

AAUP Oakland Newsletter

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Why is governance important?

The faculty members at any university are key to implementing the instructional mission. In their roles as teachers, professors are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the curriculum. Their expertise enables the university to provide state-of-the-art instruction, according to the guidelines of accrediting bodies.

Because of their critical role in providing a quality education, faculty members must have a key role in determining the priorities for the institution. This role is best exercised through governance bodies.

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What is the role of administrative costs in Michigan's public university budgets?

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Why tenure is not irrelevant in the 21st century

“The interests of all are coordinated and related, and unilateral effort can lead to confusion or conflict”



The modern American university is defined by a set of joint statements authored in 1941 by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

The modern university is built on the principle that all policy is derived from the involvement of the three constituent elements of the institution—the governing board, the administration, and the faculty.

This concept was at the heart of the reconfiguration of higher education after World War II and launched American universities into a position of global dominance. It encouraged the flowering of academic programs and broadened the research mission of the faculty.

The model of shared governance assumes that the professional expertise of the faculty is best exercised when they have a voice establishing academic programs. Faculty understand the current standards of their fields, are familiar with the intellectual resources available at the university, and have a vested interest in the academic reputation of their institution.

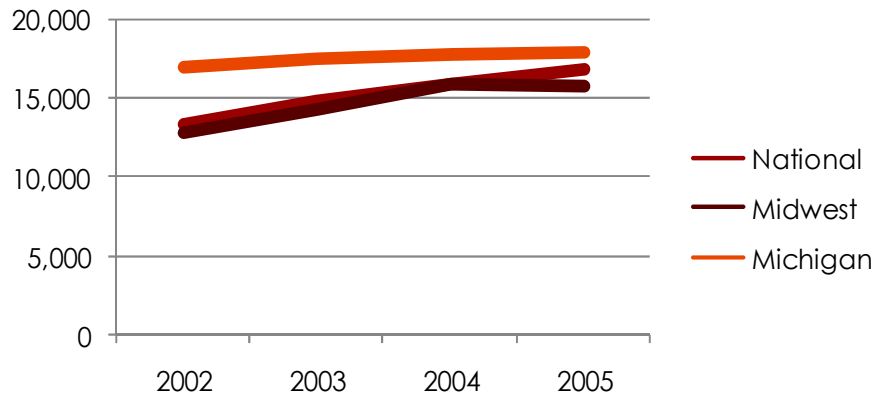
Recently the administration of Oakland has lost sight of the important role of faculty in defining the institution's growth and stature.

Major policy changes, such as the proposal of a new medical school, the re-allocation of university resources to Macomb, and efforts to create a separate category of faculty with no job security all have a tremendous impact on the instructional mission of OU.

In most institutions these sorts of changes would be debated in a governance body. However, the Oakland University Senate has lost its status as the venue for a serious discussion of the merits and weaknesses of new programs.

Regardless of how much influence the faculty has over the creation of new policies, we will live with their budgetary consequences and their implications for the university's academic mission.

Administrative Costs per Student



The Costs of Administration

During the Democratic nomination debates in 2008, moderator Charlie Gibson referred to the comfortable six figure incomes of university faculty. After much uproarious laughter from the audience at St. Anselm College, the ABC newsman retracted his assertion.

Gibson was not alone in his assumptions. It is a popular truism that faculty salaries drive the rising costs of university education. This is not the case. When adjusted for inflation, faculty salaries have barely grown—only .5% over a decade. Instructional costs are not the problem.

For a variety of reasons, the number of administrators at American public universities has risen by 38%. Some of this is due to higher costs of compliance with accrediting bodies as well as government regulation. But the rising costs of administration cannot be explained entirely by these external factors.

Oakland University now has 7 vice presidents, including a senior vice president. Five years ago, we only had 4. We have a dean of a medical school as well as 6 associate deans, and yet no medical students.

More noticeable than the numbers of administrators, salaries have risen considerably. The salaries of university presidents have exploded in Michigan. In 2006 the average salary for presidents at Central, Eastern, Western, and Oakland was \$230,000; now it is \$315,000. In that same time, Gary Russi's salary rose from \$230,830 to \$373,000.

In these times of stringent budget crisis do we really benefit from high executive salaries? Has the work of our executives really expanded so much? Is this where we want to invest our resources?

Why are non-instructional costs at Michigan public universities nearly 10% higher than the national average?

The Plight of Part-time Faculty

When tenure became a widespread practice after World War II, it helped to strengthen university faculties. Tenure eliminated much of the politicization of hiring and firing practices. More importantly, it created an atmosphere where faculty felt free to use their professional judgment to decide how to teach and what to research.

With tenure, American universities became seedbeds for innovative research. New disciplines and professional programs emerged as faculty sought to fill the gaps created by traditional curriculum. Within a generation, American universities became global centers of academic excellence.

Despite the successes of tenure, budgetary forces have worked to undermine the practice. Oakland has embraced a national trend to make greater use of part-time and temporary faculty as a means of lowering costs of instruction.

As the size of the student body has increased to nearly 18,000, the number of tenure track faculty has not risen proportionally. Instead, the need for new professors has been met by larger numbers of part-time, term-

appointed faculty. By 2007 39% of the credits taught at OU were taught by faculty who were technically part time.

Part-time faculty at Oakland fall into two groups. The larger category—special lecturers—teach at least 16 credits a year. They have no retirement plan, no dental coverage, and limited access to health insurance. The other category—lecturers—have no benefits what-so-ever.

Part-time faculty are responsible for teaching much of the general education curriculum—some departments have more than half of their general education credits delivered by lecturers and special lecturers. As such, part-time faculty play a critical role in providing the backbone of an Oakland undergraduate education.

Rapidly growing professional

programs also have high concentrations of part-time faculty. Rather than hiring tenure track faculty with expertise, OU has selected to hire part-timers with limited higher education experience. Although they do contribute important “real world” perspectives, they are seldom familiar with the larger curriculum of the university.

The use of so many part-time faculty is wrong for two reasons. First, it just isn't fair to ask employees to do such important jobs and not give them full benefits and job security. Second, it does not serve the academic mission of the university to rely so heavily on employees with no vested interest in the larger health of the institution. This is a situation that certainly does not benefit the employees, but it doesn't really meet the long term needs of the university either.

Delivery of Credits by Faculty Type

