

# Policies, salaries violate fair play

By Ron Rousseve

"Cannibalism" is a term that has surfaced recently to describe the kinds of faculty salary policies that are being implemented at institutions like the University, where an almost obsessive concern for greater visibility as a prominent "research university" seems to have unwittingly fostered a

## Commentary

number of morally questionable personnel policies. But let me be more specific about these troubling trends.

When it was announced to the public Jan. 20 that the State Board of Higher Education had approved an across-the-board salary increase of 5 percent for institutional presidents and the chancellor, this rather precipitous action was said to be in line with the 5 percent average salary increment authorized for faculty personnel this year.

Balderdash! Here at the University, faculty rank and file have recently received only a 2 percent across-the-board pay increment. The balance of the salary monies allocated by the Legislature were distributed quite selectively on the basis of equity and "merit" considerations.

Moreover, what is even more unconsciously demeaning is that President Myles Brand (in his first year on campus) has seriously proposed that next year the faculty rank and file should be allowed only a 1 percent pay advance across-the-board, with the remaining 4 percent of the allocated salary monies "held back" for disbursement to promising new hires and to those tenured faculty members who are described as representing a select category of distinguished scholars.

It is reported that the inflation rate in 1989 was near 5 percent. The climbing cost-of-living index affects all of us; and I question the moral wisdom of promulgating a so-called

"market-driven" stratagem that enables the rich to get richer, while the less-well-paid among us slide further behind.

The salary policies outlined above appear to me to represent a kind of cannibalism that results in "salary compression" for far too many of us, while an elite corps of academic stars continues to profit from the University's almost obsessive quest for glory among the ranks of America's premier research institutions.

Also related to my concerns pursuant to a fairer, tangible acknowledgement of the important contributions of the faculty rank and file to the several functions performed by the University is Provost Norman Wessell's Jan. 24 memo to the faculty about the (recommended) hiring of the spouses of top-ranked applicants for faculty positions here.

Wessell's argues that such spousal hiring is "an increasingly important component of the hiring package" at Berkeley, Michigan, etc. And he approved of simply "waiving the affirmative action search requirement in these cases."

In my opinion, much is not right with these current policies. Is our quest for academic glory worth the short-sighted compromise of fair play that is now occurring? If the responsible reply to such questions proves to be no, then perhaps the realistic alternative of down-sizing our institutional aspirations should be carefully explored. I believe there should be serious, open faculty debate about these matters — before the point of no return is reached.

Incidentally, as a senior member of the faculty who recently had to compare internal salary figures to justify a fully

defensible request for an equity adjustment in my salary, I know that there are no easy solutions to these problems. But surely it is clear that we must stop exacerbating the vicious and discriminatory trade-offs that have already exacted a costly toll in faculty demoralization among those of us who value to the University now appears to be increasingly expendable.

I regret to say that from my vantage point, an insidious erosion of certain values and principles relating to fair faculty personnel practices seems to be occurring in certain sectors of academia today — and I'm far from optimistic as to the likelihood that in the foreseeable future much can (or will) be done to change our course toward a less cannibalistic and more equitable stance.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the observations offered in this commentary are not motivated by any sentiment other than genuine concern for overall fairness in the evaluation of faculty performances. As a faculty member who has been employed full-time in American education for more than 30 years, I deeply resent the implications of salary trends that legitimize "competitive pay incentives" to recruit and retain scholars at lower academic ranks — while ignoring the undeserved salary compression that is visited upon competent senior faculty personnel in the process.

Our various contributions may indeed be "different." But isn't that what meaningful academic diversity and pluralism are all about.

Ron Rousseve is a Professor of Counseling Psychology in the College of Education.

## Commentary Policy

Commentaries should be between 750 and 1,000 words, legible and signed, and the identification of the writer must be verified upon submission. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for grammar, style and length if necessary.

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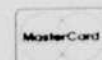
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By GARY LARSON



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