

UVM faculty call on Fogel to fund full-time professor jobs

By Lisa Rathke, Associated Press Writer | February 6, 2008

BURLINGTON, Vt. --On the eve of contract negotiations, University of Vermont professors said Wednesday the school isn't hiring enough full-time professors to keep pace with increasing enrollment and they will ask the administration to create an investment fund to boost that number.

In the last five years, the undergraduate student body has grown by 28 percent but the number of tenure-track professors has increased by only 14 percent, professors said. To meet student demand, the administration has hired adjunct faculty and increased class size, threatening the academic quality and research of the school, they said.

As a result, enrollment in introductory courses has skyrocketed, said union president David Shiman, a UVM professor of education.

"You see faculty, then, also being told 'Work harder, teach more students, advise more students, get more grants, publish more.' In fact, one group of faculty was recently told they should be expecting to work 14 to 16 hours," he said.

The school promised to hire 80 new professors five years ago, but so far has hired only half of them, he said.

Union negotiators plan to ask administrators Thursday to start a faculty investment fund to hire 20 tenure-track professors on top of the 80 already promised over the next three years.

University spokesman Enrique Corredera said UVM officials don't think such a fund is necessary. By this fall, UVM will have hired 51 professors, or three quarters of the professors it had planned to over the 10-year period ending in 2013, he said.

"We have made great progress hiring those tenure-track faculty lines (professors) and that's built right into the strategic financial package, so it's essentially in the university's budget of the next few years," he said.

Union officials said they fear the rate and number of hires is expanding student-to-teacher ratios, threatening the quality of education at the school.

"We want to make sure that this university not only becomes the premier small research university, but a premier small research and teaching university, because the teaching part of this equation seems to be disappearing," Shiman said.

Corredera said class size is important, but that there's room for some change.

"It's certainly a criteria that we're mindful of, and we want to keep an eye on, but we believe there's a little bit of flexibility from where we were at the start of this strategic financial plan," he said.

While acknowledging that the administration has made headway in salaries in recent negotiations, the union said pay still lags behind similar universities by an average of 10 percent or more.

The union plans to seek 1 to 2 percent increases to close that gap, said union negotiator Ross Thomson, an economics professor.

Corredera would not comment on what will be brought to the table, but said the administration has provided an average of 5 1/2 percent increases in salaries in recent negotiations.

Between 2002 and 2006, full-time professor salaries rose from 81 percent of the average for national public doctoral universities to 89 1/2 percent, he said. Associate professor salaries' climbed from 87.9

percent to 95.4 percent, he said.

"I think we've established a good track record with the faculty in our new negotiations. We've already successfully negotiated two contracts with this union," he said.

The current three-year contract expires in June. ■

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