April 2011

IFC Report (written by Dr. Susan Feigenbaum):

The IFC met in Columbia on April 12, 2011. Some time was spent discussing issues of civility between faculty and between faculty and staff. Apparently other campuses have had instances of faculty bullying other faculty and the question was raised about how this should be addressed. The IFC responded overwhelmingly that this was within the province of the unit Deans and that offenders should first be given tools for handling their interpersonal skill deficits and should that not alleviate the problem, they should be warned in writing to cease their unacceptable behavior.

We met with Interim President Steve Owens who informed us that recruitment ads had just gone out for the open UM president position and that applications will begin to be culled on or around May 20th. He also indicated that an advisory committee was forming for the Rolla Chancellor position but that the new President will ultimately choose the next leader of the Rolla campus. President Owens also shared that under the House budget proposal, there is a $53 million funding gap for the UM system, but that under the Senate proposal this gap drops to $44 million. Both of these gaps factor in a 2 percent merit raise pool, which the President is committed to pursuing to prevent further erosion in our competitive standing in terms of recruitment and retention. They also factor in the tuition increases recently approved by the Commissioner of Higher Education. He expects that much of the gap will be addressed through deferred maintenance and personnel cuts, although he did not elaborate on how much of the personnel cut would be through natural attrition and a hiring freeze. Finally, President Owens spoke of his support for the re-integration of e-learning into the disciplines, rather than having it offered through a separate unit. He referred to this as a “hybrid model” of e-learning.

The IFC discussed with Vice President Betsy Rodriguez the possibility of extending employee benefits to same sex and domestic partnerships. She reported that the additional cost of adding same-sex partners to benefits coverage would be about 1% of payroll, while adding domestic partners would amount to 3-4 percent of payroll. Simply going to a “+1” scheme where employees could add one person in the household who is not currently eligible would add about 10 percent to the plan costs. The IFC agreed to form a sub-committee that would produce a report that documents (i) the policies of comparator institutions; and (ii) the policies of Missouri-area corporations. The next step would be to create a base of support that includes private sector leaders in the state. Without this, President Owens believes that it is highly unlikely that money can be diverted to expand benefits given current state funding cuts and what could be a politically-charged response by the legislature in the face of severe budget constraints. He reminded everyone of the amount of scrutiny that our existing benefits – like the pension plan – have attracted despite their financial health and prudent management.

Dr. Paul Speck commented that during years of serving on IFC, he has seen the growing frustration about the domestic partnership issue amongst faculty. He stated that changes to the modern family unit should be recognized and that our concept of what defines “family” should be re-examined. Dr. Speck said that fellow faculty members are concerned about this issue and it needs to be addressed.

Dr. Feigenbaum clarified that IFC members are unanimous in their support for this type of change. Other members of the senate stated their frustration with this issue being discussed for years and not making progress. They encouraged the administration to move forward. It was pointed out that the university has lost candidates because of this issue. Dr. Feigenbaum suggested that those particular cases be documented so that decision-makers could see the impact of the domestic partnership issue.