

November 5, 2007

To: Jacqueline Johnson, UMM Chancellor and Roland Guyotte, UMM Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

From: Sara Haugen, UMM Commission on Women, and Stacey Parker Aronson, UMM Faculty Affairs Committee

Subject: Backfill Fund and Backfill Funding Policies

In Spring 2005, the Commission on Women began a discussion with the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs regarding UMM's lack of/need for a coherent, UMM backfill policy. The UMM Faculty Affairs Committee joined the discussion in 2006. The recommendations contained herein are the result of our inquiries and evaluation of the challenges and consequences that arise for the institution and the colleagues of those on planned or unplanned leaves.

Background

In our discussions we asked the following questions: Do UMM's current policies actively support UMM employees? How do **Planned** (e.g. parental leaves) or **Unplanned** (e.g. illness) **Leaves** affect colleagues? Does UMM have a family-friendly culture? The answers were not altogether positive.

Although the University of Minnesota and UMM have instituted a number of policies over the years to increase support for their employees during such leaves – including paid maternity and adoption leaves and the extension of the tenure clock for faculty -, there are currently no formal policies regarding backfill, and backfill compensation has been inconsistently implemented. The UMM culture has been one of “stepping up to the plate” for the good of the whole, not always voluntarily. It is apparent from discussions with faculty and staff that these practices may harm both individuals and the institution. The toll on employees' professional and personal lives can be damaging – added class loads and directed studies, more advisees, cutbacks in quality and number of services or programs, added campus service responsibilities – and may create hostility or resentment toward those on leave. Ultimately, the negative impact on faculty and staff is detrimental to our students.

Recommendations

- 1) Creation of a backfill fund to cover the hiring of temporary staff as needed when a discipline or campus department has a staff member who will be out on a planned or unplanned leave for more than two weeks (e.g. U of M-TC graduate students could be hired to teach classes, recent alums hired to plan and implement programs, etc.).

Creative and voluntary re-assignment of responsibilities could also be an option in which case the backfill fund would be used to augment salaries or pay overtime, as appropriate.

- 2) Creation of clear backfill policies for all areas of campus, consistent with all-University and labor policies.

Information about options should be readily available. The new policies should be explicit: hiring replacements is not the only option, but is strongly encouraged whenever possible. When it is not possible to hire someone to fulfill the duties of the person on leave, specific job duties should be eliminated or reduced to account for time spent filling in for the person on leave.

Augmentations for responsibilities that are similar in scope should be consistent across all units.

Only in exceptional circumstances should a full-time, tenure-track faculty or a probationary staff member be asked to accept additional duties.

Outcomes

These recommendations acknowledge the significant time commitment that overload entails, a sacrifice of time that may negatively affect family life, professional life, research and creative activity, community involvement, even health. The intent of these recommendations is to create a supportive, humane campus climate for all faculty and staff. We believe that a Backfill Fund and adoption of Backfill Funding Policies will enhance campus life, support community members in their work/life/family roles, and be a powerful recruiting tool for prospective faculty, staff, and students – critical components toward UMM's ultimate goal of excellence.

Thank you, in advance, for your attention to our concerns. After you have had an opportunity to consider the recommendations, we would like to meet with you to discuss your reactions and possible next steps.