Response to 2/13 anonymous letter

Dear Colleagues,

A selective response to your letter.

Regarding two specific matters:

1) “Has the Drafting Group done research on other universities’ R&T practices?”
As has been stated many times, the Drafting Group was informed by the R&T Task Force Report, which certainly did, over a two year period, do such research. A message to all faculty that this Report was complete and available for reading was sent last Fall.

Your work in the area of other universities’ practices is appreciated, but because you are working on your own rather than engaging in ongoing conversation, you end up perhaps duplicating work already done—if we could have an open conversation, we could all work more productively together.

2) Stone Age/Information Silo
If you have specific suggestions on designing a site, I hope you will make them. At the same time, please know that we are understaffed in this area; this is the first time that the Senate website has been used or accessed at all for such things.

I take the “Get Smart” initiative seriously. If we could sit down together, I suspect you would have some excellent ideas and we could cooperate to help make this a reality. I will be asking for volunteers from Senate and faculty at large to work with IT people to improve our website. This may not occur until summer, being realistic about our workload this semester. Consider this an open invitation to be part of that venture.

Regarding points addressed to me:

With respect to safe space (e.g. Faculty [only] Forums) and extended timeline for discussion, please stay tuned. These things take time. (On one level, your request for an extended timeline was met—as you and many other faculty asked, the original 1/27/11 deadline for feedback on the Draft Resource Manual was extended to 2/15/11. Your first letter asked for extended timeline without specifics.)

I hope that when the plan for faculty discussion of the Draft Resource Manual and R&T process in general is finalized and events begin taking place, that you will be a part of the conversation rather than anonymous commentators.

Finally, I want to speak candidly to the issue of anonymous postings more generally. Offering a way to post anonymous comments on the Resource Manual was designed to provide a way for faculty
(particularly non-tenured faculty) to give input on the Manual and particular issues surrounding the promotion and tenure process at LMU. The intent was to give each faculty member the opportunity to be heard, affording attention to all who want to participate in an equitable manner. Unfortunately, many faculty members have expressed to me their feeling that the approach taken in these two anonymous letters has had the opposite effect, by appearing to make demands and to ask for special priority for your concerns.

Anonymous discourse which has this effect is not, in my mind, an element of good faculty governance. Discourse of this sort is free to speak without being responsible or accountable for what is said, whereas governance should be a public, shared process. For this reason, I have mixed feelings about whether it is appropriate for me to respond to anonymous letters at all, but I have done and am doing so because I am genuinely concerned that I have colleagues who feel the way you have said you feel, and because you raise substantial issues. Again, I hope that moving forward, you will participate in the manner open to all LMU faculty.

Paul Harris
Professor of English and President of the Faculty Senate