

Mr. Larry L. Rowe, Esquire

Chair of the Board of Governors

West Virginia State University

November 19, 2012

Dear Chairman Rowe,

I am writing to you in my capacity as West Virginia State University's Faculty Representative to the Advisory Council of Faculty (ACF). The ACF is established in WV code (18B-6-1) to advise the WV Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC), the WV Legislature, and local boards of governors. The ACF is comprised of one faculty-elected representative from each public higher education institution in the state, and as such represents some 4,700 full-time faculty. Our goal is not only to represent faculty's thoughts to the several bodies that govern higher education, but also to provide those bodies a conduit to speak to faculty. The ACF concerns itself with matters that affect higher education state-wide, rather than matters that pertain only to individual schools.

In my second year as WVSU's ACF rep, I've learned that I am to report to the WVSU Board of Governors on a yearly basis. Thank you for allowing me to do this in writing. I'll lay out the more important issues that WV faculty are concerned about, and that ACF is working on.

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1. **Time to Degree**  HEPC has mandated that four-year institutions tailor their degree programs to be completed in 120 credit hours, absent some demonstrable need for more required credits. The ACF supports this as part of a wider effort to increase degree-completion rates. The ACF facilitates this by sharing among WV institutions successful strategies for curriculum reform. Currently, three four-year institutions have completed campus-wide curriculum reform, and 23 others are in process. Faculty here at WVSU are considering our comparatively large general education requirement (51-53 credits) as a place to trim hours.

However, ACF strongly cautions institutions against reducing the quality of their degrees as they reduce hours. We must be judicious in our reforms, and be leery of easy fixes. West Virginia four-year degrees must maintain not only their quality, but also their reputation for quality. College degrees are only as valuable as they are perceived to be. If our reputation for quality were to be undermined, it would take a generation to rebuild it. Every alumnus would be affected.

2. **Pre-K through College Connection** I think we all understand that success in college is based on successful preparation for college. Many students enter college unprepared for entry-level courses, and therefore enroll in developmental courses. This adds extra time (see #1, above) cost, and frustration to their educational journeys, and students in developmental courses tend to drop out at higher rates. We are working toward a seamless transition from kindergarten through college (or other post-secondary education).

As West Virginia public schools adopt new nation-wide learning standards, the "Smarter Balanced Higher Education Advisory Council" has been formed to establish assessments and generally work out an interface between secondary and higher ed. Although the new standards mostly affect secondary education, the ACF is keeping West Virginia higher ed apprised of the ramifications for colleges and universities, and ACF is getting involved wherever we can to help the over-all effort of "creating a culture of college" that begins early in a student's education.

3. When it comes to **salary and benefits**, West Virginia higher education faculty continue to lag behind faculty of other institutions. As a point of comparison, pay for West Virginia faculty ranks 15th among the 16 Southern Regional Education Board states. Reduced services plus increased costs for PEIA coverage bring further financial pressure on faculty. Salary compression continues to penalize our most experienced veteran faculty.

The ACF is certainly not blind to the financial problems being weathered by the nation, our state, individual institutions, and students. None of us got into teaching for the money, and the vast majority of us give it our all regardless of pay or hours worked. But we seek salaries and benefits that keep up with inflation, and attract and retain the best, most productive faculty to West Virginia. In the Legislature and at individual institutions, we seek to keep the conversation open.

4. **Shared Governance** Colleges and universities are diverse, energetic hot-houses for growing new ideas, for research, education and personal development. We proudly note the huge contributions that colleges have made to every aspect of the modern world, from the Renaissance to the present. An essential driver of this great success has been academic freedom, and its necessary corollary, shared governance. The idea of shared governance is that college faculty are full partners in guiding the institutions to which they have invested their professional lives. Shared governance takes many forms, and WVSU's model of a strong Faculty Senate working collegially with administration is fairly common.

We note two recent scenarios that illustrate the value of shared governance. Recently, Mountain State University collapsed as a result of serious problems that were left unaddressed for far too long. The administration of Mountain State was authoritarian and paternalistic, and it marginalized and intimidated faculty. So MSU faculty, who were in the best position to see the institution's problems, were not able to help save the school.

Last year at WVSU, a strong tenured faculty voice brought our problems to light, and pressed for change in time to save our institution. And now as we move forward, WVSU faculty feel the ownership that makes us enthusiastic, effective partners in the revitalization of State. That is the model of shared governance that ACF envisions, state-wide. And at ACF meetings, I am proud to represent WVSU faculty, and to be part of the WVSU community.

5. **textbook affordability** The ACF is helping to coordinate efforts at West Virginia institutions of higher ed to better implement HEPC's policy on textbook affordability. HEPC's Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dr. Kathy Butler, has asked ACF to review Series 51 and recommend changes as needed. WVSU's Textbook Affordability Committee met for the first time on November 2.

6. **Outcomes-Based Funding** At its annual summer retreat, July 15-16, 2012, HEPC Chair David Hendrickson told the ACF that HEPC is moving toward performance-based funding for higher education. Last week, a draft plan was circulated among ACF representatives. Each ACF has shared this plan with his/her faculty colleagues, and I have included the draft with this report. HEPC is seeking feedback. The ACF is currently doing its homework, talking with our faculty colleagues, and trying to share our best ideas for the benefit of higher ed, state-wide.

I have had the opportunity to meet with Chairman Hendrickson and HEPC Chancellor Dr. Paul Hill on various occasions. I believe I share the view of my fellow ACF reps in finding both gentlemen (and their staff) very easy to work with. They engage faculty with candor and engender mutual respect. More senior ACF reps tell me that HEPC is welcoming our participation far more than ever before. The Chancellor and Chairman have directly asked us for feedback on all the topics above. The tone isn't that of "we'll tell you what to do", but rather "let's find what works". These are times of immense possibility for higher ed in West Virginia.

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I will be happy to field your questions about this report or any other related matters, as best as I am able. Please be aware that I regularly post ACF documents on the WVSU web site, on the Faculty Senate page. I will bring to the ACF any messages, concerns, questions, etc. you wish. I can be reached as indicated, below.

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attachment: West Virginia Select Legislative Committee for Outcomes Based Funding in Higher Education (draft plan)