Statement on Working Conditions for the Faculty at LSU

Historically, the administration of LSU has not paid appropriate attention to the working conditions of the faculty. In general, employees are more creative and productive if their working conditions are positive and supportive. This statement will address a fundamental question that should underlie all projections and plans for the future of this university: How can we develop and sustain LSU as a more creative and productive institution that acts as an engine to promote the cultural and economic life of Louisiana and as a center to educate and enlighten Louisiana’s citizens?

Over the years, many universities have fallen into the habit of measuring academic success exclusively in terms of institutional awards, honors, and the procurement of outside funding, while infrequently referring to actual achievements and contributions to the profession and to the university’s mission. This emphasis on institutional forms of recognition without fully taking into account actual achievements induces the faculty to pursue only those projects that have received institutional approval in advance. It inhibits the spirit of free inquiry and discourages risk-taking, which is critical to innovative work in both the sciences and the humanities. This trend encourages careerism and is diametrically opposed to what has long been recognized as a crucial condition for intellectual creativity and productivity, namely salary levels and working conditions that promote a disinterested pursuit of knowledge without worries about economic survival.

In light of these observations, we suggest some reforms that are designed to improve the working conditions of LSU’s faculty. Goals like these may seem idealistic in the present context, but can be realized by an organized LSU faculty that is committed to changing the current environment of the university and the state.

1. Creating a balance between merit and equity in faculty salaries. Wage inequities are demoralizing for the faculty, especially when they are perceived as unfair and having little to do with the value of one’s contribution to the university. While it is appropriate and fair to reward scholarship and research at a research institution, the intellectual atmosphere and spirit of cooperation among the faculty tend to suffer when unfair inequities in wages are not addressed or, worse, are reinforced by institutional policies. Reasons for wage inequities include salary compression with senior faculty earning the same or less than junior faculty; discrimination against academic couples deemed to earn “enough” and, therefore, awarded lower pay increases; gender discrimination, with senior women falling behind in wages as they advance in their careers; making counter-offers that reward faculty who want to leave LSU, while neglecting outstanding faculty with proven records; unfairly rewarding administrative positions without direct links to specific performance criteria; and so forth. In the long term, wage inequities will make not only individual academic units less competitive
in the market for outstanding faculty, but also entire disciplines less attractive as career choices for the next generation of scholars and scientists.

2. **Greater influence of the faculty on teaching assignments and evaluations.** Faculty members are dedicated to the primary mission of LSU to provide state-of-the-art education to the citizens of this state, the nation, and the world. Decisions about class size, class level, and entry requirements for classes and programs should be made by the faculty on the basis of sound pedagogical principles and not strictly budgetary conveniences. Furthermore, faculty should be encouraged to regard teaching as critical to the primary mission of a research university, and research as the foundation of excellent pedagogy. Teaching is an art that can never be reduced to a set of prescriptive norms, and teachers should receive recognition not only for high student evaluations but for consistently taking on the more difficult pedagogical tasks, creating new courses and programs, and engaging in innovative, even risk-taking, pedagogical practices. Multiple and complex approaches to the evaluation of teaching are critical if LSU is not to fall under the paradigm of the “Wal-Mart” university.

3. **More liberal sabbatical policies.** The intellectual health of this institution can only benefit if all faculty have the opportunity to have at least a year off for research and writing after six years of teaching and service. The better universities in the United States have better sabbatical policies than LSU. Some institutions give their faculty members a year’s leave with full pay after 12 semesters of teaching. The majority of well-ranked universities give their faculty a year’s leave after a similar period for at least two-thirds pay. When faculty have more time to develop new projects through sustained periods of research, they are more likely to be competitive for outside grants. In the end, such sustained periods of research can only benefit the overall pedagogy of the university and the general quality of the research that it produces. Any faculty member who can demonstrate a viable plan of research consistent with the mission of this university should get a sabbatical.

4. **Diversity of faculty at all ranks.** The university should work at achieving gender and ethnic diversity of all ranks at LSU, including the rank of designated professors. There should be clear procedures for addressing inequities when they are demonstrated. Faculty in individual departments should play a role in establishing these procedures and should also establish an appropriate grievance process for any faculty members who feel they have been passed over as the result of inappropriate considerations. The goal is not quotas or ratios but rather revising the procedures that may have led to apparent injustice and transforming the work conditions that may have created imbalances with respect to diversity. For example, if women and minorities are more involved than other faculty with student advising and mentoring, on the one hand, or program creation and administration, on the other, they need to be more effectively rewarded for these practices or given administrative support that will minimize the demands that are made on them.
5. **Less bureaucratization of the faculty.** Increasingly in recent years, the administration, at all levels, has transferred more tasks and work to the faculty without providing adequate administrative support for faculty and students. In many cases, deadlines for grant applications, tenure and promotion reports, and other tasks have been determined for the convenience of the administration and not the faculty. Faculty find themselves spending more research time filling out forms and writing reports. For faculty members who are committed to research and writing, the summer weeks and other holidays are precious uninterrupted periods of research that are being eroded by these and other administrative infringements. Both faculty and students suffer from slow, outmoded, and redundant administrative procedures. The administration should have the mission of supporting the faculty and not turning the faculty into the support of the administration.

Respectfully submitted by the Faculty Senate *Ad Hoc* Committee on Bargaining and Representation

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