December 20, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

With Christmas only five days away, I hope the demands of the Fall semester are all behind you and that you can enjoy some time off--or, at least, more time than usual--with family and friends in celebration of the holidays. Here are just a few notes from the Faculty Senate as we come to the end of the year.

University Budget and Faculty Compensation
By now you've likely had a chance to read Fr. Biondi's December 18th message to SLU faculty and staff. In this message, Fr. shared key details of the FY2010 budget, approved by the Board of Trustees on December 6th. Given the current economic conditions, it shouldn't surprise anyone that the University is keeping next year's tuition increases low while freezing salaries and, for the most part, not filling vacant positions. Of course, SLU is not alone in taking such actions. Higher education institutions across the country are doing the same--and, in some cases, going even further by actively reducing personnel and benefits. It seems that there's little about which to cheer but the reality is that things truly could be much worse. And to help ensure SLU's continued stability, the PCC (President's Coordinating Council)--of which I, as Senate President, am a member--and academic deans will meet next month to, as Fr. Biondi wrote, further review not only next year's budget but take another look at the current budget.

None of the PCC members and academic deans wanted to see faculty and staff (including administrator) salaries frozen in FY2010--especially when it's been established that we have significant ground to make up to better compare with peer and AAUP numbers--but there was strong agreement of the need for this action. Nonetheless, I forwarded to the group the recommendation from the Senate's Compensation and Fringe Benefits Committee of a 4-1/2% average merit increase for faculty. The Committee also recommended a five-year "catch-up" initiative and three-to-five-year compensation plan. While we obviously had no hope of these recommendations being considered this year, we wanted them "on the record" for the future. EC member Mark Knuepfer has for several years compiled and analyzed the data on which the Senate Committee's faculty salary recommendations have been based. See the latest version of his contribution, Mean Faculty Salary Comparison, 1999-2008, linked from the Senate's Resources page. You will find additional details in the Report of the President and Executive Committee (EC) dated December 2, 2008; this is appended to the draft of the Faculty Senate meeting minutes of that date, posted on the Senate's Agenda and Minutes page.

Fall 2008 Faculty Senate Meetings
The changes to the structure of Faculty Senate meetings that I described in my September message have been implemented. The previously referenced Report of the President and Executive Committee (EC) now is made to senators in writing in advance of the meetings. This change provides senators with detailed information for review beforehand, enhances their ability to participate during the meetings, and has resulted in the freeing up of 20-30 minutes for other activity. Further, each meeting includes an agenda item for a Q&A about the report and the reports are appended to the meeting minutes. Please see the Senate Web page Agenda and Minutes for the Fall 2008 meeting minutes, including the EC Reports. Together these documents will give you a comprehensive picture of the Senate's recent discussions and activity.

The EC is very pleased not only with the increased discussion occurring among senators at
Senate meetings, but with the improved levels of communication between senators and their respective units. It's clear that senators are becoming more active liaisons between their constituents and the Senate. This positive change is manifested not only in the information shared by senators at Senate meetings, but in the fact that more units are incorporating regular Senate reports into their faculty assembly meetings.

And Finally...
I'm going to keep this short given its belatedness. Besides, I'm sure you'd much rather be reading those entertaining annual letters enclosed with the holiday cards you receive! I realize I've not made good my intention, stated in my September message, to write every 4-6 weeks. One of my new year's resolutions will be to email you next during the first week of February, following the first Senate meeting of the Spring semester. I hope that the availability of so much information in the meeting minutes and EC reports will suffice in the interim.

That first Spring '09 Senate meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 27th, from 3:30-5:30pm in the Busch Student Center--Room 171. All Faculty Senate meetings are open meetings, but I want to extend a special invitation to you for this one. It's become a tradition that the VP-Business & Finance/CFO and Treasurer/Chief Investment Officer make a presentation to the Senate on the next FY budget. Not only will Bob Woodruff and Gary Whitworth join us for that purpose in January, but their presentation on SLU's endowments and investments (another tradition, usually in November) has been rescheduled for that date as well. I'll send out a reminder next month.

With best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a happy, healthy, and productive 2009 --

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam E. Joseph
Faculty Senate President