

May 30, 2023

**Below are some brief responses to questions submitted to leadership during the April 2023 Faculty Senate meeting. We would be happy to provide more in-depth answers or follow-up responses to any of these.**

*How does WSU's growing interest in global activities meet the land-grant university mission? The question here is less about the intersection of global activities (such as Nairobi) and the land grant mission. What's the vision for whether/when/how international activities contribute to that mission?*

WSU has worked globally for decades – and many of our faculty colleagues have significant and meaningful research collaborations with international partners. Over the last couple of years, we have begun to internally publicize these efforts more, and we have also increased our global impact.

If you look at WSU and other major land-grant universities, global impact has become a key part of the land-grant mission. One reason for this evolution is that we all want to educate our students – undergraduate and graduate – to work and succeed in an increasingly diverse and globally interconnected economy. I am a firm believer in the value of an international experience for as many of our students as possible. For some, that will mean a physical trip outside the U.S., while others will benefit from interacting with our international faculty, staff, and students on a campus close to home.

WSU has limited resources, so we are focusing our funding and global partnerships in ways that can be leveraged to meet multiple goals. Deep international collaborations, for example, can give WSU the kind of visibility that allows us to attract international students who enrich the environment of multiple campuses and colleges.

*What is being done to improve morale, job satisfaction, and retention? (We know about the COACHE efforts. Are there others?)*

In addition to the COACHE survey results, we recently completed a general employee engagement survey, which we had not done for several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The combined results of these two survey instruments will provide a clear set of priorities for WSU to work on, and we will share an action plan on these two items broadly with the WSU community during the Fall semester. Additionally, in the upcoming years, WSU will initiate and regularly conduct a system-wide employee climate survey.

There is no question that three consecutive years of budget reductions and enrollment declines have taken a heavy toll on WSU faculty and staff morale. Presently, we are confident that no further budget reductions will be needed for the upcoming year, and we expect to see a rebound in enrollment across much of the system for the Fall 2023 semester.

While we work to ensure all areas are adequately supported, we remain committed to retaining the incredible talent we have here at WSU. As part of those efforts, we need to express appreciation more often for our current faculty and staff and the outstanding work they do. Restoration of in-person events across the system is one of the ways we are building community and conveying gratitude across our campuses.

Professional development is another way in which we can improve retention. WSU is committed to improving professional and leadership development offerings for faculty and staff. To better support our people, Human Resource Services recently launched a comprehensive revision to the learning management system with the implementation of Skillsoft Percipio.

In the long term, we will continue to advocate and prioritize equitable, increased compensation for all WSU employees with the Washington Legislature – and will look to make further progress on fully funding salary adjustments with new state funds. This is a frequent topic during conversations with other higher education leaders in Washington and nationally, yet there has been little recognition and support to fill the gap that remains between demonstrated need and new state allocations.

*What is being done to refocus investment on the research enterprise? E.g., Chris Keane talks about the ROI for things like the new faculty seed grants. But in real dollars the money available for that program has declined – despite its ROI. How is WSU thinking about how it will invest in research given the budget climate and the positive ROI on such investments?*

I think the first step to investing more strongly in the research enterprise is to ensure we are adding more research-intensive tenure track faculty positions and associated supporting infrastructure. We have seen a gradual erosion of tenure-track numbers faculty over the past two decades, and I believe this is the best starting place.

Secondly, we also have to recognize that one of the significant limitations in hiring additional research faculty members is the need to provide competitive start-up packages as we bring in new and mid-career faculty members. Some portion of this has to be funded centrally as campuses, colleges, and schools have depleted much of their discretionary resources with the budget cuts over the last several years.



Third, we will need to re-invest in faculty mentoring, as well as new faculty seed grants and similar programs identified by the Office of Research. While research expenditures is one way to measure the success of our research enterprise, WSU supports and promotes basic, applied, and engaged scholarship across the arts, sciences, and humanities. The Office of Research recently initiated a seed grant program for engagement scholarship, which is in alignment with our land-grant mission and our designation as an Engaged University by the Carnegie Foundation.

Fourth, we need to continue to build modern research facilities and provide funds to renovate and modernize existing laboratories, studios, performance venues, and research facilities across all our campuses. Some portion of this endeavor will certainly need to be funded by State of Washington resources, but some part will need to be derived from philanthropic funds to amplify the impact of the state monies.

Indeed, support for WSU research will be a significant component of our fundraising campaign. Gifts allocated toward this end will bolster many aspects of the WSU research enterprise, including faculty/staff hiring, infrastructure enhancement, and community engagement.

*How does WSU think about the ROI on admin positions? (The original question asked specifically about VPs/VCs, assoc VPs/VCs, and their staff.)*

This is an interesting question and one we think about often.

We do look at peer data and try to ensure that our number of people in executive-level positions is in line with our public research university peers. We provided some of this data recently in our response to concerns raised by some of the Regents professors in a letter already posted to the faculty senate blog. In short, we are about average compared with our peers. Nationally, the rise of administrative positions in higher education has been spurred by an increase in the need for compliance and support services. Given that we have six campuses and extension locations in each county in the state, and yet we have one Provost and one set of Deans, means that we are relatively lean on a system level. This gives us greater flexibility as a system and allows us to leverage the power of our system state-wide.

We also try and ensure that each of these positions has a clear job description and set of objectives they are tasked with accomplishing. Additionally, we ask if there are other ways to achieve what we need to without hiring a new executive-level leader, i.e. can we redistribute the responsibilities to other existing leaders?

I do think that we need to develop some clear ROI for existing and relatively new executive positions within the WSU system, and I would be happy to work with Faculty Senate Leadership on what these could be. I believe there will be differences for each position – for me – I measure most of my effectiveness in how much funding I help bring into the university from philanthropy and state/federal sources. We also need to maintain the subject matter expertise required to support our increasingly complex and societally engaged land-grant university.

Finally, I think that it would be good to invite some of the people in these positions to discuss what they do with a broad group of faculty, staff, and students. A discussion of this kind might provide clarity on what executive leaders are doing, why they are doing it, and what difference they are making at WSU. This could easily be sponsored by the Faculty Senate with a panel of these different leaders and some pre-submitted and live questions in a Zoom format.

*What is being done to improve WSU's processes (e.g., hiring, salary adjustments, pre/post awards and contracts)?*

With the introduction of Workday to the WSU system, many “back of the house” processes were significantly updated as they became part of the Workday environment. Unfortunately, the Workday team was so busy with implementation that we did a poor job communicating some of these process improvements to the broader campus community.

I have asked that our new EVP for Finance and Administration, Leslie Brunelli, take the lead on a methodology for continued process improvements. One of the advantages of Workday is that we can get really good data on “how long” things take to get accomplished – so we have good baseline data for many processes. If we can identify several items/processes that take longer to complete than they should, that would give us a starting point for process improvement.

*Can you provide an official update on what our raises will be given that the legislature is not fully funding them?*

I am working with the Office of the Provost and the Office of Finance and Administration to determine what we are able to provide in terms of salary raises for faculty, staff, and graduate assistants. We should have this announced by no later than mid-June. With the recent organization of our graduate assistants (academic student employees), it's likely that union negotiations will extend beyond that time frame.

*During the constituent concerns portion of the meeting, a question was raised about why Athletics has a 3.4% budget increase in 2024, while the academic programs are experiencing a 6% cut. Can you comment?*

As an auxiliary enterprise, Cougar Athletics is charged with raising revenue to cover its expenditures. The budget for the 2024 fiscal year is not complete and pending resolution of challenges in the 2023 year. I will send a more comprehensive communication surrounding Cougar Athletics and their budget by mid-June.