

Remarks on Faculty Salaries to the Board of Regents, April 2020

by Dr. Jonathan Sturm, President, Faculty Senate

Written March 23, 2020

As with all senate presidents, I am grateful for an opportunity to speak, this time in writing, to you this year about the faculty at Iowa State University. Last time I spoke to you, in 2017, ISU was experiencing the peak of an enrollment boom, faculty research was bringing in exceptional federal funding, one of three students was graduating in good time and with zero debt, and ISU brought about \$400 million in economic benefit to the state.

In the three years since, enrollments have dropped, funding by the state has been cut repeatedly, and factors external to faculty control—Workday and Improved Service Delivery models, the looming enrollment cliff, and now COVID-19 particularly—have impacted the work and lives of everyone on campus. Notwithstanding these dramatic changes, faculty have kept their shoulders to the harness, bringing in record federal funding, and continuing to offer students a world-class education, in new and improved ways that decrease their time to graduation. As a senate, we have worked with administrators to support and implement new policies for our term faculty. We have implemented new departmental training around inclusive classrooms. We have spoken out against racism and harassment, communicating our support for *all* our students and promoting a welcoming environment for all learners at ISU.

COVID-19 has essentially brought all American life to a complete standstill. State budgets will be repurposed at some time to cover unemployment costs. It is anybody's guess how much that will cost, and whether any other budget items will be addressed. In the face of these monumental state difficulties, I doubted that my remarks about faculty salaries and work would have much impact. And you likely expect me to make exactly the same points as presidents have for several years in a row.

Yet here I am, because you need to hear some other facts of the past year from the faculty perspective. Even without the devastation of the coronavirus, 2019-20 would *still* have been an intensely challenging and trying year for faculty at ISU.

In July 2019 ISU “went live” with two new management models: Workday, and Improved Service Delivery (ISD). Faculty were not deeply involved in the decision to adopt or roll out either of these, beyond information sharing and some consulting. Within a month of the Workday rollout, it became abundantly clear that the computer program was a complete and total misfit for the culture and nature of faculty work. Within a month of the ISD rollout, it became abundantly clear that the centralization of services had effectively taken experts and their expertise away from the local spaces. Because of this reassignment and reorganization of staff into “trees,” staff members are no longer familiar with the processes and needs of local departments. The quality and efficiency of support for regular faculty work (e.g., processing grant applications, paying contractors, hiring graduate students, etc.) have suffered, and the compounded effects of mistakes are costly and impede workflow.

One faculty senate caucus on campus estimates that the additional faculty workload in 2019-20 resulting from the problems in Workday—with its opaque ways of operating, its unintuitive language and processes, its limited access to data and reports that are crucial

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for faculty success—along with the removal of expertise from departments has added so many shadow work hours for faculty that the additional time spent adapting to and using these two systems alone is equal to at least a 5% pay **cut** for faculty.

Let me repeat that. Faculty in this past academic year have sunk so much time working through the quagmire of additional learning and effort these two systems have required that the additional effort is the equivalent of a pay cut of that magnitude. They have had to set aside time from their principal research agendas in order to create and submit Worktags for grant or travel reimbursement. They have had to solicit help to see grant budgets that were obscured from them for months and that previously they knew how to access. They have had to reconfigure from the ground up their reporting. They have been unable to balance grant budgets for months. I am asking you here, what resources does the Board have to offset if not compensate for this kind of time investment by faculty to *ensure* the university continues to work well?

Now, with COVID-19, faculty have needed, immediately, to reconfigure all our education and pedagogy to a virtual approach online. And faculty *are* stepping up. They *are* getting the work done. They *are* prioritizing students and the education they expect and have paid for. This undertaking is a massive one. Administration will have a strong spotlight on it—they are your direct reports, and the policy decisions will come from their offices. But behind them, faculty are setting courses up to be taught (99.5% of ISU courses are online/virtual-teaching-ready as of today, March 23, 2020, and that is with one week of notice). Faculty are communicating through me and other leaders what immediate needs arise; what academic deficiencies they perceive that need fixing before we get going as a virtual university.

Also, they communicate their concerns and worries—how will I get free time at home to teach while my three children are *also* at home and demanding my attention now that day care and schools are closed? How will my research agenda continue? Will my tenure and promotion be affected or compromised as a result of this crisis? How will I pay my bills when my spouse is not working?

Who is standing up for faculty at this time? Who is saying, “We know you have worked through the initial challenges of Workday and ISD that are so out of line with how you need to carry out your professional responsibilities. Now also you are stepping up for ISU students in their moment of need during a national crisis and doing your best to keep them on track to graduation. You are maintaining ISU’s AAU and Research-1 status and exploring ways to continue your research. You are doing all of this while under strict social distancing protocols and adverse circumstances that necessitate doing this work from home with your young children at home the entire time, since their lives are also completely disrupted.”

What would have happened if faculty stood up in one collective voice and said, “No. We cannot teach under these circumstances. Our morale was already low, our reserves were exhausted, and so students will have to bear the brunt of the impossibility of adjusting to the bizarre realities the novel coronavirus has placed on us?” That was not our reaction,

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and we ask now of you, our governors to compensate us for this work. We ask that you see this national emergency, added to 9 months of strenuous adjustment to new university operational systems, not only from your vantage points, or from the vantage points of the students, but also from the position of the faculty. What resources do you have available to assist us?

This speech is typically about salaries. As you must be aware, however, it is about so much more than salaries this time. Sure, we remain at the bottom of our Peer university salary ranges, as we have been for years. Sure, we are losing faculty to better paying positions elsewhere. (Vet-Med indicates salaries are not competitive to the extent that they have been trying to hire a small animal surgeon to the college for about 5 years, but no qualified applicants show interest since they can make more money for less work in the private sector.) But additionally, we are struggling with work overload, opaque business management systems that add time to our work days, the removal of our known experts who previously helped us get our work done, replaced by people across campus who are experts in finance or HR, but not in the specific aspects of those fields with which we need immediate assistance. And now we are struggling with the balance of family and work under the COVID-19 crisis. What resources do you have to bring to our assistance?

Is this temporary? Will we get through this? I believe so. But, in the meantime, what can the Board of Regents do for faculty? Are you there for us? If so, in what way? Something meaningful? Or, are your hands tied? When this is over, will you breathe a sigh of relief and return to former priorities, or will you begin to look at, to study, to puzzle through the best ways to ensure that faculty *stay* in Iowa, that they remain here to teach and to conduct world-class, ground-breaking research at Regent Universities?

This year the message from faculty is challenging. I have worked with this message and communicated it internally all year long. I am grateful to have had a chance to share it with you here, hoping that it is clear, convincing, and timely. My thanks in advance for any and all tangible efforts you make on behalf of the faculty at Iowa State University who are proving their dedication to their disciplines, their students, and their university. I am available for any interaction or discussion you may wish to have with me, should you feel more depth is needed concerning the issues I raise above.

Very sincerely,



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