



To: The Interim Co-Presidents

2/29/24

From: The Faculty President

RE: Formal Response - AY 24/25 Budget

Dear Fr. Kilian and Dr. Heynderickx,

Thank you, once again, for your letter (dated 2/2/24) inviting faculty input on the proposed budget options for AY 24/25. The Senate and I are genuinely appreciative of the invitation to work with you and other members of the community as we try to address the potential budgetary challenges that lie before us.

After receiving your letter, my advisory team and I began to draft a survey for the faculty at large. As we worked on variations of this survey, however, it became clear that we did not have enough information about the options themselves or the possible savings they might yield. For example, in your letter you list the following ideas:

- Reduction in use of adjunct faculty
  - Reduce/eliminate co-teaching
  - Reduce cross-listing of courses
  - Reduce electives taught by adjunct faculty
  - Reduce course reductions if applicable

If the intention here is to reduce the \$1.7 million we have budgeted for “Adjunct Faculty” for FY24, then reducing co-teaching and limiting course reductions for regular faculty would appear to be plausible suggestions. After all, enacting these measures would enable us to utilize regular faculty more efficiently, which may well result in a reduction in the number of electives and Core classes taught by adjuncts.

What is not clear, however, is how much savings might be gained from these or other activities, such as raising the enrollment caps in classes or limiting the number of Core classes taught online. Similarly, it is unclear how a reduction in cross-listing would lessen our dependency on adjuncts. Unless an undisclosed number of regular faculty are receiving additional compensation or credit towards their teaching loads for offering cross-listed classes – practices that are deeply troubling, if true – then I fail to see how this option would lessen our use of adjunct faculty.

I cite the examples above for two reasons. First, a majority of faculty are unaware that the \$1.7 million we have budgeted for “Adjunct Faculty” includes overload pay and other types of compensation for full time faculty. Knowing this critical piece of information fundamentally changes one’s understanding of the austerity measures being suggested in this subsection, such as the idea that a reduction in the number of cross-listed courses will result in a reduction in the use of “adjunct faculty” (read “regular faculty getting ‘special deals’”). Second, faculty who are serving on the Budget and Board Finance Committees have yet to see the entire budget and do not know the possible impact of the austerity measures you have asked us to contemplate. Without a more detailed picture of the budget and the benefits yielded from unrestricted gifts, investment gains, and the like, it is



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impossible for faculty to provide you with an authoritative list of preferences, let alone an order for our decisions.

As for the matter of potential salary cuts, it goes without saying that faculty are opposed to them no matter the form they might take. If I were to present you with a list of faculty preferences, you can be assured that salary cuts would be dead last or removed from the list entirely. There are many reasons for this, of course, but most of it comes down to one issue - for the first time in the history of SMU, the salaries of full-time faculty have been adjusted to reflect the comparable market rates based a nationally recognized database (i.e., CUPA HR). The faculty salary improvement plan was a year in the making and overwhelmingly supported by faculty, the president's cabinet, and the Board of Trustees, who unanimously approved the corresponding budget in May of 2023.

With all due respect to you both, the proposal to roll back salaries to the way they were before the faculty salary improvement plan was implemented is based on a faulty premise (i.e., that it is acceptable to reduce the pay of some and not others). Having done the hard work of bringing all regular faculty up to a level of compensation that reflects a market rate, the university community must do everything it can to protect faculty salaries and honor the work we did to get to this point. At the end of the day, there is no sound argument as to why some employees should receive market-level pay and others should not.

Please understand that the comments above are not intended to be the last word on these matters. Rather, I am hopeful that you will see this as an honest and meaningful response to your invitation to engage in shared governance. Faculty are painfully aware that we are in a bind financially and we are ready to do our part to help the school create a balanced budget. We cannot give you an informed list of preferences, however, without more information about the options you have presented to us. That said, the faculty on the Budget Committee and the University Council stand ready to continue our deliberations and look for common ground.

Best,

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Professor of Theology and Religious Studies  
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