
**Remarks by WMU-AAUP President Lisa Minnick
Meeting of the WMU Board of Trustees, June 10, 2014**

First, I'd like to offer my congratulations on behalf of the leadership of the WMU-AAUP to the more than 50 faculty colleagues whose promotions and tenure will in just a few moments be made official at last, after an eight-month-long review process and many years of dedicated service. Recognition for their accomplishments may be infrequent – as you know, most professors will be eligible for only two promotions in the course of their entire careers – but the impact of their work is experienced daily by their colleagues and by the generations of students whom they have taught and mentored and whose lives and intellectual development they have influenced in ways that will continue to unfold over a lifetime. It is an honor to work alongside and, in my role as chapter president, to serve these outstanding teachers, researchers, scholars, and artists. I offer my congratulations to all of you who are being celebrated today, my congratulations and my thanks.

As many of the people in this room are aware, the faculty is currently negotiating with the university administration on our new contract. Conversations at the bargaining table have been collegial and spirited. On the agenda are practical topics – compensation, health care – as well as philosophical matters. To take one example of the latter, the faculty team has presented a draft preamble with language that would enshrine in our contract the values of academic freedom, shared governance, and collaboration between faculty and administration, in order to reflect our mutual commitment to articulating and modeling these values for our students and for the benefit of the institution.

Our negotiation team and the chapter leadership have been listening carefully to our colleagues. For months, we have been attending department meetings with faculty all over campus. In addition to their concerns about stagnant salaries, ballooning out-of-pocket costs for health care, and persistent salary inequities, the faculty has also made clear to us the high value they place on shared governance. Additionally, preliminary analysis of the data collected in a recent WMU-AAUP faculty survey indicates that along with economic concerns, “working to restore real shared governance” is among the most frequently cited priorities for negotiations.

We are still collecting and analyzing data from the faculty survey, but so far, we have conducted a preliminary, first-pass analysis of the surveys that were completed by May 5, representing the views of a total of 250 faculty colleagues. In that set of responses, the participants express a number of interesting views, including with respect to their emphasis on shared governance, collaboration, and transparency.

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For example, regarding the academic program review now underway, 67% of the respondents said that they are “somewhat lacking in confidence” or “very much lacking in confidence” in that initiative, compared to 19% who are “somewhat confident” or “very confident.” (14% are neither confident nor lacking in confidence or otherwise in the middle.)

On the question of confidence in the availability of the resources – including financial aid and sufficient course offerings and staffing – needed to support on-time graduation for our students, 35% of the respondents are “somewhat” or “very confident” about the availability of such resources; 45% are “somewhat lacking” or “very much lacking in confidence.” 20% are neither confident nor lacking in confidence or otherwise in the middle. 61% of respondents report that they are “somewhat lacking” or “very much lacking in confidence” in the availability of resources to help students graduate without excessive debt, while just 16% are “somewhat” or “very confident” that the resources are available.

As for their confidence in major campus initiatives, only 18% of faculty respondents said they are “somewhat” or “very” confident in WMU’s new partnership with Cooley Law School, while 31% expressed confidence in the medical school.

The administration’s team, to its credit, has for the most part expressed willingness to hear out what the faculty team has to say. And what our team has to say is very much informed by what our colleagues campus-wide have expressed and continue to express to us as this process unfolds. We are very fortunate to have an outstanding team of faculty colleagues to negotiate on the faculty’s behalf. They are Dr. Cynthia Klekar, our chief negotiator, Associate Professor of English; Dr. Bilinda Straight, Professor of Anthropology; Dr. Onaiwu Ogbomo, Professor of History and Africana Studies; and Dr. Thomas Joyce, Professor of Paper Engineering. They are all dedicated teachers and accomplished researchers and scholars.

Cynthia, Bilinda, Onaiwu, and Tom have agreed to put their research and scholarly work aside this summer to focus on negotiations. In doing so, they have chosen to make a significant extra investment of their time and their talents in the future of this institution. They are outstanding representatives of the caliber of the WMU faculty as a whole, all of them possessed of enormous intellectual talent as well as great personal integrity. The faculty very much appreciates their willingness to serve in these demanding roles.

Among the key objectives of our faculty team are to model collaboration and transparency, to make clear the unique role of the faculty in the university enterprise, and to stand for the highest academic values and standards. However, they face a number of challenges, given the trend that has arisen in recent years on our campus toward increased centralization of authority and a nationwide movement toward deprofessionalization of university faculties. Accordingly, faculty respondents to the survey expressed significant concern not only over the state of shared governance at WMU but also about the university’s reputation compared to peers, and about the administration’s commitment to maintaining WMU’s status as a research university.

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Our position is that you can't be a "top 100 national university" without investing in the resources – including the people – that make such distinction possible. Once again, we are talking about priorities. Budget decisions don't happen in a vacuum. They reflect institutional values. We have all read about President Dunn's generous compensation package, making him now the second-highest paid university president in Michigan and number 18 nationwide. Meanwhile, at this "top 100 national university," faculty salaries rank 342nd in the United States. That is actually down from last year, when we ranked 339th. Once again, WMU is classified as "far below" the national median for faculty salaries, with our salaries at the ninth percentile nationwide for assistant professors, 13th for associate professors, and 14th for full professors.¹

There always seems to be plenty of money for the things that the administration values, but unfortunately, that doesn't seem to include the people who make WMU the high-quality research and teaching institution it is today. But it does seem to include consultants, vendors, contractors, and especially lawyers. For example, the administration's negotiation team includes, in addition to several chairs, deans, and senior administrators, a lawyer brought in from outside to serve as their "chief negotiator," who in that capacity appears to be vested with a great deal of authority in the proceedings but who has no stake in the academic mission of the university, is not invested in that mission, and appears to be unwilling to comprehend even what the mission is or why it has value.

His lack of shared values with everyone else at the table – on both sides of the table – is reflected in a recent negotiation update from the administration's team, which was widely circulated late last week. Not only did it contain multiple inaccuracies about matters as basic and straightforward as which team introduced and presented proposals on which articles of the contract, but more disturbingly, it lapsed into rhetoric that bordered on the union-busting variety. The faculty fully expects and is well prepared for a lively, spirited debate at the bargaining table. This is a university; vigorous debate is what we do. We make arguments; we support them with evidence and data; we challenge one another. We try to make the stronger case. And we absolutely expect the other side to do the same.

However, the tone and content of that recently emailed update raises serious questions about the appropriateness of bestowing such authority on a participant whose objectives seem to be only about winning, with no consideration of what that might mean for our collective ability to continue to offer a top-quality educational experience to the students of this state and beyond. But of course, that is not his responsibility or his problem. The people in this room and elsewhere on campus are the ones who will live with the consequences.

¹ Source: The AAUP 2013-14 Faculty Salary Survey, reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: <http://chronicle.com/article/2013-14-AAUP-Faculty-Salary/145679/#id=172699>

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Members of the board, I've prepared a packet for each of you containing all the negotiation updates² that the WMU-AAUP has shared with our members to date so that you can be apprised on how things have been progressing. We believe that communicating openly and directly about these matters is part of how we honor our commitment to transparency and collaboration. These values also extend to how we conduct ourselves at the bargaining table as well as in our classrooms, in our labs, in our libraries, in our studios, and in our community. We call upon the administration — and the team that represents the administration at the table — to embrace these values as well.

² All WMU-AAUP negotiation updates are available on the chapter blog: wmu-aaup.com



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