

**SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

- Internal Challenges
- External Challenges
- Political Activism
- Optimism

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ANNUAL REPORT ON STATE OF UNION

This year's Report on the State of the Union, called for by the Local 1650 Constitution, is unusual in two regards. First, it is a later than usual due to the state of constant upheaval and numerous grievances at the College – as well as the year-long discussions on the revised Constitution and the need to respond repeatedly to Dr. Jensen's criticisms of faculty performance and compensation.

Second, this year's report will be delivered into two parts. Today's first portion will deal with the internal challenges facing the Local from a very hostile administration. Next month, the second part of the report will address external challenges, essentially political and legislative in nature, facing the Federation and College faculty.

I. Internal Challenges

Today, we focus on: (1) the administration's unjustified criticisms of full-time faculty; (2) the administration's problematic incursions into the professional role of faculty; and (3) the administration's pejorative comments about faculty.

Disheartening Treatment of Faculty

I hear often that the mood on campus and what is happening on campus are very disheartening. I hear some members just want to avoid the negative climate on campus, teach, and go home. That is one way of handling it – disengage and let be what will be.

Unfortunately, one consequence of such behavior is clear – faculty loses their professional standing. Administrators, removed from the classroom and with limited experience teaching poorly prepared, economically disadvantaged, first generation students in an urban setting, such administrators seek to implement, with only lip service to faculty input, major changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional focus.

A second consequence is that administrators, with very limited experience in our community and a dearth of collegial leadership qualities, allege and act upon their misguided views that faculty are "overpaid" and "underperforming" "bullies," for whom "student success is not a priority." If faculty and Federation accede to this administrative agenda and invective, the future of our careers and this College is bleak and certain.

What was, for decades, a truly collegial and highly respected institution is now riddled with divisiveness. What has changed? Could it be two College administrations, with some strikingly similar qualities? In part, the current climate is the residue of the fear and the divisiveness caused by the hostility to differing opinions and the fiscal

blunders of the previous administration. In large part, it is also caused by the current administration's hostility to differing opinions and its embracing Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's dictum of letting "no crisis go unwasted" – in this case exploiting a fiscal crisis to move highly questionable and autocratic agendas.

Demean and Marginalize

Under the guise of fiscal armageddon, the current administration has attempted to demean and marginalize full-time faculty. Examples of this agenda are several. First, the administration employed such a strategy during contract negotiations: (1) by repeatedly moving the settlement goal posts and then complaining publicly that a settlement had not been reached due to Local 1650 intransigence; (2) by blaming the College's budget crisis on faculty salaries, despite the College auditors attributing it to the damaging unilateral changes in enrollment policies of the previous administration; (3) by repeatedly insulting the 1650 Negotiating Team; and (4) repeatedly misrepresenting the Federation's positions to College employees.

A second administrative "demean and marginalize" strategy followed negotiations. Local 1650, at that time, suggested that the caustic negotiations be put behind the parties and that their relationship be rebooted. Unfortunately and predictably, the Federation was rebuffed. First, the administration insisted that the governance structure of the College be totally overhauled and the faculty role in academic policy be diminished – rather than addressing the Board's publicly stated concerns to reaffirm yet again its policy authority and to include of 600-800 adjunct faculty in College governance.

Facade of Shared Leadership

The consequence was President Jensen's "Shared Leadership Committee," chaired by Dr. Jensen, in which full-time faculty were belittled and insulted for advocating the professional role of faculty – all faculty – in academic matters, while never – I repeat never – questioning or impeding the professional role of other College personnel in their areas of governance responsibility.

In fact, prior to the Shared Leadership Committee, the Federation advised Dr. Jensen to proceed with forming the Operations Council, even though the Staff Council Constitution authorized support staff participation in College committees. Unfortunately, the SSA had not enforced its own constitution.

Secondly while the Federation saw no need for a Coordinating Council, particularly one chaired by the President, the Federation did not object to Dr. Jensen pursuing such. Nevertheless, the Shared Leadership Committee was formed, and attacks on faculty commenced, under the watchful and supportive eyes of its Chairperson and his paid consultant. These attacks continued even after full-time faculty withdrew from the Committee, as confirmed by a remaining Committee member, and as evidenced in the pronouncements by and an e-mail from Mr. Burrell, who assumed a leading and public role in echoing the administration's efforts to demean full-time faculty.

When the Federation, itself, commenced formal governance discussions, the Federation again acknowledged that the College could proceed with the Operations and other Councils. When the Federation commenced discussions to address the Board's concerns, Dr. Jensen asserted that

the Constitution for the College Organization was “illegal” – a most inauspicious but increasingly typical way of his commencing the resolution of any point of contention.

Then again, Dr. Jensen’s modus operandi with those who question, no matter how professionally, his highly questionable positions, is to demean. He labels questioners as “untruthful” or “unlawful.” He has even characterized the recommendations of the Adray Golf Committee, which includes prominent Dearborn citizens, as “illegal” and “sabotaging” of the Tournament. He has treated some College Foundation members similarly. He also refers to faculty as “under-performing” He labels faculty as “bullies” who do not give “priority to student success.” He characterizes Federation proposals in highly offensive terms. In short, he marginalizes those who dare to question his assertions.

Misrepresentation of 1650 Contract Concessions

A third and most astounding example of the President’s attempt to “marginalize” faculty is his misrepresentation of Local 1650’s contract concessions. Dr. Jensen asserts that the faculty made no substantive contract concessions and experienced no substantive economic loss in the concessions it did make. He does so by distributing a highly selective and misrepresentative spreadsheet he has concocted. He ignores the 5% salary concession of 2012, which diminished the compensation of 1650 members and mitigated the magnitude of the 2013 budget crisis. He ignores the 2012 grandfathering of longevity.

Dr. Jensen only focuses on the 2% salary concession of 2013, yet the administration pursued a 7% (5% +2%) salary concession from Local 71. Evidently, the 5% concession of 2012 had meaning in that context. Dr. Jensen also maintains that the Local’s 2% salary reduction of 2015 was offset by step increases, even though teachers at maximum salary receive no step increases, and he ignores the many other 1650 economic concessions of 2013 as well.

Dr. Jensen ignores the economic impact on faculty of a 5% and then 2% reduction in contractual salary on extra-contractual compensation, which was further diminished by a 30% reduction in EC rates! He asserts that the increase in the EC hour limitation negates any EC economic impact on faculty. Rather than debate him yet again on the particulars of EC savings generated for the College, the Federation suggests that the 30% rate cut be restored and the increase in EC hours be rescinded. After all, Dr. Jensen sees all of this as a “wash.” In fact, given Dr. Jensen’s position, we could restore the old 1650 contract in its entirety with little or no real negative impact on the College budget.

To see how Dr. Jensen’s “demean and marginalize” strategy regarding Local 1650 and its contract concessions has taken root, one need only read Mr. Silvestri’s e-mail on Local 1650’s “sweetheart” contract. Of course, if there were in fact a 1650 “sweetheart” contract, Dr. Jensen and the Trustees were parties to it.

The Coordinating Council – Mission Explosion

Dr. Jensen’s Coordinating Council has become another platform to demean and marginalize full-time faculty. Dr. Jensen’s new, complicated, and arrow-ridden organizational structure for the College (which the HLC repeatedly questioned during its visit) has included from the outset – a Coordinating Council. Its original charge was to act as a line of communication between the Faculty Senate and the Operations Council, should a recommendation of one body prove problematic to the other, even though both bodies could have communicated directly absent a Coordinating Council. But why sacrifice “complexity” for “agility” – and the President’s control of the Coordinating Council as its Chairperson?

As with the administration's approach during contract negotiations and governance discussions, Coordinating Council "mission explosion" has taken place, as Dr. Jensen has now charged the Coordinating Council with conducting "rumor control" and exercising "truth squad" functions. Its role now is to formulate committees and recommendations, not simply coordinate communication between the Faculty Senate and Operations Council. Its role now is to scrutinize whatever Dr. Jensen defines as "rumor" and determine the "truth" on a variety of matters for the College community – particularly if the "rumor" or "lack of truth" stem from questioning the administration's assessment of what is fact.

What has triggered this expansive role for the Coordinating Council that Dr. Jensen chairs? In short, it has been the responses to his opinions from the only employee group immune from administrative backlash – that is the full-time faculty with contractually protected tenure. Faculty may not always be right, but their assessments are not muted by apprehension or administrative aspirations as some are.

Specifically, Dr. Jensen is using the Coordinating Council and his role as its Chair in a fashion similar to his use of the Shared Leadership Committee – to further misleading characterizations of 1650 contract concessions and to marginalize full-time faculty and the Federation when they do not acquiesce to his opinions.

If the Federation defends the magnitude of its contract concessions, Dr. Jensen accuses the Federation of spreading rumors and untruths, which the Coordinating Council must address. He could certainly address his allegations independent of the Council, but the Coordinating Council is used to lend some third party credibility to the incredible.

Moreover, President Jensen and his Coordinating Council, unlike the Board of Trustees itself, has incredibly deemed Roberts' Rules of Order undemocratic, acquiescing to Dr. Jensen's insistence that he, although Chair of the Council, votes – and "votes first" – on any matter he chooses. Message Sent! Message Received! Dissent Chilled!

Personal Attacks

If the Federation questions the timing of Dr. Jensen's increased compensation under his new contract and likewise the timing of his Cabinet's concessions restorations, the Federation President must be personally attacked yet again, as he was during contract negotiation – on the basis of his career-long tenure at the College. The Federation President is characterized as "untruthful" and someone "who has only been at one College for 40 (45) years" – as if the latter were indicative of professional shortcoming or failure. (Attached is a summary of my higher education experience which was submitted to the Trustees in response to Dr. Jensen's gratuitous, demeaning, and marginalizing remarks.)

When suggested by one of the two full-time faculty members on the Coordinating Council that Dr. Jensen put in writing his allegations regarding the Federation for the Federation to review, he declined but then threatened to broadcast his views on the College's public website. If Dr. Jensen chooses to debate his positions in the community at large – so be it. The Federation will engage in the community and media.

Presidential and Cabinet Concessions Restored

Dr. Jensen asserts repeatedly that he made the greatest economic sacrifice during the College's budget crisis – by coming to the College and receiving less compensation than other area presidents. Two points in this regard:

1. Dr. Jensen compares his compensation in his very first year at the College to the compensation levels of several long-serving presidents at other colleges.
2. Dr. Jensen was, as they say, “between positions” when he took the job at HFCC. One could well argue that his salary increased from 0 to over \$170,000 plus benefits in his first year at the College.

When a full-time faculty member on the Coordinating Council indicated that the Local 71 members who lost their jobs at the College made the greatest sacrifices to save the College, as the Federation had stated publicly at Board of Trustees' meetings, Dr. Jensen indicated that many of the terminated employees were “better off.”

In fact, the terminated administrators and their families were so better off that at least four sought to return to the College, and two were given a total of \$120,000 to drop their efforts to do so. Given the terminations of employment that befell their colleagues, it is understandable that no administrator on the Council objected to Dr. Jensen's cold characterization of those dismissed from the College – dismissed without a VESP opportunity, a furlough opportunity, or even a job sharing opportunity.

Professional Role of Faculty

Slighting the professional expertise of faculty, Dr. Jensen's administration has embraced an outdated, top-down, corporate model for the College, while paying lip service to collegiality. It seeks to impose curricular and pedagogical agendas that include a vastly expanded on-line learning program, which the administration has already outlined in written detail and for which it has set a roll-out date – all of this done prior to any input regarding the advisability, scope, offerings, necessary wrap-around services, cost, proprietary rights, contract implications, and impact of international trade treaties relative to the administration's “roll-out” ready, detailed proposal.

Because of this fast-track activity and because the Trustees have indicated that a study and faculty input are needed to determine what if any additional on-line instruction should be undertaken, the College faculty have addressed their concerns at Trustee meetings.

The administration is advancing this and other program and pedagogical initiatives with strong academic implications. The Federation will defer to Divisions and the Faculty Organization regarding the merits of an expansive on-line program, the impact of large numbers of dual enrollment students on the College classroom experience, the merits of lecture capture, the efficacy open entry – open exit, and other administrative initiatives.

The Federation reminds members, though, of the distance education and intellectual property provisions of the contract. Under the contract, Divisions are empowered to approve, review, and reapprove all distance education courses offered by or under the auspices of the College.

II. External Challenges – Elections Matter

While the College's and Local 1650's internal challenges are many, so too are its external challenges, which are, as always, primarily political in nature.

Local Elections Matter

At the local level, the College is fortunate in having three new Trustees, who bring fresh perspectives and commitment to the Board. Mariam Bazzi and Michael Meade, and Mary Petlichkoff are posing probing and needed questions about the administration's proposals and its "culture of haste." This was seen in the Board's questioning of the lack of specific rationale relative to the recently proposed tuition increase – a particularly sensitive issue given the previous Board's restoration of contract concessions for Dr. Jensen and his Cabinet, and given the increase in administrative positions at the College. (Note: the Trustees subsequently approved the tuition increase.)

The Federation trusts that the Trustees will also give careful scrutiny to the administration's ambitious construction agenda. The key issue here is how to pay for it. We should not replicate the fiscal miscalculations of the previous administration, which spent over \$10 million out of the College's operating budget to fund construction and major capital improvement projects – rather than make the case, as the College had historically done, and seeking a voter approved capital improvement bond.

When student bad debt hit \$12 million under Dr. Mee, the operating budget could not absorb it due to many construction and capital improvements obligations. The possible impact of new construction on the College's operating budget is all the more concerning, given the mere five year duration of the one-half mill operational funding increase, which was approved by taxpayers to cover the College's critical shortfall in its operating budget.

2016 will see two additional Trustee seats on the ballot. The Federation must be prepared yet again – with volunteers and funds – to support Trustees who will not rubber stamp ill conceived administrative agendas. We have been down that dangerous road before.

State Elections Matter

On the State level, the Republican ideologues who passed "Right-To-Work" (a.k.a. Right-To-Be-Exploited) legislation are continuing their attacks on bargaining rights, pensions, and education funding.

Despite Republican legislators' efforts to "demonize, marginalize, and privatize" public education in order to generate "private sector profit at taxpayer expense" and despite "Right-To-Be-Exploited" legislation, AFT Michigan locals are achieving a 90%+ sign-up rate of its union members across the State. Michigan's teachers recognize that their professional standing and the professional livelihoods are clearly dependent on the union movement and their union contracts. Henry Ford's full-time faculty recognizes this in numbers well beyond the AFT's statewide sign-up average, with only one full-time faculty member at the College benefitting from the 1650 contract while not supporting it.

The Republican controlled State government continues, as well, its attacks on the State Retirement System (MPSERS) – hoping to turn it into a “profit center” for their investment industry cronies – despite several independent studies demonstrating the significantly increased cost to the State of moving from the traditional defined benefit to a defined contribution pension system. What drives the attacks on public pensions is ideology – not sound fiscal policy.

Road Repair and Education Funding

Soon State voters will determine the fate of a “road repair” referendum, to which education funding is tied. Rather than directly address their obligations to fund the schools and fund the State’s roads, Republicans have tied education funding to a roads bill – which out of necessity we must support – but which appears headed to predictable and major defeat (Note: It met major defeat at the polls). If and when that happens, education funding will be diverted to road repair, as education funding was diverted by Republican legislators to fund a \$1.8 billion corporate tax break.

2016 Elections

In 2016, all State House seats will be on the ballot. Those of us supporting public education must volunteer both efforts and funds to defeat the view now permeating the Republican Party and, in turn, the Republican controlled State government – the view that education is a commodity to be purchased by those who can afford it and not a common good available to all and benefitting all. The nation’s founders saw government supported public education as a common good. They considered public education a generation’s most important bequest to succeeding generations. The Republican Party has abandoned that vision in state after state after state.

Federal Elections Matter

As at the local and State levels, elections at the federal level also matter. 2016 brings critical federal elections. At stake will be Pell Grant funding, which enables nearly 70% of our students to attend College, and Perkins funding, which provides the College with \$7 million to advance career education.

Due to State disinvestment in higher education, the national student debt has reached \$1 trillion, with the average student debt at \$25,000 across the nation. This unprecedented burden of student debt imperils the prospects of students and poses real dangers to the economy. Student debt now stands higher than the housing debt which contributed to the Great Recession. Student debt prohibits graduates – and those who can not afford to graduate – from investing in housing and making other purchases – purchases which stimulate and maintain economic growth. Such is the legacy of the profound disinvestment in education in Michigan and around the country.

Political Activism Matters

Political activism means phone and neighborhood canvassing and raising political funds – and all of this is critical. Unfortunately in two dire decisions, the Republican appointed majority on the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that corporations are people and that unlimited corporate political money is speech. This means that political funding to support pro-education candidates matters and is needed now more than ever. At one time, 90% of 1650 members annually contributed \$100-\$120 to Local 1650's Political Action Fund. That has now slipped to 70%. This decline must be reversed, if this Union is to effectively support candidates for office whose decisions will determine our professional lives and livelihoods.

Accreditation Opportunity

Lastly, accreditation looms and matters. Certainly, accreditation is vital to our College's standing, its funding, its enrollment, and the quality of its programs and courses. Accreditation also presents an opportunity to educate the accreditors about faculty concerns – about how this College has changed – about how the College has moved away from soliciting vital faculty recommendations on curriculum; pedagogy; and appropriate, viable program offerings.

The College culture is now one of haste – not professional, responsible deliberation. Those who cite the shortcomings of this “culture of haste” are demeaned and marginalized as being opposed to change – the typical default accusation of those who want to impose but not defend their agenda. Change in and of itself is not necessarily wise – only carefully considered change is.

The administration now sees advice as push-back and disagreement as obstructionism. There is now only lip service paid to collegiality and the professional expertise of faculty. This lip service is sometimes clothed in thinly concealed corporate-like “take it or leave it” directives, and sometimes revealed in outbursts and demands for unquestioning military-like compliance. When this is lip service challenged, there surfaces assertions about administrators' superior academic credentials; professional and personal insults; unfounded, if not irrational, threats of legal action; allegations of untruthfulness; and allegations of obstructionism, elitism, and resistance to change.

All of this is illustrative of the absence of any semblance of collegial professionalism or any semblance of enlightened managerial practices. It is also indicative of what is far more problematic – profound insecurity.

Reasons for Optimism

In light of the above, are there reasons for optimism? YES!

1. There is the quality, dedication, and resolve of faculty, who remain committed to sound academic programs, effective pedagogy, and yes student success.
2. There is the history and ongoing commitment of the Federation and Senate in fostering and defending the professional expertise and professional standing of faculty.
3. There are the contractual protections of tenure – which safeguard the academic freedom and professional judgement of full-time faculty.
4. Faculty and Divisions are communicating their concerns directly to the Trustees. This informs the Trustees of the widespread concerns of faculty – concerns that can not be readily dismissed by the administration as the views of obstructionists or a few malcontents.

5. Faculty presentations at Trustee meetings are refuting the administration's demeaning and marginalizing of faculty – by displaying faculty's competence, innovation, professionalism, passion for teaching, and commitment to student success. The Communications Division's presentation at a recent Trustees' meeting – and Trustee Bazzi's complimentary response to the presentation and faculty – are illustrative of this.
6. Three newly elected Trustees Mariam Bazzi, Michael Meade, and Mary Petlichkoff bring strong backgrounds, keen minds, and fresh perspectives to the Board.
7. The Community Service of 1650 members is proving effective throughout the community in negating the administration's misrepresentation of faculty.
8. The Federation's political connections and respect in community far exceed those of the administration – and likewise foster community support.
9. Vigilance and hard work are in the DNA of faculty – and counteract the administration's unfair depiction of faculty and its efforts to diminish the role of faculty in academic matters.
10. In higher education, administrators come and go. Faculty are the stabilizing constant of any College. Faculty are the voice that questions passing educational fads, change for change's sake, mere administrative resume building, and administrative self-aggrandizement.

Are these reasons for optimism? YES! Will a truly collegial culture one day return to HFC? Only if faculty work very hard to bring it about. It is full-time faculty, with the protections of contractual tenure, who can address the administration as professional equals – without apprehension about the consequences of doing so. And this we will continue to do through the Federation and the Senate.

It is our role to be the voice of our profession. It is the role of the Federation and the role of the Senate to see that the voice and expertise of faculty are heard and respected. Our College, our community, the students we serve, and our profession deserve no less.

John McDonald
March 23 and April 20, 2015