To: Brian McGee, Provost
   cc: Todd McNerney, Faculty Senate Speaker
From: Faculty Senate Budget Committee (Tom Carroll, Julia Eichelberger, Rohn England, Steve Johnson, Rhonda Mack, Courtney Murren, Tom Ross)
About: Draft Academic Affairs Budget for 2015-16

4 February 2015

On Jan. 30 we met to discuss the Jan. 26 public draft budget presentation and the follow-up conversation we had with you. Based on our meetings and continued conversations by email, we have prepared these comments for your consideration as you complete your Academic Affairs budget proposal for submission to the President.

Each topic we discuss is of great importance to the committee, including items for the current budget and future budgetary considerations. We look forward to discussing these topics with you at our next regular meeting on February 9 or at another mutually convenient time. Our discussion will help the committee frame a report we plan to make to the Senate in March.

Thanks in advance for your careful attention to this memo.

I. Overall: Thumbs Up

First, we thank you for being forthright with us, with the Deans and division heads, and with the College as a whole during this process. Requiring new budget requests to be presented publicly is extremely informative for the whole campus, and it enables our committee to make more informed recommendations to you. We also appreciate being able to meet with you and discuss our questions at length, as well as being given time to send you written remarks both before and after the draft budget was presented on January 26.

The committee feels very strongly that transparency in this process should be used in the future, no matter who the Provost, President, or members of this committee may be. Without this process, it’s impossible for the committee or any other faculty or staff to understand the competing new needs of all the divisions that report to the Provost. Additionally, if requests are made privately as they were made in past years, faculty and staff are understandably suspicious of those who ultimately decide whose requests to grant. Without knowing the breadth of these requests or the rationale used by the Provost, departments and divisions will be likely to submit unrealistic budget requests and to fail to make long-range plans that will enable them to meet their most critical new needs.

Overall, the committee finds the Provost’s draft budget a good one given the lean times for economic growth. Most, if not all, of the proposed new expenditures seem well aligned with our Strategic Plan, with the critical needs of our institution, and therefore with the interests of the faculty we represent.
We endorse the practices of keeping earlier promises made for hiring faculty (promises made in endorsing new programs or as conditions of donor gifts). We support building inflationary costs into the budgets of departments/divisions. We also support the moving of costs that are truly recurring and well justified out of the “non-recurring” side of the ledger, while reserving the non-recurring category for short-term spending or expenses whose value is being explored. All these practices promote sound budget planning on the part of faculty, staff, and departments as well as Randolph Hall.

Glad to have no dire warnings or harsh criticisms to offer, we now share some questions and concerns that Academic Affairs has not yet addressed, and we ask you to reconsider some specific requests.

II. Concerns and questions

1. Prioritizing Computer Science faculty lines?
   
   The two CSCI lines included in your drafted budget were not among the priorities presented by the SSM dean, who presented many critical needs. Should these lines be in Academic Affairs’ proposed budget? Your presentation notes that “recurring state funding for these positions is a possibility.” We would like to know your plan for the two lines for Computer Science now in your budget, should the state choose not to appropriate new funds for them.

   We acknowledge that the College may regard Computer Science as a special opportunity for growth that state leaders are eager to support. A state decision to fund these lines with new appropriations sounds like a win for the College, but even if this came to pass, we also would like to know whether these lines would count towards the total number the College will be allowed to add; if they are, adding them will prevent us from addressing other priorities via new or temp-to-perm lines. (Later in this memo we present additional comments about the process of requesting special state appropriations and how this process might be shared with relevant faculty committees.)

2. Parameters needed for school and program fees.
   
   In our conversations on this topic, you seemed to agree with many of the concerns and priorities that we listed in our Jan. 20 memo—several of those ideas came from you. Our memo had many provisos regarding fees, only one or two of which was mentioned in your Jan. 26 presentation; we do understand that your presentation had to be brief. At the Jan. 29 Board of Trustees Budget & Finance committee meeting, Senior Vice President Steve Osborne suggested that school or program fees might not begin before AY 16-17. We were glad to hear this; we think phasing in fees is a good idea. The Vice President’s report did not make reference to the way fees might be spent or to faculty input or oversight (understandably, since these topics don’t really concern this BOT committee).

   Our biggest fear, one we think you may share, is that these fees could create a slush fund that, in effect, forces students to fund items that are nowhere near the top of our academic priorities or critical needs. This could be very bad PR for the College and would
create an even more lopsided distribution of resources to/from schools or programs that collect fees.

With all respect and collegiality, we must note that we remain vigilant and somewhat concerned about the way any school or program fees may be spent. We would like to know your thoughts on our recommendations, on when the President and Board might be likely to begin phasing in fees, and on whether we or other faculty will participate in setting up a workable system.

II. Please reconsider:

1. Requests for increased staff for Cognos and Degree Works.
   Both these operations affect the entire campus and would facilitate much important work that now is not at all or could be done better. In both cases we were told that the institution is in a very vulnerable position because only one staff person has expertise these areas. To us this appeared a more urgent priority than adding multiple faculty lines in Computer Science.

2. Increases to URCA’s budget.
   Even when funds are scarce, a small increase to URCA will fund several additional students. We appreciate the critical boost to R&D grants, but faculty-student research is also critical to the research and development of many students and faculty. Even a small “down payment,” to use your term, would be helpful here.

3. Closing salary gaps between our Associate & Full ranks and the mean salaries of these ranks at peer institutions.
   Here too, we would urge you to consider setting aside some amount, expressly for merit/market raises that would raise the mean salaries within these ranks. (In 2015-16 there were no merit raises for any faculty except those who earned promotion or “excellent” PTR ratings.) Making a small commitment--a quarter or a tenth percentage of our budget--to raise the mean for the next several years for these specific ranks would get us much closer to our strategic goal. If we continue to leave this gap unaddressed, it will only become harder to close it.

4. Summer school reallocation
   We were confused as to why the full cost of summer school was not moved from recurring to non-recurring, since this wouldn’t cost the institution anything; summer school continues to net significant revenue. Bev Diamond’s document is not among materials shared with us—maybe there is something else involved we don’t have all the data to understand.

5. SSM startup budgets moved into “recurring” category
   This seems like a fine idea, but there are other significant startup costs for disciplines outside of SSM. Now might be a good time to convert startup costs into recurring costs for any department where these costs have been repeatedly funded and can be reasonably expected to continue, as is the case for SSM’s costs. Funding across campus
seems more equitable; it could help level the playing field for other departments and faculty who need costly materials to do the research and mentoring of student researchers that the College has hired them to do.

IV. Other budget-related issues that surfaced during these hearings:

1. We don’t understand why some schools have development officers and others don’t. More daylight on the way development works at C of C would be helpful.

   Our colleagues at the Foundation and the Office of Institutional Advancement are doubtless highly skilled and hardworking, and we’re confident they’re making progress for the institution overall, but there is a perceived gap between their priorities and the priorities of Academic Affairs and our Schools. We understand that not all programs are equally likely to attract donations, but it seems unwise and inequitable for some programs to have professional fundraising advocates while others don’t.

2. We remain concerned about our interdisciplinary programs, both under our current structure and in light of planned decentralization that would push some funds and authority out from Academic Affairs to Schools.

   Interdisciplinary programs provide valuable learning and research experiences and often add value to traditional disciplinary majors. Interdisciplinary learning opportunities are prioritized in the strategic plan and have much appeal to our students, but some programs seem chronically under-resourced and at risk for continued disadvantage. This disadvantage could worsen if Deans support only the programs that are solely within their own schools. Departments who serve these programs on an already lean budget should not be expected to neglect their own programs in order to keep their commitments (in course offerings and faculty/staff time) to these interdisciplinary programs.

   In the past, some faculty eager to mount interdisciplinary programs have presented proposals claiming that the program can be delivered at no additional cost, but this has proved incorrect. Faculty should be careful not to offer future proposals for new programs “on the cheap.”

   It may be time to do some sort of audit of the interdisciplinary programs we now offer. We need to be clear about who is bearing all costs of these programs and make sure we support them in a manner that is sustainable for the long term, rather than relying on essentially volunteer work by departments with their own majors/minors to support as well.

   We should also reward departments for developing innovative interdisciplinary majors that enable them to “reinvent” aspects of existing programs, redeploying their faculty in response to changes in their field and changing student interest (e.g., the new program in Public Health).

V. Questions/Concerns regarding Requests for Special Appropriations

   As you know, on January 29, Senior Vice President Steve Osborne reported to the Board of Trustees that the College had requested special appropriations from the SC House Ways and Means subcommittee. Some of the funds requested would pay for 6 faculty lines
in Computer Science (i.e., 4 more than in the Provost’s draft budget). The Senior VP also reported on a funding request for three new faculty lines in Supply Chain Management.

Requests for added CSCI lines and for extensive SCIM funding took us by surprise; during the budget hearings this month, the SOBE dean did not present any Supply Chain management lines as a critical need for the school. Further, in last year’s proposal for the new major in Supply Chain Management, approved by the Senate on March 3 2014, no new faculty lines were requested. According to the major proposal, the SCIM program was in the process of hiring a third Supply Chain Management faculty member; with this new hire, there would be 10 faculty at C of C contributing to this interdisciplinary major. The proposers forecast growing the number of SCIM students from 10 majors in its first year (2015-16) to 30 by 2019-20.

8 faculty lines were included in the Academic Affairs draft budget, so these lines, if funded, would add 7 more in areas not deemed critical enough for their deans to mention. Although new lines funded by special appropriations would not (apparently) be charged to the Academic Affairs budget, we would like to know whether they would decrease the total number of new or temp-to-perm hires the College could make in a given year.

We recognize that both CSCI and SCIM are highly valued outside the College. The January 31 article in the Post and Courier announced that a new logistics and supply chain research center at C of C is now underway in partnership with government agencies, implying that the appropriations for SCIM might be a done deal. We’re not suggesting the College should turn down recurring appropriations if they are offered to us, but adding these lines would not necessarily be without other costs.

We feel some trepidation about a possible influx of lines that may not have been requested or planned for by departments or discussed with Academic Planning or Budget committees. In a best-case scenario, a dramatic acceleration of the SCIM program, whose proposers had predicted only 30 majors by 2019-20, could result in beneficial growth for the College and our students. But this goal and our chances of reaching it have not been discussed within our hearing. The College’s quest for these specially-funded lines may be standard operating procedure, but it is a striking contrast to the transparency and collegiality of this year’s Academic Affairs Budget Hearings.

We look forward to discussing this matter with you further.