Academic Chairs Council – Meeting Notes 21 September 2011

Legal Lunch Brownbag (noon-1pm)
Prior to the start of the ACC meeting, Dan Kain, Vice Provost for Academic Personnel, and Michelle Parker from the University Counsel’s office discussed legal issues related to personnel matters. Approximately 19 ACC members were in attendance for some or all of the discussion.

1. Announcements / Updates
   A. Updates from President’s Cabinet Meetings (August 23, 2011 and September 20, 2011)
      1) Budget issues necessitate a reduction in custodial services; expect dust bunnies in stairwells, less frequent emptying of trash.
      2) Changes in health benefits coming (BCBS), including possible deductibles; employee contribution payments spread over 26 rather than 24 pay periods. Campus sessions will provide information on the changes as well as strategies for employees to save money and maximize their benefits.
      3) Provost Grobsmith will chair a committee to coordinate sustainability efforts across all divisions of the university.
      4) Performance funding document is finished; if accepted by the Legislature and funded, net effect will be that beyond a base budget of funding per student; additional monies will be based on degree productivity, credit hours completed, and success at bringing in research funding.
      5) University considering a transit fee for those students who do not choose to purchase a parking permit, possibly $30 / semester.
      6) The Foundation is funding construction of a building for university “backroom” operations – i.e., functions that do not involve interaction with the public; initially to include certain admissions and marketing groups.
      7) No printed phone book this year – 2 RFPs having no takers.
      8) BlackBoard Learn apps for smartphones available.
      9) ACE Fellow (Jan Bowers from Central Washington Univ) working with the President’s and Provost’s offices for the year; including attending ACC meetings.
     10) Consulting company (Sightlines) brought in to review facilities operations, particularly in comparison to peers. Findings include: NAU population up 30%, space up 17%; compare well to peers especially in energy consumption – below the peer average.
     11) First time at Cabinet meeting: opportunity to give ACC report.
     12) Twenty-one day count shows student enrollment at 25,364, up 0.6% (approx. 160 students).
   B. Provost’s Academic Leadership Council (September 7, 2011)
      1) Karen Appleby moving to ¾ time as of October 2011.
      2) Brian Chase, Vice President Capital Assets discussed relationship between Cap Assets and academic units. Is examining work order processing and other business practices to be more responsive. He invites deans, chairs etc. contact (e-mail) him with concerns, including custodial.
      3) International student numbers up from 850 in Fall 2010 to approximately 920 in Fall 2011.
      4) President Haeger gave a preview of his campus address to PALC including. He also noted that we must work faculty responsibility for students’ success into criteria for promotion and tenure (as part of Student Related Responsibilities). Deans and chairs will be expected to have conversations with faculty who have high rates of DFW in their classes, particularly in the freshman year. The President is prepared to create a Freshman Year Faculty as soon as Fall 2012, and invest significantly in student success initiatives.
      5) NBC Learn executive likely will visit campus next week.
2. Initial Discussion of proposed ACC Bylaws
   A. Concerning the Mission and Goals of the ACC (Article I), comments and questions included:
      1) The ACC should focus on ensuring the credibility and the academic reputation of the university.
      2) The mission and goals should look to what the role of the ACC should be going forward.
      3) Should the ACC be formally allied with faculty governance? Some were in favor of a formal tie, others not.
   B. Concerning how membership is determined (Article II):
      1) There was concern that the language in sections 1 and 2 should be inclusive of directors of free-standing programs (e.g., Ethnic Studies, Women and Gender Studies).
      2) The desire in these sections is to be clear as to the criteria for new membership while grandfathering in units who are currently represented on ACC.
   C. Article IV on Meetings
      1) Need to clean up language in sections 2 and 3 to clarify quorum requirements.
      2) Need to address the use of e-mail voting – a common mechanism used in the past to get final endorsement of a proposal by the ACC membership.
   D. The Executive Committee will develop a revision, and the discussion of ACC Bylaws will continue at a future ACC meeting.

3. Discussion with Provost Grobsmith
   A. Dan Kain, Vice Provost for Academic Personnel joined the group for a discussion of a draft proposal process for renewing certain endowed faculty positions. Chairs suggested that the process should include opportunity for local (unit) involvement in the renewal process, namely review by the FSC and the chair / director of the unit. Also “right of retreat” needed to be spelled out in the process.
   B. Other issues
      1) The Provost will discuss last Spring’s Workload study at the October ACC meeting.
      2) COE Dean search is underway, committee appointed, search firm being used to help identify candidates. It was President Haeger’s decision to use a search firm for this position. FCB Dean search at the stage of recommending candidates for airport interviews.
      3) The Provost has requested funding for eleven tenure track positions, waiting to hear from the President.
      4) Between the two rounds of VSRP and others retirements and departures, 90 positions were vacated; 23 were refilled, some with non-tenure track positions.
      5) Currently the overall tenure density at the university is 62%. Last year it was 67%.
      6) The Provost expressed that “we still must have a balance of tenure track and non-tenure track positions.” The university will still have a research agenda and other needs requiring tenure track faculty.
      7) The Provost repeated her call for departments to provide her with tenure density statements as a basis for departments to justify their faculty needs, when putting forth tenure-track hiring requests in the future.
      8) The Regents Professor selection process is underway. To date, 15 nominees have been identified, likely 6 semifinalists will go forward for further evaluation, and as many as 3 or 4 appointments may be made.
      9) There will be a discussion with e-Learning and IT staff at the next PALC meeting concerning issues with BlackBoard Learn. Chairs are encouraged to send Roy comments from their faculty, for him to bring to the PALC meeting.
10) The site visit for the Liberal Studies review was just completed. Many positive suggestions were received. A recurring comment from external reviewers across many program reviews is how much students love NAU, the faculty here, and their educational experience.

11) Chairs expressed concern regarding the President not mentioning at his campus forum the issue he raised last month with chairs, namely the need for faculty accountability (through the evaluation process) for their DFW rates. The Provost continues to discuss the accountability issue with the President, deans etc.: the next PALC meeting will include discussions around the role of shared governance in moving the student success initiative forward on all fronts, including evaluation of faculty.

12) It may be that a University College (UC) model will be implemented as a way to focus the efforts of the university’s best teachers on the freshman year. The UC model may possibly include teaching faculty with appointments both in the UC and in their home colleges.

4. The Student Success Agenda: how can chairs (and the ACC) contribute positively to the conversation?
   A. The group had a free-ranging discussion of approaches their faculty have used to promote student success. One suggestion being that faculty make more use of the GPS (Grade Performance Status) tool in Peoplesoft to provide students with feedback on their performance in a class, including attendance, grades, etc. GPS can be used not only to express concerns to students, but also to provide students with positive reinforcement.
   B. Perhaps faculty should engage locally with one another to problem solve concerning the impediments to student success in their unit or college.
   C. The discussion of student success on campus needs to be better informed by the research on how students learn. In many cases it seems to be driven by administrator’s attraction to a software package or technological approach they have seen demonstrated at a conference.
   D. In the area of faculty evaluation, chairs were desirous that any approach to “holding faculty accountable” for their students’ DFW rates be framed positively in terms of recognizing faculty efforts made to address student success.
   E. The group agreed to continue the discussion, seeking ways in which individual chairs, and the ACC collectively can contribute positively to the student success agenda.

- Roy St. Laurent
  Executive Director, ACC