

Clemson University's family tussles over pay issue

By John Staed, April 14, 2009

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY — If Clemson University is a family, as is often said, then it had a pretty big argument Tuesday.

The argument, not unlike in a lot of families, was about money.

The Clemson Faculty Senate told the administration it was unhappy about pay raises and salaries paid top administrators, and that it wanted more say in future salary decisions, or a least a seat at the table.

In two resolutions approved without objection Tuesday, the faculty senate said the administration showed “lack of thought” in how “disproportionate administrative raises” would be received by employees and urged university leaders to rebuild the trust they said has been damaged.

A second resolution approved Tuesday called for faculty senate representation on the administrative council, the provost's advisory council, the Organization of Academic Department Chairs, and the board of trustees compensation committee. The resolution also asked for an annual meeting with the president to discuss compensation issues, but would include a requirement that the faculty also provide “total compensation” information.

Outgoing senate faculty President Bryan Simmons said the resolutions were developed after the senate finance committee studied salaries for faculty and administrative positions. According to their report, 61 percent of performance-based salary increases of greater than 1 percent were provided to people in administrative positions. Also, of the top 50 raises, 25 were to administrative-related jobs, according to the committee report.

A faculty survey undertaken this year also was highly critical of salary cuts put in place for faculty while the administration received raises and some were hired at large, six-figure salaries.

“I don't believe in making resolutions just to make resolutions,” Simmons said before the votes. “I feel it is a justifiable response to the faculty survey.”

Simmons said the faculty's concern should not be misconstrued, that “this is one, single issue, not a wholesale distrust” of the administration.

“In this one particular case, we feel some changes need to be made,” he said, adding that the university needed to “get back to building the Clemson family.”

Clemson, like other state universities, has needed to reduce its spending as the state has continued to see tax revenues shrink in the recession. The nearly \$38 million Clemson officials said they have needed to cut has resulted in hiring freezes, building construction delays, early retirement offers and a mandatory, five-day, unpaid furlough for all of Clemson's roughly 4,000 employees.

Clemson President James Barker, who attended the senate meeting, said he and Provost Doris Helms already had met with the new faculty senate president, William Bowerman, about creating a special committee comprised of administration and senate members.

"That group would work to address that particular issue," Barker said of the salary concerns.

He also said the trustees' compensation committee "has looked at those salaries, found that there were some that were above average. They found that the people that report to me were right at the national average." That was true, too, for those who reported to the provost, except in two cases, which "were slightly above the national average," he said.

Barker said the debate showed that the university is welcoming to "a diversity of views" and that the discussion was a clear demonstration that Clemson is "a great university at work."

Barker said he was open to reviewing suggestions on more representation on the administration councils.

"I think the recommendations they have made are ones we want to consider as carefully as they have considered," he said.

The recession has exacerbated the issue, too, he said.

"I would be surprised in this current economic climate if this wouldn't have been an issue," Barker said.

Barker and Helms said some people have been hired from top 10-ranked universities and needed to be paid commensurately. Clemson is trying to reach top 20 status in a magazine's annual ranking; it was ranked 22nd nationally among public universities.

Barker said it was his job to make sure salaries were equal to or better than those at comparable universities.

"The main message I would say about (salaries) ... is that we've all got to move forward together," Barker said. "We can't be successful if our staff salaries are not competitive."