May 16, 2016

Statement in opposition of Class A Legislation concerning Faculty Salary Policy

We oppose the proposal and urge a NO vote.

1. The proposal imposes costs for minimal benefit. The mandatory raises (market adjustments plus tier advancements) approximate a 4% annual raise only if inflation reaches 2%. Estimated central costs are $2 million initially and $.5 million ongoing.

2. If inflation exceeds 2%, or many faculty accelerate tier advancements, some units will face hard choices. Without an ample supply of retirees, increasing tuition, or other funding, an academic unit can prevent salary compression only with cuts, including hiring and retentions. Without customization, the policy ignores compression for faculty who exhaust tiers or whose salaries pass the 8% cap for tier raises (based on the average UW-base, 12-month-prorated, TT and WOT full-professors’ salaries – now about $175,000).

3. The UW will no longer have one salary policy: some units will customize raise formulas or opt out of tiers. This hodgepodge will undermine faculty unity and the power of numbers to advocate for competitive compensation. Prosperous units will not advocate for poor cousins. Critically, a unit’s ability to reduce raises will diminish its leverage when negotiating with funders, such as hospitals.

4. You are asked to vote now without knowing what policy your unit may adopt. That depends on what a majority of your faculty, your dean or chair, and the provost, approve. You may spend several years negotiating your unit's custom policy.

5. Tier-advancement and market-adjustment raises will be no more guaranteed than regular and additional merit raises are now. The proponents argue the UC system's step raises have been inviolable. They ignore another explanation – California's historical big investment in its universities. (Even so, UC has recently experienced drastic cuts and salary freezes.) Our core problem has been, and remains, funding. The proposal permits tier-raise deferments for “severe financial stress” in an academic unit (not just the whole UW). When the stress ends, the raise is not retroactive. So, a faculty member could work four years for a tier-advancement and then wait several more years for an 8% non-retroactive raise.

6. Criteria for tier advancements are vague and inconsistent. (Sections 24-35H and 24-61D). They hover between requiring “continuing high achievement” versus performance “typical” of a faculty member at that career stage in that field – whatever that means. Tier advancements can be sped up, delayed, or denied, raising questions about how a review committee will assess whether a faculty member is ahead, somewhat behind, or far behind some amorphous and variable standard. The ambiguous language obfuscates the key issue of whether tier advancements reward only high performance, especially post-tenure, or whether they are a quasi-entitlement for everyone performing satisfactorily. This ambiguity invites manipulation, unequal treatment, disputes, and financial uncertainty.

7. The policy removes the 2% annual raise for regular merit. Faculty who don’t receive tier advancements will be entitled only to a market-adjustment raise, capped at 4%. Since 2006, CPI has ranged from -.4 to 3.8. The policy arguably supersedes any individual right to a legislative general salary increase that exceeds the market-adjustment raise.