

“Old Business” remarks (agenda item 8.3) presented to the Faculty Senate by Professor Gary Rhoades on 9/12/22

I am Gary Rhoades, a Full Professor here in the Center for the Study of Higher Education which I directed for 19 years, a sociologist by training who studies the restructuring of institutions and professions, and a member of United Campus Workers AZ, Local 7065 of the CWA.

My brief remarks today are about the salary monies that were swept by central administration in university-wide furloughs of staff and faculty, in 2020-2021. The furlough levels were the most extreme in the state (ASU had none), and among peer, similar types of institutions nationwide, by threefold to fourfold, as detailed by a general faculty financial advisory committee appointed by the Senate. Over the course of six-plus months, the furloughs were revised, partly in response to campus-wide feedback and response, including from the Coalition for Academic Justice, UA. In the Fall 2020, they were reduced by roughly half. But they remained the worst in the state and nation, by far. And they were accompanied by significant numbers of layoffs and non-renewals of contingent faculty, staff, and student employees.

When President Robbins announced the reduced furloughs on Sept 17, 2020, he did so with these words:

*“As you may recall, I promised to revisit these [furlough] programs in October of this year following fall census and again in March 2021, and to make any necessary or warranted adjustments. Our recruiting and retention efforts this summer and fall have yielded better than expected results in net tuition revenue, and this positive difference over projections will be applied to the FY2021 budget. As a result, I am pleased to share with you that the Furlough and Furlough-based Salary Programs will end earlier than previously announced.”*

To my knowledge, that revisiting in March 2021 did not take place, and in any event did not lead to a further adjustment to or reimbursement of the furloughed monies.

Now, it is clear that we are in even better shape financially and enrollment-wise than we were 2 years ago. It is past time to revisit the issue of the furloughed monies and to reinvest in the staff and faculty who the President has rightly noted have sacrificed much and overcome many challenges. In doing so, it is worth recognizing that in our own state, NAU, and nationally the peer with one of the next largest furlough programs, MSU, have since implemented policies repaying furloughed employees their lost wages.

This past December 2021, CFO Rulney shared that the total amount of furloughed monies was \$43.5M. It is likely less now, with normal employee turnover, as well as with departures related in part to the furloughs. Thus, over a 4- to 5-year period, that would be a mere \$8-10M/year. That is quite a manageable amount given our financial position, and would not compromise our financial health and work. The question is neither whether we have the financial wherewithal, nor whether there are possible mechanisms for achieving this reinvestment in the university’s staff and faculty through the restoration of furloughed monies; rather the question is whether there is the will to do so.

I am mindful and appreciative of the salary raises that we received this summer. I will note however, that they remained considerably less than that most in this room were furloughed, less than what other state employees received this summer, and less than the cost of living increases we have all experienced. That is particularly problematic for junior faculty and profs of practice, the majority of whom were furloughed at the same level as me, a Full Professor, and particularly problematic specially for lower paid staff, for whom any salary loss takes far longer to make back up over time.

The furlough program was set by central admin, and swept from the units. The repayment needs likewise to be a central admin targeted reallocation. And that is precisely how previously RCM, and now AIB work. Through a process of reallocation to the center from the units to targets, “taxes” central admin sets, and sweeps from the units.

In closing, I urge you as a Faculty Senate to devote time first to review the relevant documents and financial and enrollment considerations, and then second to discuss the possibility of developing a payback plan, over a multi-year period.