

Faculty Senate Meeting

Journal of November 2, 2005,

Seth Brown chaired.

- 1) The meeting opened at 7:05 with a prayer.
- 2) Minutes of the meeting of October 5, 2005 were approved, subject to the amendment that Cynthia Mahmood was in fact present.
- 3) Chair's report: the chair noted that senators should be considering and raising issues for the committees to take up. He welcomed Bob McQuaid and Denise Murphy from Human Resources to discuss present and future issues.
- 4) Denise Murphy gave a PowerPoint presentation and handout outlining changes for next year. She offered a summary of the price increases, changes in benefit structure, and new offerings from the various plans. She also gave some accounting of the rise in premiums, which are not uniform among the plans. ND contributes about 87% of the price, somewhat less for the PPO plan, which is the most expensive and offers most choice and national coverage.

A senator commented that sicker people who need the level of care that the PPO offers might under these terms essentially be asked to shoulder a greater proportion of the cost than healthier people who might opt for the HMOs (which would to some extent vitiate the idea of insurance as a distribution of risk among the covered group as a whole). Murphy responded that although PPO members did indeed seem to make more use of services, there were people at all levels of health or illness enrolled in all of the plans.

In response to questions, Murphy said that satisfaction with insurance issues in all the plans was about the same, that the current PPO worked much better than the previous one, and that ND has found problem resolution to work well with current providers. The difference in premiums between the two HMOs results from the total cost of claims in each, as well as the price structures of the different networks of providers.

Murphy noted that ND's medical costs have recently been rising at a rate of over 10% annually, which is higher than is typical in large corporations and is a trend that would have big implications if it continued. Higher use of services than in other organizations seems to be part of the issue, as well as an older workforce and the availability of expensive high-tech treatments.

ND has been focusing on reducing administrative fees (especially in move away from Cigna), joining a university group for the prescription drug plans, and joining another consortium of universities dealing with these issues. In the future, ND will be raising the employee percentage of contribution; looking into providing incentives for wellness, preventive medicine, and good ongoing care of chronic conditions; and possibly creating

a different “tier structure” for premiums. Tying premiums to income level or number of dependents might be possibilities: ND is ready to consider many possibilities for getting costs under control.

A senator noted that the premium increases for next year are so great, and raises have been so small lately, that employee’s net compensation may actually decline next year, which seems both unfair and demoralizing; he also reported that ND employees (not necessarily full-time ones) are known to be using a local free health clinic, which suggests that current plans may already be inadequate and not in keeping with the University ethos.

Another senator suggested that if there was an ongoing attempt to limit benefits to a particular, very small, percentage of the university operating budget, that might be a misguided attempt to apply inappropriate corporate business models to running of a university.

Another senator urged HR to try to incorporate perspectives from across the university in addressing the issues of cost rises and distribution, in order to find solutions in keeping with the university’s mission. Bob McQuaid responded that a working group was being contemplated, and he welcomed Faculty Senate involvement in that group. It was also noted that the Benefits Committee is seeking ongoing, regular involvement in the process of developing and implementing HR policy, rather than being limited to responding to policy after it is announced.

5) Election for treasurer: David Klein volunteered to stand for election, and in the absence of other nominations was gratefully elected by acclamation.

6) Academic affairs committee report:

The major task of the moment is work on revising and updating language in the academic articles on the procedures for hiring and retaining major academic officers.

7) Administrative affairs committee report:

This committee is taking on the issues posed by so-called “academic freedom” activism among students who are critiquing and seeking to restrict or promote course topics and assignments and the ways in which they are approached in ND classes. The committee is seeking a statement from the administration in support of the academic freedom of the faculty. The prominence of the student paper the “Irish Rover” in this area was noted and the question of its external support raised, as were the issues surrounding the use of the phrase “academic freedom” both in relation to freedom of inquiry and to the desire to exclude or require the inclusion of particular subject matter or arguments in the classroom.

8) Student affairs committee report:

The committee is seeking discussion and an open meeting with Fr. Poorman, using AAUP guidelines as a starting point, about perceived differences in handbook

language and actual administrative practice regarding student academic freedom. A perception that there is censorship exists.

Seth Brown noted that in a recent discussion with the board of trustees, the trustees concluded that it was important to promote better public recognition of ND's commitment to academic freedom, and that the language of the ND mission statement is strong on this.

Another issue is unbecoming student behavior at athletic events: the committee is working to set up a meeting with "Leprechaun Legion" to encourage more creative ways to express enthusiasm.

9) Benefits committee report:

The committee continues to seek ways of being more proactively involved and will be meeting with John Affleck-Graves and other university officers. It was noted that the faculty is now a lower budget priority for ND than in the past, as compared, say, to new construction.

Discussion followed of whether the FS might be able to provide faculty with more up-to-date and/or comprehensive material than that provided by Human Resources on benefits changes, their implications, and ND's position relative to other similar institutions, the better to respond effectively to proposed changes. The committee was asked to consider providing the faculty as a whole with an analysis, perhaps with contextual information about rates of salary increase, inflation, and other relevant factors, and highlighting the place of faculty in university priorities. This was deemed a valuable project, and one that will take a fair amount of time to conduct.

10) New business:

Noreen Deane-Moran reported that the committee on student-originated course evaluations was still working on the formulation of questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Marvin
Co-Secretary