

Annual Academic Report
prepared by Eugene G. Mueller, Chair of the Faculty Senate 2024–2025
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The academic mission of the University of Louisville remains steady, and the faculty remain committed to strengthening UofL's academic reputation, the rigor of its degree programs, research and creative activity, and the overall experience for students of all demographic groups and ideologies.

The faculty stand ready to work with President Bradley, a new president with whom we are very familiar from his service as Dean of the School of Dentistry and University Provost. Although the faculty had reasonable concerns about the unusual circumstances of his appointment, a continuation of his high energy level, enthusiasm, visibility on campus, efforts to improve transparency, and a prioritization of investment in the faculty and staff will ensure a good relationship with the faculty even in the face of difficult decisions that are likely due to the challenges currently facing American higher education.

Growth of Enrollment and Programs

The dedicated campus-wide efforts in recruitment and retention have resulted in another record student population in Fall 2025, which resulted from profound exertions both to recruit new students and retain those already at UofL. The efforts of the Provost's Office to effect the increase in both retention and recruitment led by then-Provost Bradley and have continued unabated under Interim Provost Cardarelli. The staff in the admissions office and the academic advisors have worked strenuously, and the faculty have done their part and will continue to do so. But it must be recognized that the main effort for their success must be made by students. Staff and faculty facilitate student success and can minimize barriers to that end, but students need to receive clear and continuing messaging regarding the efforts expected of them to seize the opportunities that UofL offers. In the end, the success of an individual student relies on that student realizing what is must reasonably be done and then doing it. Faculty, staff, and the administration must continually evaluate and improve their efforts to decrease the "achievement gap" between students in different demographic groups in both year-to-year retention and graduation rates.

The faculty's primary roles remain the transmission of knowledge and the development of students' intellects, an effort that starts in the earliest classes and continues through graduation. The recent increase in the power and availability of artificial intelligence (AI) poses a new challenge to those primary faculty roles for all disciplines. Generative AI in particular poses a distinct challenge to the maintenance of academic integrity and obligates faculty to instruct students in its appropriate, responsible, and effective use while still instilling creative and critical thinking in students who may turn to generative AI to collate information and draw conclusions instead of learning how to do those tasks on their own.

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. The biggest single morale issue in the past year was the passage and implementation of HB 4, an “anti-DEI bill.” The extensive changes to policies, documents, and practices was gut-wrenching and demoralizing for many faculty members. The participation of the faculty in HB 4 implementation through the normal—albeit expedited—process of unit document amendment was a mark of the value of shared governance that is held in common by the faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees. As the semester began, morale seems to be rebounding as faculty realize that course content has been unaffected due to the provisions in HB 4 that ‘carved out’ critical components of the higher education enterprise including but not limited to academic freedom and requirements for accreditation. Those wise and welcome provisions seem to have largely been the result of lobbying by then-President Schatzel and her fellow public university presidents, efforts for which the faculty is grateful. Challenges from HB 4 and its implementation remain before us, and the commitment demonstrated by President Bradley and his administration to the maintenance of academic freedom and shared governance in the initial implementation bodes well for UofL’s response to those issues as they arise.

The faculty welcomed the chance to help craft the second phase of the faculty compensation study and further action regarding salary matters through membership on a committee convened by then-Provost Bradley for those purposes. Faculty appreciate the June 2025 implementation of the second phase of the compensation study, which began to address salary compression among the more senior faculty, among whom compression is most acute. The faculty also appreciate the commitment shown by the administration and Board of Trustees to invest in the faculty to maintain the adjustment of salaries to general market competitiveness achieved by the compensation study.

The faculty is gratified by a first step to resume “salary increases based upon performance as documented in annual reviews.” (Redbook Minimum Guidelines, Section III B) with 0.5% (of the salary increase pool of 2.5%) distributed based on merit. 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). As reaffirmed by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the faculty remain eager for a return to salary increases entirely based upon performance as set out in unit documents and policy. Faculty are ready to engage in discussions to reform those policies to achieve greater uniformity among units through shared governance processes.

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 remains critical for faculty morale, especially in light of uncertainty in federal research funding. Recognition that faculty are engaged in vital efforts at UofL other than those involving undergraduate programs would be most welcome and contribute to the sense of professional fulfillment among the faculty. Clarification of the modalities of instruction removed uncertainty regarding what mix of virtual and in-person components is permissible in a course, which troubled some faculty members. The

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

current retirement of PCs running on Windows 10 (to maintain cybersecurity) highlights the wide disparity between different units regarding the regular, scheduled replacements of computers for faculty members. No one wishes stringent centralization with a schedule that results in less frequent or generous computer refresher policy for faculty in any unit, but a centralized guarantee of regular updating of computers that are essential to faculty performing their various university duties would substantially improve morale in units where such processes are either irregular or underfunded.

The areas of improvement highlighted in this report do not diminish faculty appreciation for steps by the administration and Board of Trustees to strengthen UofL's academic programs and improve faculty compensation and morale. All universities currently face multiple headwinds that range from stiff to stormy. Most impact the underlying finances of higher ed, which poses a general challenge to progress on all fronts. Some also directly impact or threaten to impact the core academic mission. Beyond the fiscal effect, the uncertainty in federal research funding dims the spark of intellectual excitement and creativity that is at the heart of the research endeavor and threatens to discourage a new generation from engaging in a career in academia. The scale of compensation now permitted for student athletes poses a new and distinct challenge to the fundamental relationship between university and student. As the administration, staff, students, and trustees sail through these uncharted rough seas, the faculty stand ready to partner, participate, and lead as appropriate in the current evolution faced by UofL and American higher education generally.