



*From the Office of the President*

**John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.**

REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**An Open Letter to the Faculty and Staff of Regis University  
in Response to the Regis College Faculty Senate  
Regarding Recent Financial Decisions of the University**

**Office of the President**

**February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to thank the Regis College Faculty Senate (RCFS) for articulating some of what all of us feel in the wake of the emotional, intellectual, and financial traumas of the last eighteen months. We have all carried extra burdens since the cyberattack, the COVID-19 crisis, and the strain of managing our University financial planning. Clearly, we are still living with and adapting to a changed world – not only the academic world but our human world where each of us is living in a more vulnerable and stressed global reality. That all feel weary and stretched exceedingly is true, clear, and important. Such lived experiences and our acknowledgement of them are the first steps to a better tomorrow; but our future does start with today and that is why I am communicating to all faculty and staff. To the RCFS, I give my sincere thanks for their collegial and honest input. I would like to structure my response in three parts. First, I would like to focus on some of the events that brought us to where we are today. Second, I will focus on actions taken. Third, and most importantly, what are we doing to build a brighter future.

Allow me to restate, to my best understanding, the asks of the RCFS for the benefit of all those included in this response. The letter from the RCFS asks for transparency and accountability for making the University less tuition dependent, including progress reports on the strategic commitment and fulfillment of this top-level goal, as well as routine reporting of progress to all constituent groups in the University with clear performance measures, and making recent and past financial statements and audit reports publicly available on our website.



In addition, the RCFS asked for a restoration of full retirement matching as of January 2022, in coordination with Empower Retirement. They ask that any extension of the pause in retirement matching would need to be approved by the Cabinet (“President’s Council”) and the Board of Trustees, rather than the other way around.

They desire early involvement of the University Budget Committee (UBC) in budget and financial planning decisions affecting faculty and staff compensation, as well as issues related to the financial health and sustainability of the University.

Further, the RCFS desires Regis College representation on high-level decision-making committees at the university level, including the Cabinet, and as elected by their peers, rather than selected by the administration.

RCFS asked that further communication be made to faculty and staff delineating the reduction in retirement match be made for faculty and staff planning purposes.

RCFS requests financial information about the distributed burden on the most recent budget cuts by college, position, years of service, race and gender.

Finally, RCFS requests that the University restore the lost retirement match funds within a period of five years.

With great care, it is good to remember some important realities and to remind us all that for the period of FY 2015 to FY 2021, total unduplicated enrollment for the University dropped by 31% from 9,149 to 6,310 students. For the same period, undergraduate enrollment dropped by 22%, graduate enrollment dropped by 42%, and doctoral enrollment dropped by 13%.

For the period of FY 2015 to FY 2021, student headcount has dropped for all three colleges. Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions dropped by 17%, Regis College dropped by 29%, and the Anderson College of Business and Computing dropped by 44%.



While we are all aware of the financial burden our employees have borne, faculty have not been disproportionately carrying the burden. Faculty salaries have been privileged in the recent reductions in force because we are focused on our academic mission and we continue to honor all contracts with our faculty. Salaries have not risen as much as any of us would like, but the rank/promotion processes have maintained the potential for fiscal advancement for our faculty. All promotions in rank have been funded at standard levels, and the number of faculty has remained stable while staff numbers (and student numbers) have shrunk. Allow me to articulate some unacknowledged realities, misperceptions, or opportunities not incorporated in the letter from the RCFS while also framing some initiatives the University has taken to recover and map our way forward.

For the Academic Affairs unit, from FY 2015 to FY 2021, faculty increased 6.1% from 278 to 295. Academic Affairs staff was reduced by 9.8% from 346 to 312 positions. For context, the Senior Vice President and CFO unit dropped by 27.8% from 126 to 91 positions. The Vice President for Advancement unit dropped 15.2% from 33 to 28 positions. The Vice President for Student Affairs decreased by 20.8% from 72 to 57 positions. Finally, the Vice President for Mission and Ministry's unit staff was reduced by 21.4% or from 14 to 11 positions. These are the most significant but it should be noted that virtually all staff functions and departments have purposefully decreased in headcount.

It is important to acknowledge that through the process of reducing the University's operating budget, three Cabinet member units (Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, and Financial Affairs) not only reduced their budgets by the needed and allocated amount, but the three units agreed to absorb additional reductions to lessen the burden on Academic Affairs. This also reduced the number of Cabinet members by two (Enrollment Management and Legal Affairs). In addition, Regis University's operational budget is sourced by student tuition, to the level of 90%. Nearly all our salaries come from the operational budget of the University. The capital budget funds new building projects, infrastructure improvements, and much of the necessary planned and strategic IT infrastructure upgrades.

The burden of academic advising is vexing. Many faculty members have succeeded in advising students in academic progress in lockstep with the changing realities of our time. In so many ways, heroism is the correct term for these efforts. However, faculties have been repeatedly offered the opportunity to switch to the student success coach model and have resisted that change because they believe in the value of personal faculty-student engagement. That is, in some ways, correct for a more traditional undergraduate population. But it remains that this workload could be transferred and calibrated, but has not been at the request of



faculty members. Academic coaches are trained to know and carry the Mission of the University into our students' thinking and choices.

In addition, and because of our deep and abiding care for the University and one another, all exempt faculty and staff carry on with some blurring of paid and unpaid time. This is true, not only of faculty, but of exempt staff at all levels. Clearly, this is a reality and a valid concern for all of us. As we all know, regulatory demands from different levels of government and our own Jesuit value of *cura personalis* put all of us in a bind and often it feels professionally overwhelming. The Academic Affairs workload study from the fall of 2020 indicated that there are redundant or inefficient organizational elements that tax faculty and staff time. Our Provost, Dr. Janet Houser, has been working with the Provost's Council since last October to implement measures to reduce wasted work time and improve committee efficiencies.

I know that many of you seek to remain current on the dynamics of our industry. The state of flux and the need to evolve has been hyper present, particularly in the past five years. Global, societal, national, and local events and impacts have accelerated these dynamics. There is no doubt that higher education as an industry has been and will continue to undergo seismic changes. I wish I could say the change is over; it is not. Realities and decisions such as the State of Colorado's lack of financial support for private institutions of higher education, the Federal Government's reluctant and inadequate support for inclusion of private institutions in the CARES Act I, CARES Act II, and the possible third tranche of financial relief in the wake of COVID-19, the political football called "free tuition," the expectation of many families that their financial contribution to their children's or their own education should be minimal, but with a substantial return on investment through highly compensated careers, are just some of the pressures higher education experiences.

We are not immune to these pressures, as you know. Our university-wide task in the last three years has been to work gradually toward a more balanced ratio between faculty and staff with - and for - our students. The cyberattack and COVID-19 have made our progress even more difficult but we have achieved progress nonetheless. In plain fact, the University has balanced the budget and maintained our necessary financial ratios every one of the past three years. Without this progress and our balanced budget, the University would move to insolvency. That is, however, patently not the case, nor is it, gratefully, our reality.

This may seem like cold comfort or, really, no comfort at all. However, with grit, immense personal and



community effort as already noted, and difficult decisions made with limited alternatives, Regis University remains vital and stable.

As for actions taken, allow me to add that in the last five years, we have had several university-wide payroll and/or cost of living adjustments.

- **January 2015**                \$300 lump sum;
- **May 2015**                    1% increase across the board to all employees;
- **September 2016**        3% / 2% / 1% across the board, noting that Regis College leadership chose to distribute the increase tiered by salary;
- **Spring 2019**                Lump sum to distribute among faculty and staff; Regis College leadership chose to distribute the increase tiered by salary; some received lump sum;
- **December 2020**        \$200 lump sum to eligible employees at the gift and behest of the the Board of Trustees. Cabinet and President exempted.

No one thinks that these salary adjustments have been adequate to the needs of faculty and staff or to meet the economic and cost of living growth in our nation and in Colorado. However, and as noted above, some of these adjustments were decided, governed, and distributed at the college level. Much of the salary compression of highly tenured faculty is due to a policy voted on and instated by the faculty ten years ago. Like many organizations with long-term employees, Regis is experiencing salary compression at the highest salary levels among faculty. Much of this can be attributed to a Regis College decision – made nearly a decade ago – asking administration not to create a tiered salary structure in Regis College. While this is a clear demonstration of the College’s focus on social justice, it does limit our ability to compete with market-driven faculty salaries. The faculty voted not to have tiered salaries as exist in other universities. This limits the ability to balance supply and demand of different specialties.

One of the most painful decisions undertaken by the UBC was, of course, the pause in the University’s contribution in matching the employee contribution to their retirement. This pause needed to be for one full calendar year to have any measurable effect on the University budget. The plan is to resume the University’s matching contributions to the retirement fund when the one-year pause is completed, that is on January 1, 2022. The whole reason for the pause, judged by UBC and the Cabinet to be the least bad alternative among bad alternatives, is that the University could not afford to match the retirement contributions for a year. While the University’s contribution will resume after one year, we cannot make up the amount in the pause; that is the reasoning of an actual pause. You cannot give what you do not have.



In the letter from the RCFS came a request that the University credibly commit to a number of asks as a sign of its long-term support for its employees. I believe the leadership of the University has been credible in our commitments to employees. These requests stem from a particular understanding of shared governance in the University that is not held by many in the University. Some of these requests are already woven into the procedures and governance of the University, albeit not always in the way framed in the request. Again, some clarification and helpful reiteration needs to be made.

Shared governance over curriculum and faculty welfare has been in place in clear and demonstrable ways for the last five years. Faculty are represented on all university-level committees, including the UBC. Faculty from all three colleges are represented, along with their Academic Deans, on the President's Advisory Council (PAC). In fact, faculty hold an equal voice on the UBC and a faculty member sits on the Resource Planning Committee of the Board of Trustees. Representatives on these committees are expected to share information with their respective colleges and represent their needs. Staying in close contact with UBC and PAC representatives is encouraged and keeps all faculty within reach of financial information.

All of the potential budget reduction strategies in the last eighteen months were taken to the UBC prior to finalizing these decisions. This group – with all faculty members present – prioritized the strategies for administration, and, in general, administration followed their advice.

I, along with the Cabinet, encourage faculty and staff to use these channels for influence, information, and feedback to their maximum capacity. We have worked hard the last five years to get faculty voice into key groups, and I believe we have been successful.

In addition, while the University's financial statements have been readily available through the Financial Affairs Office, our CFO, Dr. Salvador Aceves, has created a separate folder that now includes historical financial statements, IRS Form 990's, financial plans, and current fiscal year quarterly financial statements. This is important because our financial story is and has been openly available to all interested faculty and staff.

Moving forward, the University continues to develop strategies for lessening tuition dependency for our operations, I remain committed to and continue to strive for appropriate transparency and accountability with the whole University community in a timely manner. Yet, the University work of planning and developing our property along Federal Boulevard requires confidential and discreet conversation among



experts. Ideas and possibilities and potentials are explored and navigated with the necessary parties in a confidential manner befitting a thoughtful process. Some conversations are proprietary and, of necessity, are shared on a need to know basis to protect the interests and future of the University. As with University budgetary considerations and relations with our neighborhood communities, as well as with the city of Denver and Adams County, a great deal of patience and active listening takes place. If our postmodern era has taught us anything, it is that no one can say all that needs to be said all at once; it is a process with skilled professionals engaged. Another growing revenue stream outside tuition dependence is the University's Higher Learning Partners (HLP) and the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities (OCICU). Providing a small but growing revenue stream to the University, these projects shows great potential.

This letter is addressed to the whole University, the three Colleges, all the faculty and staff as a follow up to a letter from the Regis College Faculty Senate to me and to my Cabinet. Again, I thank the Regis College Faculty Senate for putting the questions many of us have before me and my Cabinet. My sincere hope is that this response is helpful to all in our community.

Gratefully,

Rev. John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J.  
President