

## Graves – Comments to Board of Trustees – 9/21/18

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the Board in formal session. Also, thank you for being a Board that is open to less formal communication with the university community. Chair Mahaney visited our Academic Senate with President Erickson on Tuesday. Our board members make time to meet with faculty, students, and the university community, and take their perspectives to heart. I don't think that is the norm among university trustees. It says a lot about the kind of university that NMU is, and the respect that is shared by all of the people who work to make NMU great.

You will all be happy to learn that I am not going to talk today about strategic resource allocation or commencement speakers. Instead, I want to explain how I perceive my job as president of the faculty union. I really only have two goals: that everyone be treated fairly and that faculty have what they need to have a successful and rewarding career. But how does one work toward that end? Many people think that a union leader needs to fight with administration, about everything. I believe that the union/administration relationship is like any other – if we fight constantly, it makes things worse for everyone; if we work together, we share the success. We are all in this together. But in order for this approach to work, it has to be a two way street. I try to help our university leaders succeed, because that is what is best for NMU. And what is good for NMU is good for the faculty. Luckily, we have outstanding leaders who also take this approach. I like and trust them and consider them friends.

This is an unusual relationship between a faculty union and administration. I was talking just yesterday with Steve Mitchell about the situation at Ferris, which is hurting their university and everyone associated with it. How can we avoid that situation? How can we maintain our ability to work together for the common good?

Over the summer, we acknowledged the talent, hard work, and achievements of President Erickson by extending his contract. We recognized that his pay was unjustifiably low and brought him to market equity. In his communication with the university community that day, he pointed out that he alone did not create our successes; they result from the sum of all of our efforts. We have extremely dedicated employees, from top to bottom. Respect and reward for that performance must occur from top to bottom to maintain the feeling of pride and dedication on campus that is absolutely essential for our continuing success. I don't know that everyone understands how much the atmosphere on campus has changed in recent years, and how much that contributes to students wanting to come to NMU and stay here. We have to work to maintain that positive attitude and dedication to NMU.

When I came to NMU in 1994, our faculty had the highest salaries among our Michigan peers. Fifteen years later, we had low salaries, but a benefit package that put our overall compensation in the middle of our peers. Now, we have the lowest faculty salaries, as well as overall compensation, of any public university in Michigan. That is not what our NMU family

deserves. Similarly, the number of faculty has declined and those remaining have worked harder to make up for it. NMU's expenditures on instruction last year were 29% of total expenses, while the state average was 37%. The faculty has sacrificed, worked hard, and created success, yet the money for numerous investments in NMU have come from our pockets and efforts.

We will negotiate a new contract next year. But now is the time to start thinking about how we will invest in our students' educations. We must provide competitive salaries and benefits to all of our employees, from the top to the bottom. That is what it takes to attract the best, keep them here, and create the dedication and enthusiasm that is necessary for NMU's success.

Thank you for listening. Oh yes, happy homecoming and ... GO CATS!