Faculty Advisory Committee to the President
Meeting minutes, 01/21/22

Committee members present: Kathy Beres-Rogers (scribe), Bob Podolsky (chair), Margaret Hagood, Beth Goodier, Chris Mothorpe, Dan Greenberg, Joseph Weyers, Patricia Dillon, Bob Pitts, Suanne Ansari, Suzanne Austin, Vijay Vulava, Wes Dudgeon.

Also present: President Andrew Hsu, Provost Suzanne Austin

The meeting began at 3:30 p.m. over Zoom.

I. President’s topics for committee
   • Industry engagement
     Dr. Hsu began by talking with us about engagement with business and industry. One thing missing is a champion on campus to lead us in this area. He has been looking for someone who can fill this position, and he’s identified a good fit, Knudt Flor. He was the president and CEO of BMW. He’s well-versed in leadership in different cultures: Germany, US, South Africa, China, and then led the operation here in the US. He is ready to appoint him but wants feedback from our committee.
     He is looking for feedback from us about this appointment.
     Bob asked what the efforts are in other schools to connect with industry (other than SSM)?
     Kathy asked about experiential learning- Hsu answered that that should be a big part of industry engagement.
     Joseph Myers suggested a different title, not that of VP. It might have a negative response for a position that’s really needed.
     Vijay suggested not just industry, but collaborative partnerships with non-profits, government, etc. Bob asked whether we have someone collaborating with artistic organizations, and AH mentioned Ed Hart.
     Bob asked whether one of the goals is to make a connection to the state legislature, via business, and whether he’s found success in speaking with business leaders? Hsu answered the Knudt accompanied him to speak about the college to the legislature. Members of the legislature were really impressed by what he said about the College. Bob asked if he has a backup in mind, and he answered that he does not.
     Bob Pitts asked how he will manage the relationship with the Deans and the schools. Suzanne and AH have taken on the challenge of helping him adjust to a fifth culture: academic culture.

II. Committee’s topics for President
   • COVID responses
     o Decision to open campus, town hall communication, testing
     o Preparedness to pivot if necessary
Hsu stated that we have a COVID leadership team that meets 3x a week. This group includes staff in president’s and provost’s office, business affairs, student affairs. We look for:
1) What are the recommendations of health agencies?
2) What’s the situation locally, especially in terms of hospital capacity?
3) What’s going on in our student population and among our faculty and staff?
4) What are other universities around the country doing?
5) What’s our ability to handle positive cases on our campus?

In the Town Halls, they tried to convey that message. Our staff are overworked and we’re trying to make sure we can handle the workload. He responded that we need to have constant, slow adjustment.

Because COVID-19 is not going to go away, we can’t close the campus every time we see a peak or spike.

Dr. Austin: David Sweatt at MUSC said that we’ve either reached or are going to reach our Omicron peak soon. We’ve been down this road before. If we needed to pivot, it wouldn’t be for very long.

The town hall was brought up, and BG expressed concern from faculty that our health and well-being doesn’t seem primary. SA said that they have been very flexible with faculty, and BG said they’re hearing that we want people in the classroom.

- Student preparation: Plans to assess and address COVID-related gaps for 1st y students
  - Academic Experience, CAPP office

Bob asked whether the college is assessing student preparation and is addressing those shortfalls.

1. Dan said that students seem to think that attendance and deadlines are optional, and that we will accommodate everyone. They won’t learn the rules unless we hold them to the rules and there are consequences. This leads to chaos and is extremely stressful.
2. Academic preparation is lacking- no algebra, no writing skills.

Coping skills are not great, so it’s hard to be strict about these things.

The Provost talked about the conjunction of COVID (are they sick? Are they not?) and these student skills or lack thereof. She’d ask Lynne Ford to look into coping strategies. She’d like to think about what might help us in the short term and the long term.

Dan said a faculty forum regarding navigating these issues might be helpful. SA said they’re doing a town hall in February about student mental health issues. We all need to go so that we can understand what our students are going through.

Margaret said that they’ve (along with Lynne Ford) been working on putting together a workgroup to talk with faculty about these issues.

We talked about accommodations, flexibility, etc. Dr. Austin said that we’re all doing a good job on our own and that we’re doing the best we can. BG brought up that it’s at the expense of our health.

- Plans for regular salary increases
  - Merit vs. COLA percentages
Handling of merit—consistency and transparency
Inclusion of adjuncts

Dr. Hsu started us off by talking about how we can make merit raises more apparent and consistent across units and the campus.
If you want 70% of people to have a merit raise, you need 70% of the total pool dedicated to merit raises; last time 75% were dedicated to COLA.
Internal transparency should be worked out between faculty and department chairs. This doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have campus-wide chair meetings to discuss this issue.
He’d like to start talking to chairs and faculty so that, by next summer, we have a better idea of how to handle that. SA said the chair if Jewish Studies proposed convening a monthly meeting of department chairs. This would enable chairs to share best practices, etc.
SA said that, in her career, they had very clear guidelines about merit distributions, and she’d encourage this honest communication at the department level.
AH said that they are planning on having 4% salary increase—what should be the distribution between COLA and merit?
Beth said that, when she became chair, they had meetings with chairs, Deans, Provost, etc.
Many things that get filtered down were addressed at these meetings.
Suzanne said we’ve started doing this and that they could maybe have the next one be about raises.

Chris said there might be some pushback from the departments—that it’s not going to happen?
In the past, raises have been at random.
AH said that SA and he have to figure out how to communicate this.
Bob suggested that merit raises don’t always raise morale—people feel like the process of choosing who deserves it is demoralizing, and we need basic raises because we make so little.

Joseph said we should just do COLA raises until we are competitive, and then, when we are at that level, we can do merit raises. If it’s a couple more years, he doesn’t think anyone will notice.

AH asked Dan how he handles merit raises. Dan answered that he doesn’t know any way of avoiding the demoralizing effect of those who don’t get it. Dan does like the idea of focusing on COLA increases, including adjuncts and instructors, and devoting most if not all of the budget to that. He said that setting a strict percentage doesn’t work very well—it varies across departments depending on how willing one is to ignore that directive.

Suzanne Austin says that this is what department discussions are good for, but Dan said they can get messy and difficult. In an idea world, the annual evaluations are the best way to go. He agrees that focusing on the COLA is the best way to go.

Dr. Hsu—what if everyone was labelled as merit, but it would be different levels of merit? If everything is merit, and you can decide, would it be better?
Bob Pitts- based on an HR perspective, he argues that the idea of doing an acceptable job (based on annual evaluations), is a much-studied strategy used by various organizations. He will get Dr. Hsu some literature about the subject.

- Continuing concerns about housekeeping/cleanliness/safety despite new contract
  Bob discussed this with Dr. Hsu yesterday and this is not being neglected- there’s a timeline in place.
  - Mechanisms for communication to/from PP; requests marked as fulfilled
  - Impact on student welfare, recruitment
  - How resources are being allocated to maintenance vs. infrastructure devt.

- SC Legislative Action
  This would be a longer discussion, so we should discuss them at next meeting.
  - Freedom from ideological coercion and indoctrination act
  - Cancelling Professor Tenure Act
    - What is the College’s current approach, and how can faculty support it?
    - Is document in preparation, and how can faculty contribute?
    - Partnering with business; focus on economic impacts

- Access to state budget surplus?
  - College priorities and timelines

III. Topics to update/introduce/table

**Committee composition**
Suanne Ansari (Accounting and Legal Studies)—Chair, General Education
Kathy Beres Rogers (English)
Pat Dillon (Art and Architectural History)
Wes Dudgeon (Health and Human Performance)—Chair, Faculty Compensation
Beth Goodier (Communication)—Chair, Faculty Welfare
Dan Greenberg (Psychology)—Chair, Acad. Planning
Margaret Hagood (Teacher Education)
Chris Mothorpe (Economics)
Robert Pitts (Management and Marketing)—Chair, Budget
Bob Podolsky (Biology)—Chair, FACP
Joseph Weyers (Hispanic Studies)
Vijay Vulava (Geology and Environmental Geosciences)—Chair, Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness