

April 6, 2009

MEMO TO: University Deans

FROM: Shirley C. Willihnganz  
Executive Vice President and University Provost

RE: Unit Personnel Policies

Over the past few years, the University of Louisville has developed an ambitious strategic plan; I have even called the "2020 Plan" audacious, particularly given the tough economy we're facing. While we may not reach our goals as quickly as we would like, we don't want economic hard times to prevent us from moving forward with the key elements of our plan: educational excellence; research, scholarship and creative activity; community engagement; diversity, opportunity, and social justice; and creative and responsible stewardship. I know that we will only achieve our goal of becoming a preeminent metropolitan research university through the extraordinary efforts of our faculty, and I am thus now asking units to thoughtfully make some changes to your personnel documents and to your personnel practices, changes that will allow us to be more flexible in our understanding of faculty roles and in our rewarding of faculty for the work we ask them to perform as we implement our strategic plan.

While the "three-legged stool" describing faculty work remains a valuable metaphor and is, in fact, affirmed by The Redbook, I believe we need to expand what kinds of activities and products count under the categories of teaching, research and creative activity, and service, and we need to expand our ability to assess and reward those activities and products. Our metropolitan mission pulls many of our faculty out of the Ivory Tower into the West End, the East End, downtown, and even into Owensboro, Maysville and other Kentucky communities. Our Signature Partnership Initiative, for example, asks faculty to work with community partners to enhance the quality of life and economic opportunity for residents of West Louisville. Such work is vital to our mission as a metropolitan university, but its work product may be different than what we are used to considering as university service or research. Similarly, our faculty's research results not only in premier peer-reviewed publications, but we have faculty who are engaged in clinical and translational research which may produce patents, licenses, and other non-traditional products; others engage in scholarly or artistic production that has enormous cultural and social impact critical to the growth and well being of our community. As part of our recent accreditation process, we have developed "Ideas to Action," a plan to improve students' critical thinking skills that will demand changes to the general education curriculum and our undergraduate majors and will require most units to develop culminating experiences that will allow students to demonstrate their critical thinking skills; students might write theses or complete capstone projects, but many of them may participate in service learning projects and internships. The success of Ideas to Action—and ultimately the

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success of our students' demonstrations of their critical thinking—depends, again, on the faculty's commitment to this quality enhancement program. As these few examples suggest, we have already asked faculty to reimagine their roles as teachers, researchers, and committed citizens of the university and community, and it is now up to us to imagine new ways for faculty to demonstrate the impact of their work and for the university to assess and reward that work.

Last year, I appointed an ad hoc committee to review personnel policy and to make some recommendations for improving the ways that our units evaluate and reward the work we ask faculty to do. I have asked Dr. Beth Boehm, in her new role as Associate Provost for Faculty Personnel, to call a meeting of unit representatives for personnel matters to discuss the attached set of recommendations and to charge units with implementing them; I believe she has already solicited names from each of the units. It may seem foolish to take on the task of reevaluating our personnel policies during a period when there is so little money to reward faculty effort, but just as we don't want the difficult budget to prevent us from moving forward with our strategic plan, we don't want it to prevent us from imagining better ways to "count" the work we are asking faculty to do. While there are some changes that must be made to unit personnel documents (including changes prompted by 2007 revisions to The Redbook), what might be more important is the necessary cultural change that will allow us to expand our understanding of what constitutes "faculty work" within the traditional framework of teaching, research and creative activity, and service. We want to make sure that as we ask faculty to take on tasks that serve departments, units, the university at large, or the community or state, we are able to rigorously evaluate that work and to reward it fairly.

Beth will be contacting representatives from each unit to begin to implement these recommendations. Thank you for all that you do to keep us moving toward our goal of becoming a preeminent metropolitan research university.

Att. (1) Ad hoc Committee recommendations  
(2) Faculty Senate recommendations regarding Part-time faculty  
(3) Redbook changes

cc: James Ramsey  
Larry Cook  
Manuel Martinez  
Provost's Senior Staff