

Report to Higher Education Committee

North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Williston, ND

July 31, 2012

Dickinson State University

Your agenda includes a presentation regarding an update on personnel actions at DSU “as a result of the University System internal review report on international transfer agreements and the State Auditor’s office performance audit on Dickinson State University.” Information is requested regarding personnel actions “as a result of the reports,” “personnel actions involving faculty members as a result of improper course grading practices” and any “severance packages, payments, or other agreements resulting from the personnel changes.”

There have been numerous recent personnel changes at DSU, beginning with SBHE action dismissing the former president on December 15, 2011. Following that SBHE action, a number of DSU officers have retired or resigned. During this time, I initiated a process that has led to reorganization of several DSU units and elimination or reassignment of duties of several positions, resulting in additional resignations or notice of termination due to elimination of a position. This process is ongoing and there may be additional changes. I have distributed to you a copy of a DSU organizational chart that includes information regarding these personnel changes. Because of voluntary retirements and reorganization that included elimination of some positions and reassignment of duties and responsibilities in other cases, we are assembling a new leadership team at DSU. This team will be in place after several vacant positions - or positions now occupied by individuals with interim appointments - are filled.

I am not able to separate out or identify personnel actions that were a result of the internal review report on international transfer agreements or the state auditor’s performance audit at DSU. As these and other reports were released, and following SBHE action dismissing the former president, and more recent action reorganizing the work of several DSU units, a number of DSU officers have voluntarily retired or resigned. In some instances, individual action may have been influenced at least in part by publication of a particular report or audit. In other cases, individuals had been planning retirement or they accepted other employment opportunities. In a couple of instances, individuals submitted resignations or I received information of a resignation, effective at the end of the semester or other date in the near future, and the resignations were accepted but the employees were reassigned to other duties until date of resignation. These decisions were made considering what was in the best interest of the university and how best to get DSU moving forward. In each case, I reviewed the situation with legal counsel to assure that the processes were consistent with State Board of Higher Education policies and procedures.

Regarding the suggestion of improper grading practices, it is important to note that data regarding DSU grades in all classes shows that DSU grades are almost exactly at the norm for comparable institutions. Recent research on grading published in 2010 (“Grading in American Colleges and Universities” by Rojstaczer and Healy, *Teachers College Record*, Columbia University), based on data from 240 institutions demonstrated that the overall GPA (grade point average) for public schools was 3.00 and for private schools 3.30 on a 4.00 scale. GPA’s have risen in all schools over the past 40 years. Dickinson State’s overall GPA for the Fall 2011 semester for all classes was 3.12. As a whole, DSU’s grading practices are close to national norms.

The review by the ND University System Internal Auditor found 6 classes taught by 3 instructors in which all A's were awarded. Four of the classes were taught by an instructor who is no longer at Dickinson State. In the other two classes, both instructors say that the grades awarded were earned. There is no evidence to refute these claims.

DSU is making it a priority to stress that all faculty are expected to assure academic rigor requirements in all classes, and DSU has new procedures to more closely monitor grading practices. Following each semester, DSU has implemented a process which analyzes the grades in every course. If grades in a class seem outside the norm (either too high or too low), there is a discussion with the instructor to seek an explanation. Additionally, to assure that students understand expectations, there is renewed emphasis in providing students more detailed information at the beginning of a course regarding the expected learning outcomes and how the measurement of those outcomes will be conducted. Broad-based discussions among the faculty, department chairs, and the administration have developed a commitment to assuring that these processes result in adherence to appropriate academic standards.

As part of this update on personnel actions, you have requested information concerning "severance packages, payments, or other agreements resulting from the personnel changes." I have approved two early retirement agreements that include payments by DSU. One is an early retirement agreement with the former registrar, effective December 31, 2011, that continues DSU health plan premium payments for a limited period of time, at a total cost to DSU of approximately \$21,400. The second is an early retirement agreement, effective June 30, 2012, with the vice president for business affairs, that continues DSU health plan premium payments for a limited period of time and includes a separation payment of \$40,366. Both individuals were long-term DSU employees (more than 60 years combined service). In the first instance, a medical condition of the employee's spouse was an important consideration; in the second, the employee's medical condition was a primary consideration. DSU expects to recover agreement costs over several years through lower compensation costs for successors in these roles.

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Orange - President and Senior Administration Changes
Blue - Additional Key Personnel Changes

