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*Guest Column*

## **Reduction in Research Support Must Stop**

By Katherine H. Tachau

I write to express my dismay at the DI's front-page article titled "Schools stay under leave cap" (DI, 12/4/12). As president of the UI chapter of the American Association of University Professors, as a faculty member with an active research agenda, and as the colleague of many similarly situated faculty members, I resist both the article's assumption that the small number of research assignments currently being granted to faculty is mandated by a legislative or regents' cap, and the article's tone suggesting that the faculty's excessive desire to pursue research is a troublesome problem that has now been successfully solved.

The article notes correctly that the university operated under a legislatively mandated cap on research assignments, set at 3 percent, during academic year 2011-12. That cap is no longer in effect; in deciding on the merits of research leave proposals now and in subsequent years, UI administrators are not operating under that cap.

Instead, any such restrictions are imposed by the Board of Regents, which has expressed its belief that the number of assignments should remain at about the 3 percent figure. Yet, the 65 research assignments granted for academic year 2013-14, is not only within the 3 percent target, but well below it and far below the number of research assignments routinely granted as recently as three or four years ago.

These reductions in research support fall most heavily upon scholars in the humanities and some social sciences, where significant periods of time spent in remote archives are essential to their research and where external funding is less accessible than it is in scientific fields. For a research university seeking to maintain its longstanding reputation for excellence in the humanities and the value of degrees granted to its students, this is alarming news and certainly nothing to be proud of.

Yet, according to the article, "officials said they're happy with that number [of research assignments]." These university leaders, who should be advocates for faculty research, seem happy with the level of research support reflected in the low number of research assignments approved for 2013-14. It's only reasonable to expect that faculty members will be deterred from submitting research proposals, given such administrative satisfaction with the status quo.

We now know that the number of faculty applications for research assignments has declined dramatically following extensive publicity about legislative caps, the abolition of the Faculty Scholar and Global Scholar programs, and unjustified criticism of research assignments as "paid vacations." Far from being a solution to a pesky university problem, though, this drop in applications represents a major loss to the university since successful teaching in every discipline depends on ongoing faculty research.

The only critic of the cap quoted in the article is Associate Professor Stephen Berry of the School of Journalism, whose proposal for a research leave in the fall of 2013 was granted. He is

concerned about the effects of the 3 percent cap and is quoted as saying that "decisions on who gets a career-development leave should be based strictly on the merit of the proposal."

How right he is.

If the current de-emphasis on faculty scholarship becomes the new normal, it will have predictable adverse consequences for the university: inability to hire the best junior scholars and teachers, departure of the university's premier scholars as they realize that the university won't support their work, damage to Iowa's national and international scholarly reputation, and concomitant drops in rankings and, inevitably, decline in the value of a University of Iowa degree.

For anyone who cares about the future of the university, its faculty and students, these are consequences to be avoided if at all possible. Perhaps there was reason to cut back on funding faculty research temporarily while the state was in the midst of a budget crisis. But now the state has a budget surplus, and the university's historic commitment to faculty scholarship should resume.

Iowans have long invested in high quality public education. The American Association of University Professors calls upon our faculty colleagues to persist in asking the university to support their important research projects and hopes that university administrators, regents, and state leaders will join with our faculty and help Iowa reap the rewards of its investment.

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