**Consideration of Head’s role in initiating candidacy for Emeritus/a Status**

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**Background.** Emeritus status was first conferred at our institution in 1919, according to Ross Nielsen’s meticulously documented tome: *A Review of the History and Development of Emeritus Status at the University of Northern Iowa and its Predecessor Institutions*. According to Nielsen (p. 31), “there appears to have been no local definition or statement of qualifications for emeritus status at that time.” Nielsen could find little further referencing to emeritus status for many decades, other than the recipient “having served the institution with great competence and dedication….” Although history of the process is somewhat muddled, UNI’s Policies and Procedures Manual includes mention of emeritus status by 1976. Later revisions were reported up to 1996, when Nielsen’s book was published. The application format at that time was noted by Nielsen (p. 46).

Formal application for emeritus status may be made with completion of the *Request for Emeritus Status form* (UNI-Form 2) which is available from the Office of Academic Affairs or the Personnel Services Department. The completed form should be submitted together with an accompanying letter, if one is written by the staff member or the recommending university official (vice-president, dean, director, department head). The Faculty Senate acts on all requests for professor emeritus status for faculty members. Once the form has been processed copies will be distributed to all signatories of the form.

Note: There was no specification of who must provide a letter of support, and I don’t know how to identify when department head support for emeritus status was established. You are familiar with the current emeritus/a application process, which starts with a faculty member filling out the online form R*equest for Emeritus Status*. Although this procedure differs somewhat from my application process in the early 2000s, there were many steps then, and six approval steps remain. Early in my retirement years as a new member of the UNI Emeritus Association, I joined with a few others to see if there was a way to streamline the process. However, at no point did we believe an individual could bypass support by the department head or immediate supervisor, as contributions above and beyond ‘time spent’ at the University *had to be verified*.

Regardless of how lengthy the process for approval to emeritus/a status, two pertinent matters should be clear:

(1) Purpose of emeritus status. The Merriam Webster primary definition of the term *emeritus*: “holding after retirement an honorary title….”Indeed, being awarded emeritus status is not merely recognition of a certain minimum number of years of service. From Nielsen (p. 31): “It is still considered to be an honorific award for extended successful service in higher education.”

(2) University Faculty Senate’s role. I bring this to your attention today, as should the candidacy process *not require* documentation of meritorious service, then why bother with a stop at your door? The evolution of the University Faculty Senate appropriately being involved in decisions regarding emeritus candidacy is also found in Nielsen (p. 31). The Senate had little interest in this topic for many decades after its formation in 1937, being advisory at best. Today, your role is significant.

The Faculty Senate is an agency of approval for all members of the faculty seeking emeritus-status recognition upon retirement or resignation. The Senate also serves as a response unit to request for consultation or advice regarding emeritus policy issues from the university administration or other faculty units. It also may advise or respond to members of the emeritus faculty on other matters.

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My thanks to John Burnight for bringing the University Faculty Senate’s interest in this topic to my attention. Directly quoting from John’s initial communication with me:

. . .since the letters [of support], and the excerpts read from them during the meeting, become part of the Senate's permanent records and are on Scholarworks, we want to ensure that emeritus status at UNI truly

reflects the meritorious service of the recipients, rather than simply being viewed as a right for “time served.”

**UNIEA’s Position.** Our Association has an Advisory Council comprising former and current officers. I posed the question to the Council and with other emeriti who are active in our operations. While there was consensus that emeritus status is honorary and should be documented with a letter from the department head, one emeritus firmly believes that faculty’s worthiness is documented throughout one’s career at UNI and should need no further evidence upon applying for emeritus status. Three questions emerged: (1) How would documentation be gathered should a department head and candidate have a strained relationship? (2) If emeritus/a status is awarded for those who simply have put in their time, what are we telling faculty who truly *have* distinguished themselves? (3) What criteria are in place to assure meritorious achievements for those individuals who also are granted emeritus/a status although not in fulltime academic ranks (i.e., part-time faculty; Professional & Scientific staff)?