

# *The Senator*

The Newsletter of the Wake Forest University Senate

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Donald Frey, President

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## **Senate's Year in Review**

**Donald Frey, President '03-'04**

The academic year 2003-04 saw the University Senate start or complete action in a number of areas. Some of these issues were known at the start of the year, while others developed somewhat unexpectedly as the year unfolded. A list of the Senate's activities follows:

- The Senate voted in November for a system of administrator evaluation, completing work begun in 2002-03. Future Senates will monitor implementation by the Provost's office.
- The Senate at its February meeting voted to join the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics, a group aiming to increase national faculty voice on intercollegiate athletics issues; its organizational building blocks are faculty senates. This action was recommended by an ad hoc study committee. Kathy Smith, who is also next year's chair of the undergraduate Faculty Athletic Committee, will serve as our liaison with the Coalition.
- During the year, the Wake Forest administration adopted extreme financial measures, including a pay freeze. The Senate heard from key administrators, and from the chairman of the Board of Trustees, who explained their views of the crisis and of the measures taken. Frank exchanges between faculty and administrators occurred.
- This spring, the Senate's health affairs committee studied medical-insurance premiums geared to an employee's level of pay, thus reducing the insurance burden on lower-paid employees. After sampling campus opinion, mathematically simulating such plans, and looking at similar plans at other universities, the committee recommended the concept. Eventually, the Senate asked the administration to design a plan based on this concept and present it to the community for its consideration. (See separate report in this issue of *The Senator*.)
- At a called meeting on April 30, the Senate asked the Board of Trustees to include faculty on the committee that will search for a successor to President Hearn. This climaxed a year of uncertainty as to how forcefully to act on the issue. Some felt that President Hearn's major illness made it awkward for the Senate to address issues of choosing his successor. Yet, when in late April the president simultaneously returned to his job and announced his retirement in 2005, it was obviously time to act, lest faculty perspectives be ignored in choosing a new president. (See separate article in this issue of *The Senator*.)
- Finally, Senate committees continued to play their important roles. The Senior University Appointments committee interviewed 10 candidates for three senior positions (two deanships and director of library) over a period of about one month. The University Oversight committee kept close watch on performance of the University endowment. An ad hoc committee on staff issues was appointed by the Senate President at the April 14 meeting to deal with issues unique to non-faculty employees. This committee holds the potential to greatly expand the kind of issues within the purview of the Senate; someday it may be incorporated permanently in the Senate by-laws. (See separate story in this *Senator*.)

Looking to the future, I see several areas still needing attention. First, efforts must be made to coordinate and improve the message conveyed by faculty representatives to Trustee committees. Our relationship with the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics must develop and mature. The search for a new president must reflect significant faculty input. Finally, the Senate's role in dealing with issues raised by staff employees must be defined and developed.

# **Senate Resolution: Faculty Must be Included on President Search Committee**

**by Donald Frey, President**

At a called meeting on April 30, 2004, the University Senate unanimously passed a firmly worded resolution, intended for the Wake Forest Trustees, calling for a "significant number" of "active faculty" to be included on the committee that trustee Chairman Murray Greason is appointing to search for a successor to President Thomas Hearn. Hearn announced his retirement effective in June 2005 the previous week. The full text of the resolution follows.

*Whereas President Hearn has announced his retirement;*

*Whereas the search for a new President is among the most important tasks now facing Wake Forest University;*

*And whereas best practices for presidential searches mandate integral faculty participation;*

*Be it resolved that the University Senate strongly urges the Trustees of the University to include active faculty, from the college and professional schools, elected by their peers, in significant number as full members of the committee that will conduct the search for a new president;*

*Be it further resolved that faculty membership on an ancillary or advisory committee is an inadequate substitute for full membership on the search committee;*

*And be it further resolved that the final candidates produced by the search be interviewed by the Senate's Senior University Appointments committee with its advice tendered to the Trustees.*

That faculty were effectively frozen out of the last presidential search back in 1982-83 has been a sore point with faculty for over twenty years. Over those years, various Senate officers have attempted to communicate this point to the trustees.

Sensing a need to continue to communicate this point, Senate President Donald Frey had urged the Senate's committee on senior appointments to bring such a resolution to the Senate this year. However, out of respect to President Hearn, who suffered ill health during 2003-04, action was postponed. When Hearn resumed the active presidency and simultaneously announced his retirement publicly (apparently the trustees learned of the decision a year earlier), the Senate officers decided to act quickly.

The need for quick action was apparent. Trustee chairman Greason-- at the same news conference at which Hearn made his retirement announcement-- revealed that his plans for appointing a search committee were quite far along. Those plans included only one faculty member on the search committee itself. Greason has also indicated possible faculty appointments to an advisory committee to the search committee-- a device that did not work well in 1982-83. The Senate firmly stated that such committees are an "inadequate substitute for full membership on the search committee." As of this writing, final plans for the search committee have not been announced and no trustee response to the resolution has been received.

## **Thanks to Senator Giz Womack**

**Here is a well-earned "thank you" to Staff Senator Giz Womack, who is completing his service with the Senate this year. He was among the first three senators elected by the non-faculty employees in 2000. In addition to his regular duties, Giz was the creator of the Senate's Web page and its Webmaster for its formative first years. We thank him for his many efforts!**

# **The Issue of Salary-Dependent Premiums for Health Insurance:**

## **A Report by the Senate's Healthcare Committee**

At the Senate meeting in February, the Committee on Healthcare was authorized to study the question of University adoption of a salary-dependent, health-insurance premium plan. The Committee began exploring the issue when it learned that insurance premiums next year are likely to reach greater than 25% of the salary of the lowest paid employees at WFU. One step to better the situation is to change the premium rate schedule to a sliding scale so that premiums are dependent on salary. The basis of such a plan is that the university would be increasing its contribution for the lowest paid employees while decreasing its subsidy of the highest paid employees. Such plans are in place at a number of other universities including Brown, Yale, Colgate, Bucknell, and Oberlin. Most recently, Davidson College adopted such a plan.

The committee held numerous meetings to consider the issue. It also had discussions with individuals from human resources here on campus as well as numerous email exchanges and telephone conversations with HR personnel at other universities. In addition, the committee sponsored two open forums in March and April that were each attended by approximately 100 people, a mix of staff and faculty. At the first forum, the committee simply presented the idea and collected the verbal comments of the community. At the second forum, organized by the Fostering Dialog Theme Year Committee, the idea was presented by a moderator, and a balanced panel discussed the positives and negatives of the plan. Additionally, the idea was presented to the faculties of the undergraduate colleges. Numerous faculty and staff sent emails to the Committee in support of, and in opposition to, the plan. The majority of the reactions to this idea have been favorable, although it is clear that some on campus strongly oppose the idea. The community reactions are summarized below.

### Summation of Reactions Received By Way of the Forums and Other Avenues:

Numerous comments were directed to health insurance matters beyond the purview of the proposal. Great concern was expressed over the fact that the University contributes 60% of the share of premiums to Reynolda campus employees and 75% to Medical School employees. Many urged us to ask the Administration to reevaluate this disparity.

The dominant negative response to the idea of a salary dependent premium plan went to the heart of the idea: wealth redistribution. Several persons noted that they wanted to choose for themselves whether they made charitable contributions and when making such contributions to choose the recipient of these donations.

In turn, the dominant positive response emphasized the university's commitment to Pro Humanitatae. For the individuals with this perspective, health care was considered to be more than just a fringe benefit, but was an essential aspect of health and happiness. The logical extension of this belief is that premiums should be affordable for all employees.

Concerns were raised over whether such a program should consider only employee salary or total family income. This issue could be dealt with by requiring a disclosure of family income, although that solution raises in turn privacy issues. The observation was made that only those who sought the benefit of lower premiums would be required to disclose family income. This would lessen the instances of privacy invasions, and it was noted, such disclosures are common for the receipt of other benefits (e.g., academic loans). This complex issue remained unresolved.

Many asked about, or pointed to, the effects of tax law and other government programs to argue for and against the proposal. Higher paid employees pay a lower percentage of higher premiums since premiums are paid with pre-tax dollars. But, higher paid employees subsidize potentially under-insured parties by paying higher taxes for Medicaid, etc.

Finally, some asked that the Committee consider what was styled a “multi-tiered plan.” At the low level, there would be basic coverage. Wealthier employees or employees willing to pay a high percentage of their income for health insurance could pick superlative, but expensive, coverage. But, the low paid employees would at least be better able to afford basic coverage.

In the second open forum and for the presentation to the undergraduate faculties, we conducted straw polls to quantify the opinions of those in attendance. At the faculty meeting, 93% of those in attendance indicated that they believed that the university community should put a priority on reducing healthcare costs for the lower paid faculty and staff. Additionally, 84% of these faculty members were either in strong or moderate support of a salary dependent premium plan. At the later forum, 64% of those attending supported a salary dependent premium plan, while 20% felt that the idea required further study. Additionally, the majority of direct communications by e-mail or telephone with the committee have supported this idea.

**Conclusions:**

The Healthcare committee provided the campus community with many opportunities to explore the idea of a salary dependent premium plan. As a result of these discussions, the Committee judged that a majority of the faculty, as well as the campus community, generally support this idea. The committee felt that it is time for the administration to more formally develop an idea and bring a specific plan to the community for further analysis for making health insurance more affordable for lower paid employees. The committee therefore brought a motion to the Senate on April 30, which, with amendment, passed with a large majority. The Senate action puts the issue to the Administration: to address the significant problem of increasing insurance costs by developing a salary-dependent premium plan and by exploring the option of offering several tiers of insurance coverage, with a lower priced and lower coverage option.

**Ad Hoc Committee on Reynolda Campus Staff Issues Begins Work**

**By Dana Hutchins**

The recently appointed Ad-Hoc Committee on Reynolda Campus Staff Issues, an advisory body established for the purpose of examining relevant issues identified by University staff, began its monthly meetings on May 6. This initial meeting served to introduce the staff representatives to each other, discuss its charges and purpose, and to start a dialogue of communication across the Reynolda Campus. Gloria Muday, incoming Senate president, gave the committee a review of the University Senate and its role in the University, and the role that the Ad-Hoc Committee of the University Senate would play. With this information, monthly meetings were set to begin the committee’s work.

The committee would like to extend thanks to Gloria Muday, Don Frey, and Paul Ribisl for their efforts in getting this committee off the ground and to the staff senators Giz Womack, Dana Hutchens, Gloria Stickney, and Julie Groves for their work getting this committee off to a running start.

**Transitions**

**University Senate Officers**

	<u>2003-04</u>	<u>2004-05</u>
<b>President:</b>	<b>Donald Frey</b>	<b>Gloria Muday</b>
<b>Vice President:</b>	<b>Gloria Muday</b>	<b>Harry Titus</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Dale Dagenbach</b>	<b>Yvonne Hinson</b>
<b>Assistant Secretary:</b>	<b>Yvonne Hinson</b>	<b>Greg Shelness</b>
<b>At-Large Member of Executive Cmte:</b>	<b>Joe Tobin</b>	<b>Joe Tobin</b>

**Note: new Senate officers take office at the start of the new academic year.**