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UW e-mails about salary suit barred

Meghan Erkkinen Jan 11, 2006

A King County Superior Court judge ruled that one-sided communications from the University to the faculty about an ongoing class-action lawsuit "exceeds the 'ordinary course of business'" today, barring the University from sending similar communications in the future.

Judge Mary Yu's ruling concerned a Nov. 30, 2005 e-mail from UW President Mark Emmert, regarding the lawsuit, over the University's failure to pay employees an annual 2 percent salary increase promised to meritorious University faculty. A judge ruled on Oct. 25 that the University breached its contract, and must repay faculty members. The exact amount of the repayment is yet to be determined.

"The president thinks that raising the faculty's salary is a top priority, but he's fighting this 2 percent raise," said Stephen Strong, an attorney for the faculty. Strong submitted the motion to prohibit further direct communications on this issue between the administration and faculty. The administration, he said, should not be soliciting the faculty; all communications should be made through an attorney.

Emmert's e-mail provided "information regarding the lawsuit involving faculty pay," according to the text of the communication. Emmert defended the University's decision to withhold the salary increase, stating the decision "was made in a very challenging fiscal environment."

Emmert warned of the potential financial burden the ruling puts on the University. He suggested the University might appeal the case and affirms its commitment to "providing competitive salaries to recruit and retain our outstanding faculty."

University officials could not be reached for comment on yesterday's ruling.

Yu will determine the amount the University owes the faculty in June.