

Report on FC EC Meeting with President Richard Joel and Provost Selma Botman 2/23/15

Participants from the Faculty Council Executive Committee: Paula Geyh (YC), Avri Ravid (SSSB), Charles Swencionis (Ferkauf), Joan Beder (Wurzweiler), Nora Nachumi (SCW), David Carlson (Cardozo), and Daniel Rynhold (Revel)

We were invited to meet with President Joel and Provost Botman to talk with them about the university and important issues on the minds of the faculty. Prior to the meeting, the members of the EC met and discussed what we thought were important points to make at the meeting. We agreed upon, and subsequently stressed, the following:

- As faculty, we are concerned, above all, with maintaining Yeshiva University's high standard of education.
- We pointed out that the faculty is working with the administration to achieve savings in the university's academics. We believe, however, that some of the proposed curricular cuts at YC, SSSB, and SCW will cause substantial damage to the quality of the education we offer and save relatively little. At the graduate and professional schools, further cuts could endanger their quality of education, reputation, and accreditation.
- We expressed the belief that proper procedures for curricular changes were often not being observed by the administration.
- We objected to requests that the faculty cut crucial parts of the curriculum without sufficient information. In order to evaluate the proposed changes fairly—and to propose alternatives where needed—the faculty must be allowed to see the proposed cuts in their entirety and the budget for each unit. We need to consider the curriculum as a whole, rather than making piecemeal changes.
- We stressed that academics should be the last resort for additional cuts. Consequently, we raised the possibility that savings not only could but should be found elsewhere, for example, we wondered what had happened to the proposed merging of the two campuses and how the administration intends to deal with the “administrative bloat” that has occurred in recent years.
- We emphasized that the faculty continues to pay a very high price for the university's financial situation. After five years with no salary increases and four years of the reduction in our retirement benefits from 7% to 2% of salary, faculty members are increasingly impoverished; in many cases, their daily lives and the financial well-being of their families have been affected. In addition, their prospects for retirement are rapidly deteriorating.
- We called attention to the marked decline in faculty morale. We linked this decline to a number of factors, including the stagnant salaries and cuts to our benefits, an ongoing decrease in research support, and our inability to see—or have much of a say in—the creation of a plan to return the university to a state of financial stability.
- We proposed that the administration make a plan for resuming faculty salary increases, restoring our promised retirement benefits, and prioritizing faculty research funding. If a

timeline for addressing the faculty's needs proves unfeasible, we suggested the administration use financial benchmarks to indicate when faculty raises and benefits will be restored and research funding increased. We recommended that the administration publicly commit to creating such a plan as soon as possible.

- We emphasized the need for transparency in budgets and for greater faculty involvement in budgeting.
- We pointed out that, absent a plan for the university's future growth, cutting academic programs and research is likely to lead to a "death spiral" of falling rankings and lower enrollments necessitating further cuts and so on.
- We argued that there needs to be long-term strategic planning to ensure the growth of the university and inspire the university community and donors. We emphasized that this planning process should involve faculty.

President Joel insisted that the cuts—although painful—are necessary. He stated that, regrettable though it is, it will not be possible to give faculty raises or reinstate our 403b retirement matches to their previous level in the near future. He said that the administration would look at the possibility of creating a benchmark for resuming raises and retirement benefits once they have a budget in place. He said that he was in favor of greater transparency and would provide the Faculty Council with information as long as it was discussed in a closed session.

The representatives had the impression that the president and the provost listened carefully to our concerns (and they took notes). We all felt, however, that there had been no real progress made in this meeting in regard to altering the plans for cuts in the academic programs.

Report on FC EC Meeting with Dr. Henry Kressel, Chair of the YU Board of Trustees
2/27/14

Participants from the Faculty Council Executive Committee: Paula Geyh (YC), Charles Swencionis (Ferkauf), Joan Beder (Wurzweiler), David Carlson (Cardozo), and Jesse Itzkowitz (SSSB)

This meeting with Dr. Kressel was requested by the Faculty Council. In our invitation to him, we said that the Council would like to share the faculty's perspective on the current situation of the university because we're concerned that the Board may not be sufficiently informed about it.

Prior to the meeting, the EC assembled a set of key issues we wanted to address in the meeting. These included cuts in faculty and programs, faculty salary freezes and benefit reductions, cuts to research funding, lack of confidence in the administration, the need for strategic planning, and a request for faculty representation on the Board of Trustees.

In our discussion, we told Dr. Kressel that the faculty is greatly concerned that the quality of the education we offer is being threatened and the university's reputation damaged by proposed cuts in faculty and curricula.

Dr. Kressel said that he and the rest of the Board were very concerned about the negative impact of the academic cuts on the quality of the education Yeshiva offers, but that it is essential that the budget be balanced as soon as possible. He insisted it was necessary to streamline our operations and what we offer our students. He said that the university needs to "be treated as a business" and "needs to live within its means."

We suggested that there might be other sources for these savings besides cuts in faculty and curricula. The Board might, for instance, deal with the "administrative bloat," including the proliferation of vice presidents. Dr. Kressel responded that this "was being dealt with." We also suggested relocating SCW to the Wilf Campus to reduce the duplication of administrative and other functions. He said that this would be considered, but that it was a long-term proposition and that we needed to make budget reductions immediately.

We reviewed the history of YU's faculty salary freezes and benefits cuts, and pointed out that it was extremely bad for morale for there to be no end in sight to this. Dr. Kressel agreed, but said that the university's finances did not permit any change at present. He did say that the Board would consider the proposal for a salary/benefits reinstatement benchmark.

We brought up the issue of the faculty's lack of confidence in the current administration and observed that this was supported by the assessment of Moody's, departing faculty members, transferring students, falling applications for admission, and donors sitting on the sidelines. Dr. Kressel dismissed the Moody's reports, saying that they were the same agency that had given high ratings to collateralized mortgage instruments before the crash and their assessments of Yeshiva's situation were meaningless.

Dr. Kressel attributed Yeshiva's problems to the widespread financial pressures on higher education (we are "not unique" in this regard) and, more particularly, to the lack of financial systems, including reporting and budgeting systems. He said that financial systems (i.e., Banner) were now being put in place at great cost. He indicated that the Board has faith in the current management of the university.

We emphasized that the university needed a long-term strategic plan for growth that would prevent a "death spiral." He agreed.

Dr. Kressel told us that the Board was very pleased with the Einstein-Montefiore agreement, which will turn Einstein into a quasi-independent medical school. The agreement was, he said, "exactly what we wanted."

In closing, we asked that the lines of communication between faculty and the Board be kept open, so Board members can know what's happening "on the ground" to education and research. We requested faculty representation on the Board, and on its finance and academic affairs committees. Dr. Kressel said that they would consider this.

The representatives felt that we had been able to convey our concerns. We did not have the sense, however, that we had convinced Dr. Kressel that there were alternatives to cutting faculty and academic programs.

We will follow-up on the possibility of faculty representation on the Board, plans for strategic planning, and a schedule or benchmark for the resumption of faculty salary increases, benefits, and support for research.