Special points of interest:
• Information on the Immigration Act
• Discussion of the Optional Retirement Program
• Explanation of the new Committee on Developing and Evaluating Teaching
• A Brief Look at Enrollment Figures and Student Recruitment

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Merit Raises
As promised by the president and the provost, the merit process is a work under construction. The department chairs, deans, associate provosts, the provost and I reviewed last year’s process at a retreat in August. Most seemed to think that things went pretty well. Some mentioned how the late stages of the process seemed mysterious to faculty. Up to the point of the chair’s recommendations to deans, the process seemed transparent, but from the faculty’s perspective what was foggier was what happened between that point and the receipt of one’s letter from the president.

The chairs were clear that they wanted to retain a distinction between the merit process and the annual review, and so the provost’s office worked out a new draft of procedures that Beverly Diamond presented at the first Academic Forum of the Fall semester. (The Forum, presided over by the provost and myself, consists of chairs, deans, and the chairs of certain Senate committees.) This coming year’s process will recognize the distinction between the judgment of merit for the purposes of raises and the annual review process.

The key provisions in the draft read:
Annual evaluations shall serve two functions: (1) to guide the professional development of the faculty member, and (2) to record part of the evidence upon which personnel decisions and salary recommendations shall be based. Accordingly,
• each regular faculty member of the College of Charleston will be evaluated annually on the basis of performance over the last calendar year at the College.

In addition,
• each faculty member with at least one full calendar year of service at the College will be assigned a merit category on the basis of performance over the last three calendar years (or the time since hire if this is less than three years) as one factor to be considered in the determination of any salary increase.

(Continued on page 3)

Immigration Act
In its last session, the General Assembly passed the Illegal Immigration Reform Act that, among other things, will require state colleges to police the citizenship of students. All students must prove to us they are citizens or that they are legal aliens. If they cannot, we must kick them out. Tom Trimboli (Legal Affairs), Don Burkard (Enrollment Management), and the Provost, among others, have hammered out a strategy to put the College in compliance with this act. Though they had no hard numbers, they reported to the Board of Trustees that compliance will come at no small cost to the College.

In my view, requiring the College to verify citizenship does little to protect the state from spending money on illegal aliens.

(Continued on page 2)
Optional Retirement Program

Those faculty who have chosen an optional retirement program (ORP) rather than the state retirement program may be getting less from the College than they think. Your pay stub says the College contributes 12.48% of your salary to whatever retirement account you’ve chosen. But only 5% of that money actually goes to you. One portion of the remainder, 3.42% of your salary, goes into a state insurance fund; and 4.02% goes to the state retirement fund. (If you are in the state program, 9.06% goes to the pension fund and the same 3.42% goes to the insurance fund.)

The contribution to the insurance fund helps pay for the insurance that all state employees will enjoy after retirement, whether you are in an ORP or the State Program. But the 4.02% that the College pays into the pension fund will never benefit the ORP faculty member on whose behalf it is contributed. It helps to pay unfunded mandates, such as the TERI program, which benefit only those who eventually will draw a state pension.

Terry Bowers, the faculty secretary, has been working on this issue ever since he was chair of Welfare years ago, but neither Judge Sanders nor Mr. Higdon were much interested in this inequity. Now, with the new administration, we’ve begun to see some hope for change.

On 30 September, Bowers, myself, and Steve Osborne (Business Affairs), Shirley Hinson (Government Affairs), and Tom Trimboli (Legal Affairs) met to discuss possible solutions. It seems that state law might require the percentages summarized above; but we’re looking for other workable ideas that will bring the College’s retirement benefits more in line with those of peer and aspirant institutions, which almost universally are more generous than South Carolina. North Carolina contributes 6.84% (rather than 5%) to ORPs; Tennessee contributes 10%; Georgia 9.65%.

Working with Compensation and Welfare, Bowers and I will continue to meet with the administration on the issue and update you when there’s more to report.

Immigration Act (Continued from page 1)

I have seen no data to indicate there is a problem in the first place. I will not venture to speculate about the motives of members of the General Assembly who voted for this measure, but it seems to me it will accomplish little more than the inconvenience of dozens of staff and hundreds of students. Almost certainly it will cost the state more than it saves.

The law harms the ethos of a public college. To borrow an image from our own sagacious Simon Lewis, it turns our gates into machines of exclusion. Symbolically, we are closing our wrought iron doors to those who are most vulnerable amongst us: the children of undocumented workers, children who cannot be held responsible for any crime of migration. I say symbolically: it’s not as if the children of illegal immigrants could afford to come here in the first place! The whole thing is not only ungenerous, but its gratuitousness makes it a gesture unbefitting a great people. What a petty thing to do! It diminishes us, and every time we demand a citizen to produce his or her “papers” we ought to be embarrassed for ourselves.

Tim Carens and George Hopkins are working to draft a resolution on the issue for the November meeting of the Senate.

Enrollments

Don Burkard reported to the Board of Trustees on current enrollment figures. “Preofficial” figures put our undergraduate population at 9833, a reduction of nearly 100 students from last year; graduate students have risen about 100 to 1493. Full-time enrollments levels have dropped by 136. That translates into a pretty significant decline in revenue. Four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates have all improved, continuing a steady trend, but are still rather low at 55, 63, and 65%. The number of incoming African-American students declined significantly, from 182 last year to 123 this year. Another somewhat disturbing trend is the worsening “yield” rate for accepted applications. While we’ve held steady in acceptances at about 64%, fewer students are choosing CoF, proportionally. Only 43% of in-state admits ended up coming here, as did only 22.6% of out-of-state admits. These continue a three-year downward trend. The only thing keeping our enrollments somewhat steady is that our number of applicants is up in that same period, from 8674 in 2006 to 9964 in 2008.

It seems clear that student recruitment is an issue we need to take seriously.
The main difference, of course, is that the merit evaluation is over a three year period. Faculty will submit material for the annual evaluation and a supplement for the merit evaluation:

The Department Chair or Dean of Libraries will assign a merit category on the basis of this three-year summary and the annual evaluations over the same three calendar years. Newly hired faculty members need not submit any additional materials.

The Forum also discussed the descriptions of the three merit categories. Susan Farrell, representing the Tenure and Promotion Committee, asked that service be added to the highest merit category (last year, one could get into the highest category only through exemplary research or teaching). This suggestion was largely supported and so will be incorporated into the next version of the draft. That draft will soon (if not already) be available to all faculty on the Academic Affairs web site, and I encourage you to look at it and talk to your chairs or send comments to me or to Laura Penny (Welfare chair), Laura Turner (Compensation chair), or Richard Nunan (T&P chair).

The final draft will be reviewed by the Compensation, Welfare, and Tenure and Promotion committees, and, because it will incorporated into the 2009/2010 FAM, the By-Laws committee will also present it to the Senate for comment.

Brand Manual

Mike Haskins, Executive Vice President for External Relations, has launched the College’s first brand manual, a compendium of standards for everything from business cards to letterhead to web-page design, style sheets, and ideas for consistent messages. The goal is not only to establish a uniformity in our external presentation but a uniformly professional appearance. The manual represents exactly the kind of attention to the College’s public image for which President Higdon brought Haskins to the campus; and it’s exactly the kind of thing for which the Board of Trustees brought Dr. Benson.

To invoke Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message so often with prospective students, with prospective donors, and really with the public in general. As Dr. Benson indicates in his cover letter to the manual, this effort can pay dividends to us all.

I’ve heard various reactions from faculty so far. Some have breathed a sigh of relief with an “it’s about time” view. For these it’s an area that’s been long neglected and has long lagged behind the quality of work we do at the College. Others have chafed at the inconvenience of compliance. It pinches to break in the new shoes, so to speak.

There is no doubt that conforming to the new standards will require . . . conformity. And many of us have a natural impulse in the opposite direction, not to say we’re all mavericks. The impulse to ignore “appearances” and get to the “substance” is, of course, good in faculty and contributes to the leadership role we play in society. But a sloppy and uneven self-presentation can undermine that leadership as well, and I’m glad we’ve got some talented people at the College now attending to our appearance.

I’ve had a number of conversations with Mike about the new standards and about the costs of the complying. The hope is that we’ll ease into them over the course of a year to defray many of the costs—of printing new letterhead, for example. Do NOT throw away old letterhead, business cards, etc. Use them up before you turn to the new standards.

There’s a possibility of costs to faculty and academic departments that Mike has not anticipated, some of which I’ve heard voiced in the last few weeks. I recommend that you take those to your chairs and deans, and if there’s still a problem, take them to me so I can collectively represent these hardships to the provost. I’m convinced we can solve these problems, even with our budget cuts, and that it’s well worth our while to solve them.

We’re also bound to encounter things in the manual that need tweaking. Such a document is never static and will be continually updated, so bring your suggestions for improvement to Mike.
Developing and Evaluating Teaching

As I reported in my last newsletter, one of my concerns about the change in annual evaluations and in the new merit system is that we run the risk of devaluing good teaching. There’s a clear incentive to produce exemplary research, which is relatively easy to document. But proving that one is an exemplary teacher is a foggier affair. What evidence of teaching will persuade chairs and deans to put a faculty member in the exemplary merit category?

To address this concern—that is, to make sure these changes to our evaluation processes promote excellent teaching—Associate Provost Diamond and I convened an ad hoc committee on developing and evaluating teaching. The purpose of this committee is to provide a resource for academic units—a compendium of “best practices.” It is not to promulgate some new standards to which departments must conform.

We’ve broken into four subcommittees, which are listed at the Senate website. One subcommittee is looking into our student evaluations, seeing if the instrument ought to be revised and trying to determine to what extent the data produced by these questionnaires can be trusted in merit judgments. Another subcommittee is studying the role of classroom visitations in helping to develop a teacher’s skills and in evaluating that teacher’s performance. Another is studying portfolios and other evidence of good teaching, and a fourth is looking into how the College can provide faculty with the resources they need to develop into better teachers.

The first reports coming from these subcommittees ought to be ready near the end of the Fall semester.

Budget Process

As anyone who’s recently been on the Senate’s Budget or Planning Committee knows, the faculty have not been exercising much influence on those most important decisions of the administration: where will the money go? In my view, this is not any individual’s fault, and it’s not the fault of an administration stingy of faculty input. It is a systemic problem that is largely exacerbated by our own committee structure, which builds in a sort of institutional amnesia from year to year. We ought to be developing financial expertise among faculty who serve on Budget, and we ought to be thinking strategically in the Planning committee. But neither committee has really ever been given the resources to function meaningfully.

Nor does the current process allow them much room for meaningful influence. For example, new programs do not reach these committees until the eleventh hour, just before they come to the Senate and after departments and individual faculty have invested scores or even hundreds of hours of preparation. It is difficult to think strategically at that point: the committees can only react.

That’s one of the things the ad hoc committee on shared governance is hoping to solve. In the meantime, I’ve been meeting with Academic Affairs, Business Affairs, the deans, and the chairs of Budget and Planning to put into place an annual budget process that provides for the kind of faculty influence called for in the Faculty/Administration Manual.

Largely through the efforts of Cynthia Lowenthal (Dean of HSS), Bev Diamond (Associate Provost), and Sam Jones (Budgeting and Payroll Services), we’re very close to producing a draft of a process for the Academic Affairs portion of the College’s budget that includes faculty at all stages—from original conception to approval by the Board of Trustees.

I’d like to emphasize here the support that the Provost, Elise Jorgens, and Dr. Benson have given to this initiative. Both have fully encouraged meaningful faculty participation in the budget process.
TERI Program

There was some confusion among faculty recently about whether one became an at-will employee upon entering the TERI deferred retirement plan. (An at-will employee can be fired at any time for any reason.) Drawing from state documents, Human Resources, I think, was suggesting that faculty became "at will" employees upon enrolling in TERI. After extensive review of the law, Tom Trimboli, our attorney, has assured Academic Affairs and HR that faculty enrolled in TERI constitute a special case, and no one will lose their tenure status upon entering the program.

No faculty will become an at-will employee.

Committee Reports

Educational Technology

September 9, 2008

1. Optional online course evaluations, which were approved by the Faculty Senate on April 8, 2008, will be implemented for all semesters from fall 2008 – spring 2009. The only exclusions are fall 2008 express 1 and express 2 courses due to time constraints. Adjunct Faculty and Study Abroad courses will be included in the optional online course evaluations. The system will be administered and evaluated by Digital Measures, an off-campus vendor, in collaboration with the Faculty Educational Technology Committee (FETC) and John McCarron in the Office of Accountability, Accreditation, Planning, & Assessment (AAPA).

2. Faculty will be invited to opt-in for each course they teach via an e-mail that links faculty to Cougar Trail with instructions on how/where in the Faculty Activity System to opt in. (This will occur after rolls are finalized and faculty will be able to opt in for all courses they teach in one secure place.)

3. Faculty must opt-in for online evaluations by 10/30/08. As of Oct. 30 approximately 10% of the courses taught are going to utilize online evaluations.

4. The evaluation window will be open the last week of classes (12/1 – 12/8) from 6:00 AM until 11:59PM and students will access this through Cougar Trail. John McCarron, in AAPA, will send an initial email to students in the participating courses, with instructions. Reminder emails will also be sent during the week that online evaluations are open to remind students to complete their evaluations.

5. Results will be processed and available via the Faculty Activity System (FAS) after final grades have been submitted.

6. Online results do NOT include the percentile rankings – only the course ratings and student comments, since the paper-based results will not be available until much later.

7. Online results are merged back into the paper-based results and processed normally (reports are generated and sent to the department).

Compensation Committee

From Laura Turner, head of the Compensation Committee:

The committee has a multitude of issues before it, some of which are being also pursued by the welfare committee. These concurrent issues include increasing ORP contributions by the College and possibly providing benefits for partners and their dependents. In addition to assessing the first year of the merit raise situation and making recommendations for improvement we also hope to also create a strategic faculty salary enhancement plan with specific goals/benchmarks. The committee is also looking into a variety of issues including a salary study of adjuncts and instructors as well as a gender based salary study. There are many other ideas/issues in the mix that we will be looking at for possible action on our part that are simply too numerous to name! Please rest assured that we are talking with deans, chairs, provosts and faculty to glean the greatest understanding of the various issues from all perspectives and are trying to work towards the greater good in all ways.