

FACULTY ASSEMBLY

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Faculty Assembly October Minutes

October 22, 2020

Dr. Robin Darling Young called the Zoom meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

68 faculty members attended the meeting from the Schools of Arts and Sciences; Engineering; Law; Music, Drama, and Art; Architecture; Nursing; Philosophy; NCSSS; and Theology and Religious Studies.

The issue of the 4% salary cuts was the main agenda item. The University has indicated that faculty have a week-long period in which they can opt into the cuts beginning in November or the cuts will automatically begin in the fall semester with the new academic year.

The Faculty Assembly conducted a survey to learn how faculty viewed the options proposed by the University and with more than 100 respondents found that 56% of faculty intend to postpone taking their cut until the fall, 20% will volunteer to take the pay cut now and 24% are not sure what they will do.

Since the University hasn't articulated why faculty should take their pay cut now and whether more pay cuts were coming in the future, the floor was opened for discussion to those who wished to share with the group why they are choosing to take the pay cut now or to delay. The following points were made:

General Issues/Questions about the pay cuts:

- How will the pay cuts work with outside fellowships?
- Faculty may be able make withdrawals from their TIAA-CREF funds using new Cares Act rules that waive the penalties for early withdrawal if the money is repaid in 2-3 years.

Reasons to defer:

- What is the legality of cutting pay of employees who have letters of appointment and not contracts?
- Can written assurances be obtained that there won't be additional cuts?
- Many faculty are already struggling financially and have spent their own money on at-home instruction costs of online education so they need the added time to recover. Did the University take this into account when they proposed the salary cuts?

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- The economic advantages of taking the pay cut earlier are not clear.
- Faculty already feel stretched with tight academic budgets, increased responsibilities, previous promise of raises, and the pivot to online education.
- There is worry about the online form for volunteering to start the cuts early and what the implications are for signing that form. For example, does it weaken tenure protections or mean that we are agreeing to be at-will employees?
- Faculty feel uninformed about the implications and legal issues surrounding a voluntary pay cut.

Reasons to take the cut now:

- There is concern that surprise language will be inserted into the August 2021 letters of appointment for those faculty who defer.
- We want to show good will and solidarity with the staff. Having a reservoir of good will be helpful as the University's financial situation may get worse in the spring.
- The University may paint the faculty as being unwilling to sacrifice if they don't volunteer.

CoFEW asked faculty what issues they felt were important for them to advocate. One suggestion was to request a 5-year economic plan for the University that includes an austerity plan whose focus is not on salary cuts. A transparent Town Hall is due so that the faculty as a whole can communicate what we are willing to do and to get more information from the Administration.

A discussion was held about obtaining legal counsel for help in negotiating and obtaining legal advice about taking the pay cut and being as protected as possible for future cuts. A lawyer could also help with clear, effective communication in working with the University to participate in shared sacrifice without inadvertently giving up employment protections. It would also be helpful to have someone who could negotiate and advocate on our behalf with the hope that progress made that would also help staff and help protect jobs.

A majority of attendees were in favor of obtaining legal counsel. The FA Board will conduct another survey to learn the extent of support across the entire faculty and to see if we will be able to raise the funds for a retainer. The FA will then proceed following the wishes of the majority of faculty.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm.