5 May 2011
John Haeger, President
Liz Grobsmith, Provost

Dear President Haeger and Provost Grobsmith,

In response to your request that the ACC make recommendations regarding tenure density on campus, we have engaged in group discussions as well as discussions within individual units. We have also gathered what data we can find from other institutions grappling with related issues.

We have developed recommendations based upon recognition of the following factors:

1) Tenured and tenure-track faculty are needed to maintain core competencies in disciplinary areas that provide the scaffolding for our community of scholars.

2) It is a stated objective that NAU is committed to providing undergraduate students with research/creative activity experiences; these opportunities typically require participation of tenured and tenure-track faculty.

3) NAU has also been mandated by ABOR to increase research activity; tenure track hires, rather than lecturers and instructors, are key drivers in this type of effort.

4) Departments are examining curricula trying to balance the need to maintain quality with the need to maximize efficiencies under constrained budgetary conditions. Certain aspects of the curriculum likely do not require tenured and tenure-track faculty to deliver in compelling and effective ways; other aspects, such as specialized upper division and graduate courses, probably do require tenure track colleagues in order to insure that appropriate standards are maintained. Many departments have formalized this by determining which courses must be taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty and which courses can be taught by non-tenure stream faculty.

5) Hiring new non-tenure track faculty has become a highly inefficient use of faculty time in some departmental units. Non-tenure track faculty turn over with greater frequency than tenured and tenure-track faculty, resulting in a growing number of “revolving door” positions and searches to fill them. This situation disproportionally increases the service load of tenured and tenure-track faculty at a time when the university is demanding more teaching from them. Operational efficiencies and fiscal savings are better achieved by hiring tenure-track faculty with high-level expertise and long-term commitment to the institution.

We also recognize that units across campus vary. Levels of tenure density may need to be higher in units with large numbers of majors or extensive graduate programs (particularly doctoral programs).

Given these considerations and our recognition that the budget crisis is real and worsening, we recommend that efforts be made to insure that units across campus are able to sustain tenure density in the range of 70 to 85%, understanding that some variation based on factors mentioned above will be necessary. We further recommend that departmental policies regarding rank of faculty to involve in delivering different courses be respected as much as possible to maintain academic quality throughout this crisis. Departments should review their policies in light of our current constraints.

Respectfully submitted, members of the Academic Chairs Council.

Roy T. St. Laurent, Executive Director

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1 The current working definition of tenure density reflects the percentage of full-time faculty who are tenured/tenure-track in relation to the total number of tenured/tenure-track faculty and full-time non-tenure-track faculty.