Brain Drain Summary: Where Have Colleagues Gone -- Why?

by Joyce Patterson

Based on observations in our own departments and others, some of us have perceived that this campus seems to be losing in alarming numbers many of its best and brightest faculty. We hear of others planning to depart. Is the number greater than one might expect for a large state university with a mobile faculty population? We're not sure, but the question seems worthy of a bit of exploration.

Provest DeFleur has said that her office cannot document any unusual number of departures. But the rumors persist. So we — Council — decided to conduct an informal, and quite unscientific, survey to try to determine whether our perceptions were indeed based on fact or merely rumor, which has a way of spreading and of seeming to be truth.

Through Faculty Forum we asked that you send to us — to Council — the names of people in your department who have left in the past five years. We were pleased that so many of you took the time from busy schedules to respond, both by phone and by letter. And we were surprised a bit by the results, particularly by the intensity of the replies.

You will recall that we asked for the names of departed faculty members, where they went — and why. You have provided a wealth of information pertinent to these questions, which is summarized here.

First, it should be noted that not all departments reported to us, but 18 units did so, and a pattern seemed to characterize the responses. Some of the lists came from deans, others from departmental chairs, and still others from senior faculty within divisions. The names of 71 faculty who have chosen to leave the university were forwarded to us. (Some of the lists included names of others who are planning to leave at the end of this academic year, but these are not included in the tabulations.)

Those who have departed went primarily to Big Ten schools, to other Big Eight schools and to state universities in the West, the Southwest, the Northwest and the Southeast.

Seven, for example, went to Ohio State. Six went to other Big Eight universities. Some went to the large private universities — four to Washington University, e.g., and others to Tulane, George Washington and American.

Twelve went to universities in the Southwest. A few went to smaller schools, like Memphis State, Ball State, and Southern Alabama — but when they did, they usually went for major increases in salary, usually as much as 30 percent, often 50 percent, in a few cases 100 percent. Substantial jumps in salary were true for those going to the larger schools, too.

What were their reasons for going? Most often financial. They went because they said they could not afford not to go. Some said the offer was considerably higher than they could hope for here, even after several years.

Others went for a better environment, including more support staff, better facilities and more time for research.

Some went because they wanted to move up — to a chairmanship or a deanship — and another school made that position and a big increase in income too attractive to resist.

What has been the effect of this movement? The survey findings suggest at least three results that would seem to merit serious attention.

1. First, a diminishing in the quality of programs. As one faculty member put it, “This campus has suffered a serious loss. In too many instances we have replaced senior, nationally known faculty with new, and relatively inexperienced PhDs. Ultimately they may prove to be superior teachers and researchers, too, but in the interim, the program suffers.” Another asked, “How do we know these new faculty will stay after they gain academic maturity? They will be attracted by the better offers, too, and the revolving door syndrome is likely to continue.”

2. A second effect has been the problem of retaining faculty. Some have left after a few years, feeling, they said, that promises made to them during recruitment didn’t materialize. Maintaining continuity and putting together a faculty that will help build the program into the future is a continuing problem, one that is sure to intensify in some divisions as salary levels remain low with little hope of significant change.

3. A third effect noted by respondents to this survey is the devastating effect on recruitment. Because the University seems unable to compete with salary levels at other schools, attracting desirable new faculty becomes, as one respondent reported, “a depressing challenge.”
Another factor in this mix is the competition from industry and private practice. As one longtime faculty pointed out, "You can’t expect to compete with those sectors, but if the differences in salary levels become too great, faculty — some of the best ones — are going to opt for those positions."

Salaries, facilities, support staff, time for research. These were mentioned most often as prompting faculty to leave, although they would have preferred to stay at UMC.

"There," one senior faculty member said, "the prevailing attitude is 'Make do - with less.' That's not how you build a great university. It's not even how you maintain a good one."

What does all this mean? We aren't sure. What does seem apparent is that we are losing some of our best faculty and the prospect of recruiting replacements of equal quality, under present conditions, doesn't seem very promising.

This is what you told us. Whatever your comments, we’d like to hear more.

― Dr. Patterson is a professor in the School of Journalism and chair of Faculty Council’s Communications Committee.

Minutes from Nov. 19 Meeting

Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 3:40 p.m. in S110 Memorial Union by Professor Bauman, Chairman. Professors Baldwin, Gardner, Good, Griggs, Taylor and Warder were absent. Dr. Gerald Brouder, Vice Provost for Budget and Academic Personnel, and Dr. Jeffrey Chinn, Vice Provost for Instruction, were guests.

Minutes

The minutes of the Nov. 5 Faculty Council meeting were approved as distributed.

Announcements

Professor Bauman, Chairman, announced that Chancellor Monroe has established an Advisory Minority Committee. Membership includes representatives from faculty, students, staff and administration.

Professor Bauman also circulated a letter from the Chancellor reporting that $5,000 has been raised for minority scholarships and asking faculty to consider further help to this fund.

Discussion

Professor Peter Davis spoke to a resolution that proposes that the chairperson of each Faculty Senate or Faculty Council be authorized to attend Board of Curators meetings, that chairs from each of the four campuses be designated as an Association of Faculty Chairs and seek Board recognition as representatives of the UM faculty.

Professor Davis said the resolution raises many questions and suggested further investigation is needed before the Council makes a decision on this proposal.

Professor Joyce Patterson, Chair of the Communications Committee, brought a suggestion from the Executive Committee that Council solicit input from faculty through campuswide surveys. These could be run in Faculty Forum asking for expression of interests and concerns. Informal approval was given to the idea for a general survey. The Communications Committee will discuss the topic further and recommend a plan for continued surveys on current issues.

Professor William Noteboom reported on a meeting with the campus Computer Advisory Committee and said he anticipates a report soon with recommendations for Council's consideration.

Professor Bauman reminded Council of the General Faculty Meeting, Dec. 9 and urged faculty attendance. The agenda will include the faculty’s Agenda for Administration and its recommended plan for evaluation of Administrators.

Reports from Standing Committees

Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee: Professor Al Hahn, Chairman, reported that the Ad Hoc Committee studying tuition waivers for dependents of faculty and staff needs more data relative to benefits in general before making any recommendation. That study will continue. Professor Hahn also discussed a letter from Professor J.C. Headley requesting campus observance of Veterans Day. This was referred to the Chancellor.

Financial Affairs Committee: Professor Jay Dix, Chairman, reported on a meeting of that committee with Chancellor Monroe and Provost DeFleur. Their position relative to salaries, he reported, is that faculty salaries continue to be a high priority, but they do not think that Big Eight/Big Ten averages can be met. Other commitments of the University have to go forward, they said, which takes away any flexibility for increasing faculty salaries to meet those averages. The questions will be discussed further by Council and will be an agenda item at the Dec. 9 General Faculty Meeting.

Special Projects Committee: Professor Noteboom, Chairman, brought to Council’s attention two letters from faculty members to the Provost citing changes in current KBIA programming as they see them and their request that attention be given to these changes. He reported, also, that staff benefits will be the subject of a major study by his committee, as quickly as the computer report is completed.
Assessment: Jeffrey Chinn, Vice Provost for Instruction, discussed and distributed a brief summary of assessment plans. The various divisions are using to assess their seniors as mandated by the Board of Curators. His office is consulting other universities to try to determine ways of encouraging student cooperation in the assessment programs.

University Planning Council: Gerald Brouder, Vice Provost for Budget and Academic Personnel discussed the University Wide Planning Council which was established this fall. The purpose, he said, is “to develop environmental statements for 1998-2000.” Such statements will include projections pertaining to economics, political climate and social issues within the state. The new Council’s role, he reported, is not to revise the existing Long Range Plan but rather to develop a plan of action for the next two to three years and to advise how the Long Range Plan may be implemented. Their report is due for a special planning meeting of the Board of Curators Jan. 11.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Executive Session

The Council went into executive session to discuss personnel matters.

—Respectfully submitted,
Joyce Patterson, Acting Recorder

Let Us Hear...

Thanks to all of you who responded through the survey form that ran in the last issue of Faculty Forum.

We asked what was on your mind vis-a-vis the University — and many of you let us know.

However, in some chance meetings on campus and through phone conversations, some of you reminded us that this was the busiest of seasons on campus and you hadn’t found the time to respond.

So, we’ve extended the deadline, to Jan. 11. In the quiet of the holidays — when all the papers have been returned, grades posted and books closed for the semester — set your thoughts to paper.

List topics of particular interest, in rank order, please. Add comments, if you wish. These will be particularly helpful to Council as agendas are set for the coming semester.

Please send your list and comments to: Joyce Patterson, Editor, Faculty Forum, Box 52, School of Journalism.

Topics of particular interest to me:

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Division ________________________________

Highlights from Dec. 9 General Faculty Meeting

Chancellor Monroe reviewed the state of UMC as he sees it and brought faculty up-to-date on budget expectations.

He spoke of the excellence of the faculty, increases in enrollment, the extremely low level of delinquent student loans by UMC graduates, the excitement of alumni about the coming 150th anniversary of the University and noted the “light and shadows” of campus facilities, some very good, others obviously old and in need of attention.

He urged that we try to recruit the very best students we can and noted with pleasure the large number of “bright flight” students who have elected to stay in the state and have chosen UMC. And he said we need to review recruitment and retaining of minority students and to be sure they feel welcome on this campus.

He stated his conviction that faculty should be rewarded on merit and he expressed his deep concern about library needs, including the fact that thousands of volumes are stored in non-library buildings with no space in the library to house them.

He pointed out that big increases in the state budget for prison reform and school desegregation have cut into the money pie. That source is finite, he said, and these two new pieces have cut away the portion that might have gone for other purposes, including higher education. In his meetings with state legislators he has seen little sign that we will receive a larger portion than in the past.

He underscored how difficult it is to find more funds and asked for suggestions. Should tuition be raised? Should programs be cut? He
reminded that faculty are not alone in being underpaid and underrewarded. Staff are important. They make the university work. And administrators wouldn't mind raises either, he said.

He reminded faculty how important tenure decisions are. A tenure decision means $1 million, he said, in the long-term commitment it represents. "If you have any doubt in a tenure decision," he said, "if there is any possibility you might get a better person, vote negative."

He concluded by reviewing the governor's priorities as they relate to higher education in the state. These include, the Chancellor said, assessment; longer semesters; clarifying the mission of the institution on an historical basis, student population and geographical location; partnerships with private industry; access (in relation to economic and ethnic background); and contributions to the state's future.

He expressed his pride in the University and urged that faculty help to make known to other citizens of the state why they have reason to be proud of the institution, too.

Professor John Bauman, chairman of Council, spoke to the agenda sent earlier this fall to the Chancellor and Provost urging that a plan be developed to bring faculty salaries to Big Eight/Big Ten averages. Professor Gordon Kimber reported on activities in Nebraska where students at the University there have voted to increase student fees to help fund faculty salary increases, providing the legislature matches those additional fees for that purpose.

Professor Dick Dowdy discussed the plan for review of administrators, also sent to campus administrators this fall. The plan calls for a partnership between administrators and faculty in reviewing administrators at every level.

Professor Bauman announced that Council will appoint a blue-ribbon task force to review assessment and hold hearings in the spring. Several faculty members urged more vigorous action in relation to this issue.

Faculty members present approved a motion to support the resolution passed earlier by the Arts and Science faculty that, after this year's trial, future assessment be subject to faculty approval.

Schedule of Council Meetings Next Semester

Faculty Council meets every first and third Thursday afternoons at 3:40 in S110 of the Memorial Union. If you have comments or suggestions for your divisional representative, you might want to talk with him or her before the scheduled meetings.

The dates of meetings for next semester are listed below. The January meeting date was juggled a bit to fit President Magrath's schedule so that he might join Council at the first meeting in January.

The complete schedule is as follows:

January 14
21
February 4
18
March 3
24
April 7
21
May 5

You'll recall that under this year's academic calendar the winter semester ends May 6. You will also note that this earlier ending was made possible through the shorter Christmas break — one week less than in previous years.

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