



Squandering of Resources, Lack of Transparency, and Ignoring Shared Governance Paint Ugly Picture of UW System Administration

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The following is the statement of the AFT-Wisconsin Higher Education Council concerning the redesign of University of Wisconsin Personnel Systems and the recent revelation that the UW System has a surplus that exceeds \$1 billion:

“For more than a year, faculty and academic staff unions throughout the UW System have been questioning the actions of high-level administrators at System Administration. We have written several letters to President Reilly and to the Board of Regents about unsettling trends we are seeing emerge at the System level. We welcome state legislators to this conversation.

“While members of the Joint Committee on Employee Relations have every right to question the financial situation of the University of Wisconsin System Administration, the focus should be on how we got to this point. The University of Wisconsin System Administration has closed its decision-making process to public scrutiny, shut faculty and staff out of the conversation, and engaged in serious mismanagement of public funds.

“Rather than engaging the Board of Regents, faculty and academic staff governance structures, and student governance, System administrators acted with total disregard to the important role that all of these bodies play in the governance of the university. The UW Personnel Systems redesign, for example, was done behind closed doors, with hand-picked faculty and staff, instead of allowing governance and the campus unions to select their own representatives. Rather than listening and engaging all constituents in this important discussion, the administration chose a process that limited input and debate. It is in the public interest to strengthen and reinvigorate shared governance and campus unions because organized and engaged students, staff, and faculty are vital to ensuring greater budgetary transparency and accountability in the UW System.

“Conversely, the weakening of shared governance and campus unions has contributed to gross managerial malpractice. The reserves themselves are not the topic of concern. Reserves are actually standard accounting practice. It is the lack of transparency and the secretive nature of the reserves that raise a red flag. Why did

top administrators conceal the fact that our campuses were amassing sizeable reserves during the most difficult economic time in the last 80 years? For several years, campuses have authorized a disproportionate increase in administrative positions, as well as a series of sizeable salary increases to existing administrators.

“During this period: they have burdened students with a series of large tuition hikes at a time when students nationwide are burdened with mounting and unprecedented levels of debt; they have allowed compensation for graduate employees to fall steadily behind the cost of living and below graduate salaries at peer institutions; and they have allowed salaries for faculty and non-administrative staff to stagnate and fall even further below the salary levels of our regional and national peer institutions. Time after time, System leaders have said that tuition increases would go to salary increases for workers and to enhance student programming. It is obvious that the Reilly Administration has repeatedly failed to honor those promises.

“We believe that recent moves by Minnesota legislators to increase spending on higher education in exchange for institutional accountability and a tuition freeze might serve as a partial model for cleaning up the mismanagement of the UW System. Inspired by those moves, we strongly urge Wisconsin's legislative leaders to increase public spending for higher education in exchange for the following commitments from UW Administration: greater managerial accountability to students, graduate student employees, staff, faculty, and the public; a freeze on tuition increases in the UW System; and a balanced use of available funds to promote student achievement, degree attainment, and student satisfaction with the educational experience, on the one hand, and to improve the salaries of UW employees, with the goal of maximizing the gains for the lowest paid, on the other hand. We do not believe these goals are in tension. On the contrary, because students' learning conditions are employees' working conditions, the one cannot be improved without the other.”

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