

Letters from the PPC

November 7, 2011

Colleagues:

We write to urge you to attend the Arts and Sciences Faculty meeting on November 14. As is becoming increasingly apparent, there is much to discuss, and Provost John Coatsworth has agreed to attend to address some of our concerns.

As you may recall, when the faculty on the Policy and Planning Committee (PPC) wrote to update you in mid-August we were optimistic, both for the immediate future (the newly unveiled benefits packages would be revised to address the serious concerns voiced at our April meeting) and for the longer term (the A&S budget would be restructured, eliminating the chronic deficit and allowing for significant enhancements to our academic programs, the College, and the distinction of the University). At that point, we believed that it would be possible to achieve our collective aspiration to restore, augment, and sustain the academic excellence of the Arts and Sciences and, by extension, of the University, in which it figures so centrally.

With respect to benefits, our optimism has been dispelled. The substantial erosion in faculty benefits remains largely unaddressed. The increase in monthly premiums for health insurance for active employees, while thankfully less than first predicted, and the innumerable hidden costs resulting from new limits on coverage represent a substantial reduction in faculty health care benefits. The “retirement program” remains largely unchanged and perpetuates perverse disincentives that thwart our academic aspirations. Despite reassurances that these problems would be constructively addressed by October, there has been little progress on a process involving faculty voice that could shape a rational policy. Likewise, the change in housing policies that requires a large percentage of current faculty and all future hires to relinquish their apartments soon after retirement will be ruinous for our ability to sustain excellence.

As for the enhancements to the budget, President Bollinger called upon us to work with Executive Vice President of Arts and Sciences Dirks and the Provost to map out a budget for A&S with a long (ten year) projected horizon, and to articulate a vision of what will be required in the short and the long run to restore the academic excellence of the Arts and Sciences. In this process he committed resources to offset a portion of the shortfall that has plagued A&S. We remain concerned that A&S has been falling behind academically in some respects, and we do not want to be locked into a multiyear budget that is that not commensurate with the faculty’s legitimate academic aspirations. Given the importance of the budget for the health of A&S, we hope to see meaningful consultation with the faculty in a deliberative, thorough process. Success in this opportunity to revitalize the Arts and Sciences depends on your participation when the Provost and the Executive Vice President of Arts and Sciences present their proposal for investment in our faculty.

It is essential that we articulate our priorities and that they be taken into account. The upcoming November 14 meeting is an opportunity for you to make your voices heard—by the PPC, by the Executive Vice President, and by the Provost.

Sincerely,

Faculty Members of PPC

Ann McDermott, Chair

Teodolinda Barolini

Peter Bearman

Robert Friedman

Cathy Popkin

Michael Riordan

Jack Snyder

Philip Watts

William Zajc