

May 26, 2006

TO: Western Michigan University Faculty
FROM: Faculty Senate Executive Board
RE: Graduate Program Review Process and Appeals

As you may know, President Judith Bailey has invited several faculty members of the Faculty Senate structure to participate on the Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee. President Bailey has asked Senate Vice President John Jellies to chair this Appeals Committee and Senate President Mary Lagerwey and particular members of Senate Councils to serve as members of the Committee.

We believe it is important to update the faculty on the role of the Faculty Senate in the review process, the stance we have been taking with the administration, and our role in the recently announced appeals process. We have been listening carefully to faculty concerns with the process and the recommendations from the Provost's Office. The Executive Board has also met as a group and individually with President Bailey. We commend her for seeing the need for further appeals.

The Faculty Senate Executive Board believes that a review of graduate programs was necessary and commends the administration for their initiation of this process. Programmatic reviews should be systematically conducted on a regular basis in any viable organization. Unfortunately, the original justifications have been lost between the initiation of the process in the fall and the final decisions announced on May 11.

The assertion that faculty were involved in the process is technically correct but not an accurate characterization. It is correct that the Faculty Senate provided input into the process. In significant ways, however, the decisions announced on May 11 bore little resemblance to the recommendations made by departments, deans, the evaluation teams, and the Faculty Senate Executive Board's responses to appeals. In these cases, it might be that a façade of faculty participation and Faculty Senate support had been used to justify administrative decisions. Even the appearance of such would not be conducive to our shared vision.

Based on criteria with which the Faculty Senate had agreed, the review committees provided department chairs and deans with a numerical rating and a narrative on program strengths and shortcomings.

The original "appeals" component is of particular concern to us, as it involved the Executive Board directly. Appeals had to be made while the Provost's decisions were still unknown. Department faculty and chairs had the opportunity to submit a written appeal of review teams' final recommendations to the Faculty Senate Executive Board. The Board reviewed the appeals and forwarded its recommendations on those appeals to the Provost's Office. It was understood the Provost's Office would not consider further appeals after this point, but the expectation was the Provost Office's decisions would be based on the published criteria, the recommendations of departments, colleges, review

committees, and the Faculty Senate Executive Board's responses to appeals. It seems the evaluation criterion remained fluid throughout the process and the criteria may not have been applied consistently at all levels of the review. The effect was to render the appeals process irrelevant to the decisions.

The Faculty Senate Executive Board welcomes President Bailey's recent decision to allow additional appeals by programs slated for closure in the May 11 announcement. For this process to have any legitimacy, however, the results of the appeals must be received with utmost consideration, and criteria for decisions must be transparently presented to faculty, departments, and the Appeals Committee. It is our strong contention that faculty governance, fairness, transparency, and consistency in applying criteria must be addressed in the appeals process initiated by the president. We remain concerned about the timing of proposals going to the Board of Trustees, the need for adequate review through the curricular process, and the lack of clarity on the "evolving criteria" for review of the graduate programs.

We do not contest that administrators may have the legal authority to make these recommendations to the Board of Trustees; that is an issue for the WMU-AAUP to consider. We do, however, question their ethical authority to change the direction of the University without significant faculty input. The choice is one of democratic or autocratic governance. Without trust, a sense of fairness, and collaboration, this institution will be challenged to sustain itself. Furthermore, absent deliberate curricular review, we cannot see how the announced changes and its devastating effect on faculty morale could enhance enrollment and retention.

We believe the faculty and administrators can support President Bailey in making difficult decisions. For this to happen, however, these decisions must be made with the shared governance, faculty engagement, and transparency promised at the beginning of the Graduate Program Review process. This is why we applaud the President's decision to consider appeals and clarify her determination that all other changes now proceed through the curricular process. The Executive Board acknowledges there are programs that may need to be discontinued, but encourages these decisions be made in an atmosphere that promotes trust, respect, and unbiased concern for the entire University. The Executive Board supports the administration in its goal for making Western Michigan University the highest caliber university possible, and urges continued conversation as the best means to achieve our mission.

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