution on their campuses. Most reps agreed that, whatever the fund’s shortcomings, it would be a mistake to turn down any salary increases, especially given the governor’s fondness for the fund.

2. Faculty Salaries. The reps expressed skepticism that the legislature will be persuaded to increase salaries to something approaching the median of our peer group by repeating arguments that have failed to persuade in the past. [At the most recent Board of Regents meeting (November 6th), Al Crist (UWS Associate Vice President for Human Resources & Workforce Diversity) reported that President Reilly’s Compensation Advisory Committee has determined that two annual increases of 7.78% would be needed to bring our salaries up to the mean of our peer group.] The Faculty Senate at UW-LaCrosse has asked Representative Gordon Hintz of the Assembly’s Colleges and Universities Committee to request that the Legislative Audit Bureau commission a “white paper” on faculty salaries, on the assumption that the legislature is likelier to listen to the LAB than to the UWS on this issue. During an afternoon meeting, Al Crist was vaguely wary of the wisdom of this, as one never knows what an audit might turn up. The UW-Oshkosh rep asked other reps to see if their senates will endorse UWO’s request or make similar requests. I will be pleased to draft a letter to Colleges and Universities Committee member Jeff Smith of Eau Claire requesting an audit, for the Senate to approve at our next meeting, if this is the sense of the Senate. While the recent change in the makeup of the Assembly might give cause for hope, current economic woes seem to make any significant increases unlikely.

3. Vickie Washington of UWSA gave a presentation on Inclusive Excellence, which, she stressed, was not a new initiative but rather an effort to coordinate existing efforts (e.g., Equity Scorecard, climate studies). Inclusive Excellence focuses on a broader definition of diversity than has been used previously and on communicating the well documented educational benefits of diversity. The next stage will be to create a System-wide feedback group, with representatives from each campus, with a goal of next fall for submitting a final draft of the Inclusive Excellence Framework to the Board of Regents.

4. Freda Harris of UWSA gave an update on the budget. Current projections are for a $3 billion deficit for the 2009-2011 biennium. The picture should become clearer around November 20th, when the next revenue report is published. Behind the dark cloud currently looming over the economy there appears to be an even darker cloud.

5. Larry Rubin and Lynn Paulsen discussed their work, and sought feedback from the reps, on the Making Opportunity Affordable grant (from the Lumina Foundation). Wisconsin is one of 11 states selected for planning and information gathering; five states will ultimately be selected to receive $2M to improve access to higher education. Wisconsin is below national averages in both baccalaureate degree attainment (25% of adults to 27% of adults, nationally) and per capita income ($34,405 to $35,705), and currently lags Minnesota in both categories (25% – 34%; $34,405 to $38,805). The foundation’s goal is 55% baccalaureate attainment by 2025, which will be difficult to attain, given a projected 9% decline in high school graduates in Wisconsin between 2008 and 2015. Among the
issues discussed was how alternative scheduling and giving more credit for non-classroom learning might attract and serve the non-traditional students who will make up the bulk of the graduates needed to reach the 55% benchmark.

6. System has asked for nominations to the Teacher Retirement Board (TRB), which advises the Wisconsin Retirement System and the benefits administered by the Department of Employee Trust Funds. The governor will appoint one UWS unclassified staff to a five-year term. If you’re interested, email Assistant Vice President for Human Resource Services Sue Chamberlain <schamberlain@uwsa> expressing your interest along with a brief vita by Thursday, November 20th or contact me for more information.

7. Any faculty member with expertise in mental health who is interested in serving on the UW System ad hoc Mental Health Committee should contact me. The committee will look at a System report that suggested such things as making sure each campus is up to national standards regarding the number of counselors on campus. The first meeting of the committee will be in Madison on either Dec 2 or 16th from 10-3. Future meetings may not be face-to-face depending on the committee’s recommendations. The group will meet periodically during the spring semester. The report from the group is due May 15th.

8. The most recent Regent’s meeting (November 6th) focused on three issues: (a) the “graying” of the faculty (in 2007-2008, 39% of UW System faculty are 55+, as compared to 33% in 1997-98; (b) the impact of low faculty (and staff) salaries on retention, recruitment, and morale; (c) the role of UW comprehensive campuses in Professional Practice Doctorates (e.g., the Doctor of Nursing Practice currently being planned jointly between UWEC and UW-Oshkosh), which included a presentation by our very own Brian Levin-Stankevich, and the effect such degrees might have on undergraduate education.

Respectfully submitted,

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