

Minutes of 18 February 2008
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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
SENATE ASSEMBLY MEETING
18 FEBRUARY 2008

Present: Abdoo, Anspach, Boxer, Brophy, Brown, Denver, Eagle, Ensminger, Fitzgerald, Fossum, Frier, Garton, Geary, Gull, Hirshorn, Jackson, Ketefian, Koopman, Lehman, Maddock, Mahalingam, Maher, Moore, Ottaviani, Patil, Peters, Poe, Potter, Powell, Queen, Rothman, Sabel, Smith (chair), Stark, Thompson, Thornton, Thouless, Volling, von Buelow, Wakefield

Requested Alternate, none available: Altschuler (Medicine), Fraser (Dearborn-Library), Graham-Bermann (LSA-Soc Sci), Larsen-Freeman (Education), Navvab (Arch & Urb Plan), Reisch (Social Work), Ziff (Engineering)

Alternates: Koopmann (Lomax-Medicine), Highfill (Sweeney-LSA-Humanities),

Absent: Adriaens, Andjelkovic-Zochowska, Avi-Yonah, Becker, Brock, Carson, Currie, Dey, Friedman, Frost, George, Green, Hesseltine, Kabamba, Karni, Kosch, Li, Maybaum, Mehta, Mueggler, Primus, Rahme, Riles, Roe, Samson, Sellers, Stoolman, Tropman, Younger

MATERIALS DISTRIBUTED

1. Draft Senate Assembly Agenda
2. Draft minutes of the Senate Assembly meeting of 28 January 2008
3. Question list about health benefits submitted to L. Thomas by SACUA

Chair Smith convened the meeting at 3:15 P.M. The draft agenda was approved.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of 28 January 2008 were approved as submitted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Smith announced:

1. The Shared University Governance document will be brought to the Assembly in March for its consideration. The document has reached an impasse with the administration over a sentence stating that the administration will inform and consult with elected representatives of the faculty before making decisions that affect the faculty.
2. The report from the Multicultural Committee has been postponed owing to Professor Evans' illness.
3. Nominations are sought for four open seats on SACUA. Please consider volunteering for service or nominating a colleague.

VISIT OF CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER LAURITA THOMAS

Chair Smith introduced Laurita Thomas to the faculty at 3:25 P.M. and Thomas addressed the Assembly. She concluded her prepared remarks at 4:00 P.M. and provided the Senate Secretary with a copy of her written responses to the questions in distributed item 3.

Professor Potter asked whether it is likely in the future that bargained-for employees would have different co-premiums than non-bargained-for groups. Ms. Thomas replied that a sliding scale of co-premiums according to salary may create differences among groups, but that it would still be one system. Professor Brown asked how a sliding scale would be applied to retirees. Ms. Thomas replied that she did not know because she had not considered the question.

A member of the Assembly asked how faculty could communicate their concerns and problems to the Benefits Office. Ms. Thomas said that individuals could write to her directly (laurita@umich.edu), or call the Benefits Service Center: Phone: 734-615-2000 (5-2000 from the Ann Arbor campus) or 1-866-647-7657 (toll free for off-campus long-distance calling within the U.S.); Hours: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday – Friday

Professor Askari, chair of the Committee on the Economic Status of the Faculty (CESF), remarked that he knew there have been problems for some patients, including difficulty obtaining insulin pumps. He asked what problems have been reported most frequently. Ms. Thomas deferred to Ms. Marty Eichstadt, who said that many calls have been received complaining that the names of dependents were not listed on the health card. She said that, while that is true, the dependents are nonetheless eligible to receive benefits.

Professor Askari pointed out that the Senate Assembly would like to choose representatives to sit on the Michigan Healthy Community Advisory Committee. Ms. Thomas replied that the Assembly could nominate names, but that the president and executive officers retain their right to make appointments. Professor Stark stated that there are not enough elected faculty representatives on the benefits advisory committee. He noted how a program had been eliminated the previous year, which while small, had been popular with faculty who must travel abroad for their research. Ms. Thomas insisted that there are faculty on the committee, and she called it a “faculty led” committee. Professor Askari asked whether there would be an objection to the Assembly naming a liaison without vote to attend meetings. Ms. Thomas replied that she would transmit the suggestion to the executive officers.

Professor Askari asked whether it was true that the U-M was contemplating giving up local management of the pharmacy benefits program to Blue Cross. Ms. Thomas replied that the administration is evaluating the plan with the help of an external firm. She said that their goal was to get maximum value for the health care dollar. She said that she expected to receive feedback from the firm within the next 60 days. She noted that even if the U-M gives the pharmacy benefits to Blue Cross, because the U-M has a self-insured plan, it will retain some control.

Professor Askari asked whether there was a chance of extending free coverage to drugs for illnesses other than diabetes, such as hypertension. Ms. Thomas said that the next health initiative will be in area of coronary illness, and that the diabetes study will continue.

Professor Abdo stated that she has been getting the “run around” on her health care plan. She said that her primary care physician keeps changing, and she can’t find out who it is. Ms. Thomas said that she should call the internal benefits information office cited above, rather than Blue Cross directly.

Professor Poe asked whether the initiative to improve health and healthy behaviors would have any measurement effect on the cost of health benefits. Ms. Thomas replied that the initiatives were intended to help control the rising cost of health care, but that costs are still expected to grow. Dr. Winfield, chief health officer, added that the initiatives might exert an effect equal to 1 to 3 percent per year. He noted that many retiree costs will be covered by Medicare, but that pharmacy costs have been rising faster than the rest of the health care budget.

A member of the Assembly asked how drugs are selected so that they are subject to zero co-pays. Ms. Eichstadt replied that drugs administered in a physician’s office have no co-pay. Dr. Winfield added that decisions will have to be made about extraordinarily expensive cancer drugs not becoming available that only extend life for a few months.

A member of the Assembly asked for more explanation about incentives and disincentives that are being contemplated, and how are they being evaluated. She noted that incentive programs tend to center on individual behavior when, in fact, there are often environmental factors that are equally or more important. She also pointed out that there is a risk of discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ms. Thomas replied that her office is keenly aware of the need to avoid personal issues. She said that her office considers only incentives that encourage participation in healthy behavior, and will not touch matters that are personal.

Professor Hirshorn asked why the recent RFP for an improved dental plan was constrained to be cost neutral. Ms. Thomas replied that she did not want to increase the cost to the university. She said that the Benefits Office wants to offer a new dental option in 2009. She added that dental school faculty have been involved in the deliberations.

Professor Thouless remarked that it was ironic that the administration is trying to encourage healthy lifestyles through diet and exercise while at the same time increasing the fees to use campus recreation centers. Ms. Thomas replied that there is an effort to maximize access to facilities that were originally built for students, but that the facilities are in need of upgrade.

The guest left the meeting at 4:25 P.M.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted

John T. Lehman
Senate Secretary

University of Michigan Bylaws of the Board of Regents, Sec. 5.02:

Governing Bodies in Schools and Colleges

In each school, college, or degree granting division of the University, including those at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and at the University of Michigan-Flint, the governing faculty shall be in charge of the affairs of the school, college, or division, except as delegated to the executive committee, if any, and except that in the School of Graduate Studies the governing board shall be the executive board, and in the Medical School shall be the executive faculty.
