

TO: Earlham College Faculty and Staff; ESR Faculty and Staff

FROM: Doug Bennett

RE: Appointment of an Ad Hoc Committee Regarding Full-time Status

DATE: September 2, 2008

Last April, in the midst of discussions in the college faculty concerning benefits and part-time status, I said that I would appoint a committee to look into the question of who we consider a full-time member of the faculty. (A copy of the earlier memo is attached.) I now want to set the charge and composition of this Ad Hoc Committee on Full-Time Status.

Full-time status is important at Earlham because, under our Faculty and Staff handbooks (for both the college and the seminary) many of our most significant benefits (including pension and health care) are available only to full-time employees. A few other matters of personnel policy also pertain to the distinction between full- and part-time employees. Our current definitions regarding part-time/full-time status are stated in the college's Faculty Handbook (section K), in ESR's Faculty Handbook (section J), and in the Staff Handbook (section on employment status). In essence, the ad hoc committee would be considering whether to recommend any changes in these Handbook sections, recognizing that we need a common approach across the three Handbooks. If proposed, any changes would then require the approval of the relevant faculty (for the two Faculty Handbooks), the president, and the Board of Trustees.

Charge. I ask the ad hoc committee to undertake the following:

1. Review Earlham's two faculty handbooks and the staff handbook to see how they define full-time and part-time status, particularly with regard to eligibility for benefits. Also, review practices in this regard at other, similar colleges.
2. Review the handbook sections on "combinations of adjunct positions." [Questions about which specific benefits are available to full-time employees and which to part-time employees will continue to fall under the purview of the Earlham Welfare Committee.] The committee should consider what should be done about positions that appear to be distinct and unrelated to each other.
3. Address what might be the second-order consequences of any changes in definitions of full-time and part-time status or in eligibility for benefits. (What, for example, might be the budgetary effects of any change in benefits eligibility? Might some positions become too expensive to sustain? Etc.)
4. Offer guidance about the circumstances under which Earlham should constitute a position as part-time and thus, likely, ineligible for benefits. Are we making too much use of part-time positions?

Composition. The ad hoc committee will be composed of the current and former conveners of Welfare Committee (Jane Terashima and Peter Blair), the convener of Employee Council (Nancy Fessler), and the Business Manager of ESR (Tracy Crowe).

TO: Earlham College Faculty and Staff  
ESR Faculty and Staff

FROM: Doug Bennett

RE: Part-Time Status and Benefits

DATE: April 25, 2008

Following Wednesday's discussion in the college faculty meeting concerning part-time status and benefits, I want to lay out a way Earlham can continue consideration of this matter in the future. Note that I am sending this memo to both faculty and staff and to those who work at both the college and the seminary, all of whom are affected by our benefits plans.

There are at least two aspects to the question: (1) Who do we consider a full-time employee? And (2) What benefits do we extend to part-time employees? The second has been under consideration by the Earlham Welfare Committee for some time, and I believe consideration of that matter should remain there. For the first, I propose to appoint an *ad hoc* committee to start work as early in August as possible. In constituting that *ad hoc* committee, we will need to remember that its recommendations would likely affect faculty and staff of both the college and the seminary.

As a governance matter, any changes in eligibility for Earlham's benefits plans require changes in a legal Plan Document, and such changes require final approval by the Board of Trustees. The Plan Document describes (among other things) the criteria we use in making people eligible. We cannot simply name individuals. A second governance consideration: section K of the college's Faculty Handbook (section J of ESR's) specifically addresses the situation of combination of part-time positions. A change in our policy might require amendment of the Faculty Handbooks, which would require action by both the college and ESR faculty followed by approval by the Board of Trustees. There is no way we could make any changes that would take effect quickly.

For any changes that would affect eligibility for health care benefits, I am sure the Board of Trustees will want to know potential financial consequences for both the college and the seminary, and will also want to consider how our comparison institutions handle such matters of eligibility. Board members are always concerned about fairness and equity, but at present they are also very concerned about the sharply rising costs of health care for Earlham.

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I want to add some substantive reflections of my own on these matters. (Of course I cannot say anything about the situation of any individual, and I was distressed to hear that the college faculty did discuss the situation of an individual.)

These issues are difficult because the United States, singularly, has no national health care policy. All of us are reminded once again why this is such a large issue for the U.S.

Issues of national health care policy are beyond our control, but why, how and when we employ faculty and staff in part-time positions are matters under our control. I believe (apparently with many of you) that full-time work should carry benefits, especially health-care

benefits. I also believe (and have for some time) that we have too many part-time positions. Because they can carry the risk of abuse or exploitation I believe we should be on a track to combine positions and otherwise reduce part-time situations. This would have the effect of increasing the number of full-time individuals who have health care and decreasing the number of part-time individuals who do not. Such a change would have to be carried through slowly and carefully so as not to disrupt the lives of those who are incumbents of part-time positions. As a part-time faculty position became full-time, we would normally want to conduct a new national search to fill the position.

I do not believe we would ever want to completely eliminate all part-time positions, however. There are good reasons, both for the individual and for Earlham, to have part-time positions. Some individuals seek part-time work because it fits their other responsibilities and desires. These individuals generally have benefits from another source or have no need of benefits. Sometimes Earlham offers part-time work because the task is discrete and does not require all of someone's time. Sometimes the task is transitional or temporary or seasonal. I believe our default expectation should be to hire people into full-time positions with benefits. When we do offer a part-time position, we want to be sure there is a good reason the position should be part-time, that we can keep the position within its time expectations, and that anyone applying for such a position understands that it is part-time and carries no benefits. That is, when we offer a part-time position we should be sure the institution's reasons for offering such a position and the individual's circumstances are complementary.

For Earlham simply to offer health care benefits to those currently in part-time positions would dramatically change the considerations around the wisdom of having each of our current part-time positions. We would need to rethink each of these positions, and the consequent adjustments could be quite disruptive. (For many part-time positions, the cost to the college of providing health care coverage would exceed the wage or salary paid to the individual.) Thus, I am much more in favor of seeing that we move carefully towards more full-time positions with each having full benefits.

If you are thinking as you read this that turning part-time positions into full time ones will put us into situations where we will need to rethink the allocations of positions and thus potentially trigger PAR/RATS processes, you are realizing another reason why we will want to carry through this rethinking of positions in a deliberate and measured way.

In all these matters we are dealing with ways in which Earlham as a community collides with Earlham as an organization. To the greatest degree possible, we want these two aspects of Earlham to stay in synch with one another. As a community, we want to be a place of mutual care and concern. But the organizational side of this collision does need to consider questions of budget, employment law and benefits plan design. Thinking together, I am sure we can find a way for Earlham to model its best values in its employment practices for those who hold full-time or part-time positions.