Dear Colleague:

As the tempo of activity around the Service Employees International Union’s organizing campaign picks up, I find the need to communicate with you more frequently as well.

You may recall that last week, I wrote to tell you that the University had appealed a decision from the Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Services. Since then, I’ve received a number of requests for additional background on why we took this action. Those requests ticked upward this past weekend after the SEIU issued a press release that mischaracterized both what we did and why.

As background, in January the SEIU filed a petition to represent the approximately 1,600 Twin Cities faculty (referred to in law as “Unit 8”). Shortly after filing the petition, the SEIU took the unusual step of asking the BMS to add certain Professional & Administrative job classifications that have teaching responsibilities (which are currently part of “Unit 11” along with researchers and others) to Unit 8, nearly doubling its size. As a result, the union is seeking to represent this combined group of more than 3,000 faculty and P&A employees for purposes of collective bargaining.

If successful, the union would collect dues or other payments from this group and bargain collectively on its behalf as a single unit. The University does not agree that the Twin Cities faculty and these P & A job classifications can or should be combined or that they should be subject to the same terms and conditions of employment.

At the end of March, the BMS issued its first substantive ruling in this case, a decision to proceed to what is called a “community of interest” hearing regarding the union’s request. In our opinion, the ruling jumped over the critical question of whether the faculty and these ten P&A job classifications can be combined to a question of whether they should be combined. While some might view those questions as closely related or matters of obscure procedure, the University views them as distinct and critical to the nature of the University and the role of the faculty. By taking this step, the BMS ignores the law as it has been written since 1991 and as it has been applied for decades. More fundamentally it ignores the manner in which the University, like its public research peers, has been administered since it was founded.

Allowing the BMS decision to go forward unchallenged would imply that we no longer believe in the central and unique role of the faculty within the University. We reject that assertion even as we acknowledge and value the vital contribution that our P&A professionals make. Each of these roles are critical, but they are distinct and different. It is for this reason alone that we filed for review of the decision by the Minnesota Court of Appeals and are seeking a stay in the BMS proceedings until that question can be addressed.

We will continue to advocate for our point of view in this matter as it goes to the core of our mission and values. We will do so respectfully, in full support of every employee’s right to engage in collective bargaining and in a manner that reflects the values of fact-based, reasoned discourse that our profession demands. We reiterate our strong desire to have these issues fully and definitively settled so that the faculty – the group the SEIU filed to represent – can vote on the question of union representation at the earliest opportunity.
As this matter progresses, we will continue to update you on developments and to post relevant information on the Office of Human Resources' website. And, of course, I invite anyone with questions, comments or concerns to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Patti Dion
Director, Employee Relations

This email was sent to Faculty, selected P&A Employees, Vice Presidents, Twin Cities Deans, selected HR Leads, and Human Resources Consultants on behalf of Patti Dion by the Office of Human Resources Communications Department at the University of Minnesota, 319 15th Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Please read the University of Minnesota's mass email privacy statement.

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