

**Annual Academic Report**  
**prepared by Eugene G. Mueller, Chair of the Faculty Senate**  
**September 2024**

The academic mission of the University of Louisville remains steady, and the faculty remain committed to strengthening that mission to enhance the UofL's academic reputation and quality of education, its research and creative activity, and the student experience for those of all demographic groups and ideologies.

**Growth of Enrollment and Programs**

The student population has hit a new all-time high in Fall 2024, which resulted from profound efforts at both the recruitment of new students and the retention of those already enrolled. Those efforts have been campus-wide. At the direction of President Schatzel, Provost Bradley and his office have worked tirelessly to enhance both recruitment and retention, embracing new ideas to institute new programs and then examining metrics to gauge the efficacy of each effort. The work is ongoing, and the staff in the admissions office and the academic advisors have done their work energetically. Faculty have also responded to the call and will continue to do so. However, all must bear in mind that students must take advantage of opportunities offered and should be given clear and continuing messages about what is expected of them to achieve success rather than expecting staff and faculty to bear continually greater burdens on the student success front, sometimes to the detriment of scholarship. Vibrant faculty are engaged at the forefront of intellectual activity in their disciplines, and that knowledge permeates even introductory classes through faculty members' expertise.

Retention suffered during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath, but the efforts spearheaded by Provost Bradley have turned the tide, and retention rates have recovered to their pre-pandemic norms. It is to be hoped that the efforts show a sustainable progress that will allow us to hit our high retention goals, but the next few years will tell whether that is, indeed, the case or whether we have prosaically returned to the *status quo ante* and will remain in the same range of retention rates that prevailed in the 'normal' years before Covid-19. The Board of Trustees is actively engaged in the retention efforts, participating in state-wide programs for university governing boards concerning the issue and giving President Schatzel a mandate to increase overall retention and eliminate gaps in year-to-year retention and graduation rates between students of all demographic groups and ideologies, the "achievement gap." Provost Bradley has once more led the efforts to move towards those lofty goals, and though there is more fluctuation semester-to-semester in the retention rates of those demographic groups that have perennially lagged the average of all students, it appears that the overall trajectory is toward elimination of the achievement gap.

A vital university also needs to update its offering of degree programs and other credentials. The Faculty Senate takes its role as the judge and guarantor of the quality and rigor of degree programs and credentials extremely seriously. The Academic Programs Committee closely scrutinizes proposals for new programs and certificates with analysis and input from the Planning & Budget Committee and request changes to ensure the rigor and appropriateness of the academics, certify the soundness of the budget, and mitigate potential impact on other programs

across UofL. Due to their diligent yet speedy work, improved proposals arrive before the full Faculty Senate in a state that has resulted in recommendation of their approval by the Board of Trustees. In the past academic year (September 2023–August 2024), the Faculty Senate has approved four graduate certificates, two undergraduate certificates, an M.S. program, and four B.S. programs.<sup>†</sup>

A source for concern has also arisen over the past year. The administration holds that initial approval of any program is fully elastic to all changes without further review unless those changes require a change in the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code. The first instance was slashing by half the credit hours required to earn a certificate; after resistance, the changes were referred to the Academic Programs Committee for review, and it judged them appropriate and reasonable to maintain the purpose and rigor of the certificate. Currently, proposed changes to an existing degree program would create entirely new tracks and substantially alter the conditions for admission, yet the administration holds that Faculty Senate review is not needed. The charge to the Academic Programs Committee this year includes development of a proposal for consideration by the Senate and Provost's Office to define cumulative changes to degree programs or certificates that differ substantially enough from what was initially approved to warrant reevaluation by the Faculty Senate.

Even given the stated caveats in the preceding paragraphs, the standing of the academic program at UofL remains strong and shows distinct improvement following the pandemic and its immediate aftermath with signs of progress towards achieving the ambitious goals regarding student retention and the elimination of the achievement gap, which together will lead to realization of the target six-year graduate rate of 80%.

### **Faculty Morale**

Faculty morale is critical to the health of the academic programs at any university, for a faculty with high job satisfaction and a sense of professional fulfillment is engaged and energized to facilitate learning and discovery at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Although implemented a full year after that for the staff, the initial response to the faculty compensation study resulted in substantial increases in salary to raise all to at least 80% of the median for a faculty member's rank and discipline. The communication to faculty through the last year of the study was exemplary, including a town hall each on the Belknap and Health Sciences campuses a few days before all faculty members got notification of whether or not they received a salary adjustment. The faculty appreciates the resources that the administration and Board of Trustees made available in the current fiscal year budget to make those salary adjustments possible.

Issues concerning faculty salary do remain even after ensuring everyone has reached the lower end of the defined competitive range of 80–120% of median by rank and discipline. The faculty eagerly awaits word on a second phase that reflects time in rank akin to the second phase of response to the staff compensation study. This concern applies especially to full professors, who

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<sup>†</sup> Graduate certificates in Healthcare Management, Healthcare Financial Management, Healthcare Quality Management, and Population Healthcare Management; certificates in Diversity, Inclusion, Community Engagement, and Equity in the Workplace (DICEEW) and Healthcare Skills; M.S. in Artificial Intelligence in Medicine; B.S. in Exercise Physiology, B.S. in Biochemistry, B.S. in Applied Engineering, and B.S. in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

have no avenue for further promotion to improve their salary as do assistant and associate professors. Expectations for term faculty to advance in rank may not be as clear as with tenure track faculty, and such expectations for term faculty would benefit from discussion and clarification.

The faculty remains eager (as voiced in a unanimous Executive Committee resolution to that effect last December) to resume “salary increases based upon performance as documented in annual reviews.” (Redbook Minimum Guidelines, Section III B) That return to traditional practice after a seven-year gap\* is in accord with Redbook: “[salary] increases shall not be across-the-board, and should reflect an award structure that is based on performance.” (Minimum Guidelines, Section III B 2).

Provost Bradley is constituting a committee to review and recommend changes to the policies and processes by which merit-based salary increases are determined to ensure consistency across units at UofL. He has requested representation from the Faculty Senate, and that representation will eagerly participate, but the work of that committee need not be complete before the duly approved unit documents are again employed in salary increases based on annual merit reviews. In response to a claim that some units lack documentation of the criteria and procedures to be used in merit-based salary increases, the Redbook & Bylaws Committee has been charged to gather such documents, which may include documents other than “personnel documents” themselves such as dean’s guidelines. However, the new committee being constituted by the provost does have a vital role in a systematic review and potential reform of those unit processes to ensure consistency and equity across all units.

Pay is a central and obvious component of faculty morale, but it is not the only one. Renewed attention to scholarly and creative activity including externally funded research will also enhance faculty morale. Non-monetary rewards for achievement in those endeavors and acknowledgment that faculty at Carnegie Research 1 institutions are engaged in vital efforts other than those directly associated with the undergraduate programs would be most welcome and contribute to the sense of professional fulfillment among the faculty.

As with the first section of this report, the caveats enumerated in the preceding paragraphs do not detract from the steps that have been taken by the administration and Board of Trustees to improve faculty salaries and other steps to strengthen the University’s academic programs and faculty morale. As with student success metrics, faculty morale seems to have improved from a nadir during the pandemic, and it is to be hoped that steps taken by the administration with a shared governance contribution by the faculty will continue to improve the morale of the entire UofL community. As President Schatzel says, “all means all,” and that should encompass professionally satisfied faculty and staff as well as students who equally achieve higher levels of success regardless of their demographics or ideology.

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\* The last merit-based raise pool was in 2017, when it constituted only half (1%) of the pool (2%).