

Approximate Transcript of Opportunity Hiring Conversation at 3/11/08 Faculty Meeting

Chuck Williamson (CW): We would like to open the proposed opportunity hiring policy for discussion.

Cathy Whiting: Can you give us an example of opportunity hiring? My concern is that a better candidate might well be uncovered in a national search.

CW: In its current form, the policy is very broad. It could be used for a “star” hire, diversity hire, or spousal hire.

Todd Silverstein: What does it mean when it says it shouldn’t be considered as a way to expand a department’s size? Won’t it do that automatically?

CW: This refers to long-term department sizes. The Positions Committee will keep records of all hires, and take opportunity hires into account when considering new or replacement positions within the relevant department.

Don Negri: Our resources are scarce. If we make an opportunity hire, what do we give up?

CW: This is a key question. Opportunity hires represent a unique situation.

Don: That doesn’t answer the question!

Lee Pelton: Good question! If an opportunity hire comes through the pipeline and we feel that it is a compelling position that deserves funding, then it competes with other such needs. It is like any other unbudgeted, unanticipated expense. It should not be seen as “guns and butter,” however; it is not at the expense of established programs.

Don: But it is something.

CW: The hire could be a Lausanne Fellow, perhaps, without a full search.

Mark Stewart: I have two questions. 1. What data do we rely on to make sure problems in the past don’t hurt us under this policy? 2. Why is the Faculty Council part of the protocol? We don’t involve them in other hires.

Carol Long (CL): In answer to question 1, we will be examining specific cases. In the abstract, this policy represents a principle. In a specific instance, we will be looking at the individual involved.

Lee: This policy will help us improve our diversity profile. Look around the room, and consider the racial and ethnic composition of the people you see. If it looked different, we wouldn’t need opportunity hires. To the degree we have not succeeded in any

measure in living up to our ideals, this is an opportunity for us to move forward a way that is collaborative and non-threatening. It has checks and balances against bad decisions. The term “star hire” is unfortunate; that is not the purpose. For example, many other institutions would have hired a senior faculty member to begin the AES program rather than creating a burden on junior faculty to provide leadership when they are still working toward tenure. It is about being strategic in providing the dean and the faculty with tools.

Mark: We have a problem with the timely completion of national searches. Why is Faculty Council weighing in on this kind of hire?

CW: This is equivalent to someone with experience coming in at the associate level, a situation in which FC is involved.

CL: A proposal comes from a department, is received by the positions committee (as normal), and also reviewed by FC to examine credentials. The process is a shortened version of a search.

Lee: FC is inserted in the process to reaffirm a fundamental characteristic of the faculty. We are a faculty-centered university. This will guard against well-meaning presidents and deans.

Marva Duerksen: We’ve been on a hiring splurge; once it’s done, we will go back to about five positions per year. How does this policy fit in?

CW: After we finish with 3-2 hires, we may not look for new positions at the same rate as before. The 3/2 funding comes from maintenance, etc., and the money will go back to that.

CL: We will hire occasional expansion positions, but mostly replacements.

Rebecca Dobkins: I appreciate AC, the dean, and the president for presenting this document. This is a crucial issue. I would have liked it at the start of the expansion. It is all about flexibility. This is not like a national search (re: Mark’s question). We can take advantage of networks, Lausanne Fellow presence, etc., that national searches can’t help with it. This kind of policy gives us flexibility to take advantage of opportunities – for example, Lausanne Fellows. A spousal hire is different from the first two kinds; the time frame, for example, is different. This is not like putting forward someone’s name. If we include spousal hires in the policy, we should change that to “partner” rather than “spouse.” We should probably not have it in the policy to begin with.

CW: Should we break it into categories? Senior hire, diversity hire, spousal hire? AC considered this and decided to bring it to you in its current form to begin the conversation, but this is one reason we want feedback. Do you want it split up?

Sammy Basu: In response to Mark: this is not data, but we have a historical record of losing candidates. The issue is not in the timely completion of searches; the lag occurs in

the timely approval of searches. I have a concern: if a candidate is foreign, we are required to go through a national search.

Stas: There are real, programmatic issues. An opportunity hire is a chance to bring something unique. We will judge them on these skills, not on the usual criteria. We have nothing on the books for this. We need to codify this and track the results. Do they live up to this?

CW: That's why we pass through FC.

Don: Regarding hiring senior people, our step system locks in salaries. The step system has done a nice job of creating community. When we instituted it, the economics department said, 'It will break someday.' We need a conversation about it and how to break it. This needs to be part of the conversation. We will be thwarted if we can't pay them.

Jerry Gray: If they're attractive people, they will be recruited elsewhere. We'll have to pay them to keep them.

CW: AC tried to separate the issues to avoid this.

Don: If we avoid it, we may not have any luck.

CW: We wanted to untangle the two. If we bring them both to the faculty, both fail. We wanted to get the policy first.

April Overstreet: Does this include the possibility of hiring at the associate or full professor level?

CW: We kept it separate. We have precedents of hiring at the associate level but not to tenure.

CL: The current PPP does not permit us to hire to tenure.

April: If so, this is different from how hiring procedures have been. How would a person's previous accomplishments be accounted for?

CW: There is precedent for associate and even full appointments.

Julie Abendroth-Smith: Prior work is not looked at. That's April's question.

Ellen Eisenberg: From my FC experience, when we hire at associate or full, their prior accomplishments get them to that point. Then work done here moves them along. There is a provision in the step system for exceptions. Diversity hire is an example. In some fields we might not be competitive without this provision.

Melissa Buis Michaux: It is good to be considering this policy. This gives us much more flexibility. To Rebecca: I agree we should use partner instead of spouse. We might consider this at the time of hire but not necessarily. The partner may finish his or her dissertation after the person's been here, for example. Don't make it too distinct or we might not be able to use it in a broad way.

Todd: What does this give us that we don't already have? If we want a diversity or star hire, why can't they just apply to a national search?

Gretchen Moon: In English, we had a splendid candidate. We made an offer. Her partner got an offer at Williams. We tried to entice the partner; to counter a tenure-track offer, we offered a Lausanne post-doc, but it was not enough. If we had had a policy....

Lee: This is somewhat encouraging. We lost out to Williams College! They were eager to be here if our architecture for hiring had allowed it to occur. Think about it as flexibility.

CL: There are several examples from recent years. Both were courted by several. If we'd had the policy, they might have come just for the potential – that is, they might have come even without the position, just knowing there was a vehicle to allow the possibility.

Mark: Had it gone through, would it have violated the bit about not increasing faculty size permanently?

CW: It's not a hammer. The next replacement would be considered with this person.

Mark: Could it phase into a tenure-track position?

CL: This policy doesn't itself permit that.

Marva: Were both candidates in English?

Gretchen: Yes.

Marva: What if we have an English and biology couple but no biology position, or biology doesn't like this person?

Emily Drew: Back to Mark's question about data, can we collect data from the last ten years? How do we evaluate it? We need it to make a conclusion.

CW: What kind of data are you thinking of?

Emily: Gretchen's story is useful, but do we have a sense of the magnitude? Are we blowing it out of proportion from anecdotes?

CW: We can get that information from chairs.

Cathy: I think we should separate spousal hiring.

Sarah Kirk: We want to be a proactive university, not reactive. Do we have the data? Who cares – let's just do it!

Stas: Can you define "better"? How do we quantify "better"? I have trouble with these soft definitions. My definition is to have more resources to do my job better.

Sarah: If the goal is to hire people who fit the mission of our university, let's just do it.

Mark: What is our mission? Was there data? The language suggests that people thought it through.

CW: I think we need to wrap up our discussion for now. We will post our transcript on BlackBoard.