

# UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Campus Information Technologies and Educational Services (CITES)  
2406 Digital Computer Laboratory, MC-256  
1304 West Springfield Avenue  
Urbana, IL 61801

January 3, 2013

Mr. Lewis T. (Tom) Morelock, Executive Director and Members of the Merit Board  
State Universities Civil Service System (SUCSS)  
1717 Philo Road, Suite 24  
Urbana, IL 61802-6099

Mr. Morelock and Members of the SUCSS Merit Board:

My name is Kostas Yfantis and I am an Academic Professional at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I work as an Acting Manager of Teaching and Learning Services for Campus Information Technologies and Educational Services which provides IT services to faculty, students and staff to help advance their teaching, learning, research and service goals.

I currently serve as the Chair of the Council of Academic Professionals (CAP), an advisory body to the Chancellor of the Urbana campus as well as the Chair of the University Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (UPPAC), an advisory body to the President of the University of Illinois.

I am here today to represent both CAP and UPPAC in our unanimous opposition to the removal of the exemption authority from the University. We believe that the risks of such a development far outweigh any potential benefits. We are against the proposed rule changes to section 250.30 of the Illinois Administrative Code because it seriously jeopardizes the ability of our institution to efficiently and effectively recruit and retain the most highly qualified Academic Professionals, who are central to the mission of the University.

It's not only Human Resources professionals that oppose these changes but many faculty members, students, administrators such as Deans, Directors and Department Heads. Here is a set of direct quotes from University of Illinois employees that teach, research and coordinate educational programs across our campuses when asked to provide comments about the proposed changes:

A faculty member at the Urbana-Champaign campus stated:

*Federal funds are the lifeblood of the institution. Often, the funds are for relatively short periods of time which demands that work begin immediately. Undo bureaucracy that prohibits flexibility, impedes progress and the chances of subsequent funding.*

An administrator at the Chicago campus said:

*As the Director of one of the largest research institutes at UIC, and an employer of over 100 APs, our functions, and ability to get and operate federal grants (more than \$20million/year) would be SEVERELY hindered with this proposed change in HR processes. We would lose a significant portion of our grant dollars because of inability to respond quickly with hires, and many potential jobs would go unfilled -- a major crisis for the employees, workers, and state and university to lose these federal dollars.*

A staff member at the Springfield campus indicated:

*Students in our college rely on AP's for time-critical advisement, work that cannot be put off but must be absorbed by others when one or more advisors leaves. A slow process of rehiring will put an impossibly large workload of urgent business onto a few people for a long time.*

Specifically, our concerns regarding the removal of the exemption authority include the following:

#### Number 1

Based on evidence supplied as part of this testimony, the SUCSS agency has demonstrated an unsatisfactory ability to be responsive to the needs of State Universities. An administrator at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign indicated that one of the reasons the exemption authority was removed from SUCSS in the late 1990s and given to each State University was the inability of SUCSS to handle transactions efficiently causing significant delays in the hiring process. Why repeat the mistakes of the past?

#### Number 2

We are also concerned that some of the rules governing Civil Service employment are rigid and inflexible.

One example of these rules that can significantly affect the recruiting process of top talent from around the globe is "the rule of three" which would not allow search committees to review all the applicants for a position but would restrict the review to "three at a time". To meet the challenge of innovation at institutions with vigorous academic environments, we need to be able to recruit the best candidates and not rely on a filtering process based on standardized tests. Search committees who will be working closely with prospective employees in each unit must be able to review the entire pool of applicants in order to select the top candidates.

Another example of rigidity and inflexibility is the issue of "bumping rights." This rule denies the individuality of each position and assumes that one title fits many roles. In my area of expertise, information technology, I can attest that the years of experience is not the only differentiating factor in terms of ability and skills between employees that share the same title and job description.

### Number 3

The SUCSS provides oversight to State Universities and holds them accountable with the audit process.

By transferring the exemption authority back to SUCSS, the proposed amendment would make the auditor and the decision-maker one single entity. But who will hold SUCSS accountable if some of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the past causes irreparable damage to the operation and reputation of our Universities? Let's keep these two distinct powers separate and have SUCSS keep its audit authority, which should be separate from the exemption decision-making power so SUCSS can provide fair and balanced oversight to the institutions it is designed to serve not run.

We believe it is in our best interest if the exemption authority is vested not with a centralized entity which is not part of the operational fabric of the University but instead with the human resources units deployed at institutions that fully understand their unique missions and needs. One size does not fit all and in this case one agency cannot serve all.

From discussions with campus HR professionals, I know they are grateful for some of the innovations SUCSS introduced for Civil Service Classifications such as credentialing, specialty factors and flexibility in defining salary levels. I believe it is SUCSS's responsibility to provide the HR Professionals on each campus with the tools they need to succeed such as the aforementioned innovations. SUCSS should not decide or does not need to decide which positions are exempt if it provides University HR staff with the protocols required to appropriately determine exemptions according to standards identified by SUCSS. The System has provided the universities with standard titles that are appropriate to use as exemptions. Yet, today, use of these titles is being challenged by System staff when used by the campuses. SUCSS should, therefore, update and clarify the guidelines for using these standard exempted titles so that the universities can use the titles correctly in exempting positions. The audit process then would determine whether the campuses are following those guidelines correctly.

We oppose the rule change because it will negatively impact our ability to hire and respond to the rapidly changing needs of our institution. By removing the exemption authority from state universities, you will be denying them the ability to make sound decisions about directing their future. Hiring decisions need to stay close to the local level to ensure we recruit talent of the highest caliber in today's globalized environment in an efficient and effective manner. Therefore, we urge you not to take this proposed rule amendment further in the JCAR process and we propose an alternative approach.

At the November 14 2012 meeting, a SUCSS Merit Board member proposed that SUCSS convenes a study group that would include merit board members, HR Directors and faculty members. The purpose would be to identify how to resolve issues between SUCSS and State Universities without having to remove exemption authority from the institutions. We believe that setting up this study group and charging it with coming up with a set of recommendations on how to resolve these issues is the right path moving forward.

In Spring 2012, during the first public comments period of the proposed amendment UPPAC solicited comments from employees at the Springfield, Chicago and Urbana campuses. A total of five hundred and eighty four employees responded with comments. An overwhelming majority, ninety-four percent (five

hundred and fifty respondents) oppose the removal of the exemption authority and believe that the Academic Professional hiring process should not be managed by an external agency that is not connected to the day-to-day operations of our campuses. Many provided compelling cases demonstrating why the exemption authority should remain with the campuses. As part of my testimony, I am submitting a packet that includes a summary as well as all five hundred and eighty four comments that UPPAC received.

I want to express my appreciation to you for the opportunity to offer my testimony today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. N. Y." with a horizontal line extending from the end of the "Y".

Kostas Yfantis