Faculty Advisory Committee to the President
Meeting minutes, 11/18/21

Committee members present: Suanne Ansari, Dan Greenberg, Patricia Dillon, Chris Mothorpe, Joseph Weyers, Bob Pitts, Margaret Hagood, Bethany Goodier, Wes Dudgeon, Bob Podolsky (chair), Kathy Béres Rogers (scribe), Vijay Vulva, Steve Short.

Also present: President Andrew Hsu, Provost Suzanne Austin

The meeting began at 8:31 on Zoom.

I. President’s topics for committee
   a. Advice about reorganization of EHHP, for shared governance: What faculty groups should they be discussing this with? They had gone (provost and president together) to the senate. Who else should they approach? Bob responded that they should approach standing committees, not just the senate. Dan added that they had approached academic planning very early in the process. They did not hear a lot after that (when the idea had not been solidified). Many people were not notified that we had decided to create a stand-alone school of Health Sciences. Bob Podolsky- when the Dean convened the school this year, he did not deliver an update about what the status of this move might be. The communication of this issue could have been clearer and could be clearer moving on. They then heard that the budget committee was not involved as early as it could have been. President Hsu responded that he can’t remember having met with the budget committee and would be happy to bring that to them. As far as the SSM was concerned, he mentioned having that discussion during Town Hall meetings.

   i. Budget
      Bob Pitts, chair of Budget Committee, said they had not seen the budget. Provost Austin said she planned to share the budget at the December budget meeting. The budget has been run out to 10 years whereas the others were at 4 years, because Dr. Hsu said 10 years would be more convincing to the board. He added that he would bring this up at the town hall meeting for SSM but he ran out of time to answer questions.
      Bob Pitts: previous administrations presented programs and ideas to the board before they were seen and approved by faculty committees. This is a historical problem. Dr. Hsu says that they have developed a system so that we can move forward more smoothly. Dr. Austin said that part of this has to do with process and part due to communication.

   ii. Timeline
      Dr. Hsu said they would like to have a new school by next summer, no later than August. They still have not yet received approval from the board or gone through the faculty committees.
Margaret asked whether HHP stays within the school of education until August, and Dr. Austin responded that it does.

iii. Communication
Beth noted that we have a lot of decentralized communication with a number of topics. We have messages coming from Deans that might be different from AA information. She suggested more emails from the Provost biweekly. Often the important topics are pushed to the Dean, and it comes across differently to different schools.
Bob Pitts also commented about the lack of faculty input before proposals are already approved in curriculog. Dr. Hsu answered that the initial approval process is an approval of a preliminary design. They want to make sure that it works before departments spend hours and hours developing a detailed plan.

iv. Departmental Concerns
Bob noted that Biology is the department that is going to be represented in this change, as there is a strong interest in health professions among their majors. He doesn’t have a sense that the discussions in/with biology are being kindled to the extent that they can. Could there be a point of greater engagement with the biology department? Dan Greenberg also noted a concern with psychology-natural collaboration with these departments that spans schools. That can be a concern with RCM. 10 year budgets aren’t really reassuring to him; out of the blue, they now have 700 majors, and they had no idea this was going to happen 2 years ago!

II. Committee’s topics for President
A. Trust in senior leadership
   i. Do low scores on survey results include deans as part of senior leadership?
      Chris said that trust seems to be high at the local level, but what about the deans? Provost Austin responded that, at her past institutions, deans are always included in senior leadership. In the president’s mind, senior leadership was his cabinet, and he didn’t include the deans in this thinking.
B. What is policy on communication with the Provost?
   SA says she gets messages from people who want to have a new academic program. Those conversations need to start in the schools - she wants to make sure these types of things get addressed first before they come to her. Dr. Hsu added that if it’s an administrative issue, it should go through the chain of command. The answer is that it depends upon the issue.
C. Dean evaluations
   i. Concerns about interpretation: analysis and presentation by person being evaluated (COI). What role does Provost play?
      Bob Podolsky stated that Deans are expected to handle their own evaluations - is there a way for that information to be used beyond the deans talking to us? Dr. Austin responded that she has the evaluations and meets with the deans monthly, flags areas of concerns, and talks to them. This is an iterative process, but her plan going forward is that we do every other year. She does think it’s
really important that the deans own the information in the survey, go before the faculty, and talk about it.

D. RCM model

i. Avoid dismissive language about concerns

   The town halls were very helpful, as is the open forum. The framing that Dr. Austin brought up, the discourse about “resistance to change,” was not well phrased. Philosophically, many people don’t understand or appreciate the basis of the RCM model.

   Dr. Austin responded that this was far from her intent; she was trying to address the historical context at the college.

ii. Subvention

   Bob led us in a discussion about subvention, “protecting priorities from the model.” Why, he asked, are we starting with a businesslike model that does not begin with our priorities?

   Dr. Hsu responded that the more meaningful question is why do we want to move to this new model? He has taken his analyses for the last few years to a number of groups. The College has been struggling financially for the last 15 years. Our only way to balance the budget has been raising the tuition. Hsu says that if we don’t do something different, we will see the same results.

   Both Hsu and Austin have seen RCM working- at these campuses, we don’t see these types of budget issues. The bottom line is that many universities who have run into these budget difficulties went to this new model and were able to turn it around. Dr. Hsu added that, on an RCM campus, faculty departments are very innovative in terms of developing new programs- new programs developed almost every year in order to be responsive to student and workforce demand. At a previous institution, he suggested to a department that they develop a Masters degree program. Within two years, that program enrolled over 100 fee-paying MA students.

iii. Is competition the best framework for supporting an academic mission?

   Dr. Hsu disagrees with the phrasing of this statement. Instead, he is “trying to align the interests of the faculty with the interests of the institution.” As individual academic programs, what is best for the department is not what is best for the college.

   Dr. Austin added that we are competing against each other right now, but in an incredibly untransparent system. Some people have been able to garner resources in under the table ways, in un-transparent conversations. There has been competition, but it’s been very opaque.

   Beth Goodier added that the process for new program creation is onerous and takes a lot out of faculty who are already teaching 800 majors, trying to manage, etc. Part of why we aren’t as creative with new programs is because it’s a thankless process.
iv. Accountability--who oversees Dean and his or her priorities? Who oversees subvention?

Bob Podolsky asked this question. SA said the deans have a lot of autonomy, but it needs to get done with the Provost and under the broader rubrics of the Strategic Plan.

Dr. Hsu: subvention. It takes a while for schools to become self-sufficient, to support the transition process. On an RCM campus, there’s a steering committee that would look at all of the subvention plans as well as budget for support services. Make sure that back-room deals don’t get through without scrutiny.

E. COVID status
We need a consistent masking policy and practice at campus venues (e.g., TD Arena). Positive cases on campus remain at the ‘noise level’ since October. Between 3-6 active cases since then. Vaccination rate went up to 77%. In the region, the numbers have been going down. We will keep mask requirement for as long as possible. Current plan is at least until the end of the semester and 2 week period when students come back. At that time, we might be able to remove the mask requirement.

The meeting ended at 10:01.