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March, 2004

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At Western Michigan University

The Semester of Workshops

Gary Mathews, Ph.D.
WMU-AAUP President

This may well be thought of as the semester of workshops. We have scheduled workshops on tenure and promotion, classroom visitation for evaluators, and retirement options, as well as several focus groups for recently hired faculty.

There were few participants at our recently held tenure and promotion workshop. However, an important point was raised about narrative student comments in tenure and promotion files. Article 16.4.6.3, on page 30 of the current *Agreement* states: "Bargaining unit members may choose to include unsigned student comments in adjunctive files submitted for performance

reviews.... If the faculty member does submit comments, the full data set shall be included in the adjunctive file."

In other words, it is no longer permitted to cull positive comments about a class from students and omit the negative comments. If you use some comments about a class from the students, you must include all comments, both positive and negative. It is too late to correct tenure and promotion files this year, but let us all be vigilant in preparing and reviewing the next years' files.

An Open Letter on the Reliability and Validity of ICES

Dear Faculty,

This letter concerns the validity and reliability of the new student evaluation instrument, the Instructor and Course Evaluation System (ICES) form, that faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences began using in Fall, 2003.

The Department of Sociology has assessed this instrument and is deeply concerned that it is generating invalid and unreliable data about individual faculty and about the faculty as a whole. Thus, individual faculty members are losing valuable and accurate documentation of their teaching for tenure and promotion decisions. Additionally, the faculty as a whole is losing valuable and accurate information about the quality of

teaching and the level of student satisfaction with courses at Western Michigan University.

The position of the Department of Sociology is that during our last contract negotiations the Faculty and the Administration both agreed to institute a standardized, University-wide student evaluation instrument. We understand that both sides negotiated in good faith, believing that a valid and reliable instrument would be developed and instituted. We further understand that we are currently involved in a two-year test of the ICES instrument. With the results of one semester of testing in hand, however, we believe that the instrument is so seriously flawed that it should be dis-

continued at once.

Our aim is to bring these concerns to the attention of the Administration. Our hope is that Faculty and Administration will come to a joint agreement to immediately discontinue use of the evaluation instrument and to temporarily return to our previous systems until a replacement instrument can be constructed and implemented. What follows are the specific problems with the instrument as identified by the Department of Sociology's analysis of the instrument and the statistical results generated from it.

One major concern is with questions 1 and 2: the global questions regarding overall evaluation of the course and the instructor. On each of these questions, our department had an average rate of *non-response* of 18% (at least one faculty member had a non-response rate as high as 37%). That is, 18% of the students who filled out the survey skipped these two questions. The standard rule for survey research in the social sciences is that a non-response rate above 5% is cause for concern. Above 5%, we need to know if certain groups of students were less likely to answer – for example, “A” students, hurried students, students who wanted to look at the specific questions first, students in different demographic categories. If those students who failed to respond to the items differ systematically from those who provided information, an 18% non-response rate seriously biases the results, rendering the statistics invalid because we can no longer assume that the questions have adequately measured student perceptions of the course and instructor. Also, the instrument will likely be unreliable because future administrations of the survey will probably yield inconsistent data.

Several factors should be considered. First, questions 1 and 2, unlike all the other questions, are printed in a smaller and different font, using different ink. The font resembles the instructions rather than the rest of the specific questions. Standard survey procedures dictate that all questions should be presented in a consistent manner. In addition, stan-

dard survey procedures dictate that global questions should come at the end of a survey, not at the beginning. In other words, after students have answered each specific question and thought about their course and its instructor, they should make a final, overall assessment. Placing global questions at the beginning once again likely biases the results. Finally, it is a basic rule of statistical analysis that the appropriate measure of central tendency (a measure of the typical ranking) for ordinal data is a median, not a mean. These data are ordinal, but ICES has generated means. This is a particularly important point for small classes. One student in a small class can have a disproportionate influence on a mean. For example, in a class of 10, if 9 students

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at once.*

rank the course at 4, while one student ranks it at 1, the mean for the course would be 3.7 while the median for the course would be 4. In this case, a 4 more accurately reflects how the *typical* student in the class ranked the course.

Attention to questions 1 and 2 is particularly important because these are the only two questions that specifically enter into tenure and promotion decisions. In addition, from what we understand, questions 1 and 2 are the only two questions that are specifically used for "norming" and making University-wide comparisons among faculty. Thus, biased, invalid, and unreliable data generated on these two questions are highly consequential for assessments of individual

faculty and for University-wide assessments of faculty performance.

A second concern is with the "norming" process itself and the generation of invalid and unreliable data for the purpose of University-wide comparisons among faculty. At bottom, we have no information about where the norm came from, what it means, or how it is being used. Are individual faculty members being compared with an ICES norm, with Western's norm (based on the overall results of this survey), with each Department's norm, with all other equal-rank professors at Western, or something else? In order to make a meaningful interpretation, each faculty member should have answers to these questions. In addition, Faculty and Administration should have a clear sense of how and why statistics that register "below norm" and "above norm" are generated and deemed appropriate.

Finally, the results provided are inadequate for assessing University-wide faculty performance. No information is generated about class size. While the instrument asks students whether the course is required or elective, we have no information about how required or elective status is factored into the norming process (nor do we know how non-response on this item is treated). Moreover, while faculty are asked to indicate whether the course is a lecture, lecture/discussion, seminar, etc. when submitting the "red form" on which we select additional questions for the instrument, it is unclear whether this information is taken into account in the norming process. Generating information about instructor rank is insufficient for determining how to make University-wide comparisons. Thus, the comparisons that are made may be invalid and unreliable indicators of course or instructor performance.

The Department of Sociology firmly believes that at this particular moment, when the University budget is a concern for us all, we should not be investing in an evaluation process as faulty as this.

We understand that we are paying the University of Illinois something in the neighborhood of \$100,000 for creating and administering this evaluation. This should stop. We believe the Faculty and Administration at Western Michigan University are fully capable of constructing a sound instrument, administering it, and analyzing the data appropriately – right here on campus.

The Department of Sociology plans to send a letter outlining these concerns to the appropriate Administrators, namely, to our Dean, Provost and President. If your Department has other concerns with the instrument, please tell us about them. If your Department supports our position on these issues, and is interested in signing with us, please let us know. You may contact Greg Howard, the Department of Sociology's Association Council Representative, at gregory.howard@wmich.edu in order to convey additional concerns about ICES as well as your department's willingness to add its name to the letter bound for the Administration.

In order that we may dispatch our concerns to the Administration before the end of the Spring Semester, please communicate with the Department of Sociology by April 5, 2004.

Sincerely,

Paula S. Brush, Ph.D.
on behalf of Faculty of the
Department of Sociology

Let Them Eat Cake

*Pam Rooney, Ph.D.
Grievance Officer*

Although it is only fair to say that the difficulties some of us are experiencing as a result of the changes in our health-care benefits are merely transitional glitches, there are growing problems in other areas of service provision, billing and reimbursement that indicate something other than “transitional” glitches is critically hindering faculty access to immediate, necessary, and contractually guaranteed health care.

While in some cases the impact on faculty and their dependents could be classified as a nuisance, in others the impact is often more costly, frustrating, or humiliating. In some cases, problems could have been averted had Human Resources more clearly explained the implications of plan changes to faculty moving from the Delta Dental plan to either the Revised Indemnity or the Community Blue PPO plan. Specifically, faculty would have known that while dentists may accept the BCBSM approved rate on a per treatment basis, they are not participants in the PPO or any other BCBSM plan and not subject to BCBSM accepted rates. Had they known this, they would not have thought they had to find a new dentist or pay more for dental work. Instead, faculty have been told to search for a “new dentist” when they needn't and have been helped by BCBSM with a “let them eat cake” attitude.

In another example, faculty who have not received the correct (or any) insurance cards, but who are enrolled in one of the insurance plans and have also been paying for dependent coverage, have been denied treatment or have had to pay for emergency room services because “they didn't have coverage.” Although the AAUP leadership has brought this concern to the attention of the Administration and asked for an immediate correc-

tion to the insurance card distribution problem, in keeping with the “let them eat cake” motif, the Administration has left it up to faculty to seek out and obtain the correct cards themselves.

Prescription drugs and the issue of brand vs. generic is proving to be a particularly vexing problem. If you have been forced to accept generic or to pay the difference if you wanted brand — or been forced to pay above the maximum of \$20.00 at a retail pharmacy or \$15.00 at Sincuse — please notify me immediately at rooney@wmich.edu. If you have been told our plan allows for generic only, let me know. If you have been denied a prescription on the grounds that the drug/medication doesn't qualify under the BCBSM plan, let me know.

Given the magnitude of difficulties and irregularities issuing from the changes to our healthcare benefits, the Chapter has filed a comprehensive healthcare grievance against Western Michigan University's Vice President for Business and Finance for failure to ensure administration of the agreed upon services and reimbursements, ensure that BCBSM administer the contractually mandated guidelines (rather than BCBSM guidelines), make a good faith effort to increase the number of participating providers, and ensure that Sincuse provide services in accordance with the Sincuse plan.

This grievance is a result of numerous reported service and reimbursement obstructions in the following areas:

*If you have fallen
victim ... please
alert the AAUP
leadership.*

Mental health outpatient care reimbursement denial for treatment, massage therapy reimbursement denial, numerous and various discrepancies regarding prescription drug coverage or coverage denial, dental coverage at an incorrect rate, inconsistent Limitations of Benefits resets, denial of treatment to PPO participants referred by a PPO provider to BCBSM contracted Traditional providers, lack of any area PPO neurosurgeons, ear, nose & throat (ENTs), and rheumatologists participating or scheduling appointments within the next six months, and Sincuse prescription dispensing inconsistent with agreed upon Sincuse Plan guidelines to include application of a formulary, automatic generic substitutions, and quantity dispensed.

Our healthcare benefits were negotiated in good faith. The AAUP negotiating team recognized the reality of escalating healthcare costs in a time of severe budget constraint and made every effort

to find ways to minimize costs while maintaining quality service. The Team also expected that once the *Agreement* was signed, the Administration would ensure that the plans negotiated were the plans provided. That is not happening in many areas, and while we cannot grieve mismanagement of our benefits, we will continue to oppose actions or policies that erode the benefits we have.

If you have fallen victim to the University's failure to provide the negotiated healthcare benefits, please alert the AAUP leadership. The more data we have the better we will illustrate the magnitude of these problems.

Retirement Options **Workshops**

Tuesday, March 23rd
3:00 — 5:00pm
208 Bernhard Center

Wednesday, March 31st
12:00noon — 2:00pm
210 Bernhard Center

Friday, April 16th
10:00am — 12:00noon
210 Bernhard Center



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