Academic Chairs Council Meeting Notes for August 13, 2014

Dr. Roy St. Laurent, Executive Director of the ACC, convened the meeting at 1:05 p.m. in the Fremont Room of the Dubois Center. There were approximately 35 members present.

Guests who joined the meeting were Dr. Dan Kain, Vice Provost for Academic Personnel, and Dr. Laura Huenneke, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began with a round of self-introduction by all members in attendance. Dr. St. Laurent welcomed the 12-13 new members of the ACC and offered his service to them as an information resource. He also offered to aid in pairing new chairs with more seasoned chairs as part of an information ACC chair mentoring program.

Dr. St. Laurent provided a brief review of the History, Mission, and Goals of the ACC, available on website at nau.edu/Academic-Chairs-Council/Purpose/. He reminded the group that the ACC is an advisory council, not a replacement or parallel group to the Faculty Senate. The ACC functions as an advocate for the needs of unit chairs, as a sounding board for both faculty concerns and administration proposals, as an entity uniquely positioned to make proposals to administration, and as a facilitator of effective communication between administration and departmental units.

Summer updates included mention of the newly redesigned website, which now (as of September 1st, 2014) has a short cut “friendly url” of nau.edu/ACC. One of the functions of this website is to aid in the dissemination of meeting agendas and other documents, which will be posted on the /Current Council page within the website. The website update was implemented, in-part, to address concerns expressed during the recent performance review of the Executive Director. Feedback and suggestions regarding the website and its potential uses should be sent to the Dr. St. Laurent via email.

Another process change implemented as a result of the Executive Director review is the development of a plan to have meeting notes taken by staff or graduate student to ensure that information is readily available for members who may not be able to attend meetings or need to consult information from past meetings. These notes will be also posted on the Current Council page on the website. Full implementation of this plan is still incomplete.

Dr. Todd Sullivan, Associate Executive Director of the ACC, updated members concerning the June 28th PALC (Provost’s Academic Leadership Council) meeting. [read agenda]. Highlights included recognition of Dr. John Haeger and his contributions to NAU and a preview of the upcoming presidential transition. Other agenda items that ACC members will want to stay alert for further development/information included 1) concerns raised about effective tracking of faculty international travel; and 2) concerns raised about faculty workload restructuring to reflect differences between the various modes of course delivery and development. Neither of these issues is actionable at this point but will be discussed at upcoming PALC meetings. There was general discussion by ACC members of the need to stay informed on these issues as they are complex and could have significant impacts on departments and faculty in general.

2. FAAR (Faculty Activity & Achievement Reports), Dr. Dan Kain

Dr. Kain started with several announcements related to Faculty Professional Development programs available through NAU. Two programs highlighted were 1) Productive Beginnings and the 2) Chair Development Program. For more specific information on these programs, or any other faculty development resources available, ACC members were asked to contact Dr. Kain directly, or Dr. Larry Gallagher, the Director of the faculty Development Program.
In giving a brief overview of the FAAR system, Dr. Kain reviewed the history of NAU’s decision to implement the Faculty180 data collection system. He stressed that this system is meant to be a comprehensive tracking system for individual faculty and for the institution as a whole, allowing individualized and aggregate reporting.

In order to serve this reporting function, the database needs to be fully populated with faculty data, including research interests and a full reporting of publications. Dr. Huenneke commented that she is already using data from FAAR in her reporting.

Dr. Kain then spoke briefly about data confidentiality, reminding ACC members that system data points fall into two different categories: faculty data and activity data. Activity data is available to all Faculty 180 authenticated users through the data system search mechanism. Faculty evaluations and other confidential data remain confidential, and is not accessible to every user of Faculty 180. There is, though, the possibility of human error in this system. To minimize this, Dr. Kain is working with the data company about implementing additional protection of confidential data items.

If chairs have any questions or concerns about the FAAR system or the workings of the Faculty 180 data collection tool, please contact Dr. Kain or the assigned liaison within each college (usually an Associate Dean.) The feedback button on the data collection software contacts the software company only—please do not use that mechanism to request process assistance.

3. **COACHE Survey results, Drs. Dan Kain & Laura Sujo-Montes**

Dr. Kain spoke briefly about the COACHE Survey of working conditions of all faculty. Plans going forward include campus dissemination of the results and using the survey results to improve faculty working conditions. The COACHE Advisory Team “CAT” will spearhead these efforts. The full report of results will be made available to faculty soon (once language is drafted to frame some data anomalies resultant from forced answer questions and other data collection decisions). The report compares NAU data to data from peer institutions that participated in the survey and will also compare NAU data with the aggregate data.

There were several questions from ACC members for Drs. Kain and Sujo-Montes (the ACC representative on CAT). Questions revolved around the survey process, results, plans for release, and use, as well as the role of departmental units versus the institution in addressing actionable items derived from the survey results. In general discussion, ACC members stressed their desire to be kept up-to-date on this process.

4. **Discussion with Provost, Dr. Laura Huenneke**

Dr. Huenneke reported that our new President, Dr. Rita Cheng, is now in Flagstaff. Dr. Huenneke’s impression of Dr. Cheng’s immediate plans for NAU include a period of learning about current conditions and processes before initiating major institutional changes.

Three issues are at the forefront of Dr. Huenneke’s agenda for Academic Affairs for 2014-15:

1) **Faculty issues**

   This includes ascertaining the current composition of faculty by department (i.e., tenured, tenure-track, lecturer, etc.), the number of searches we run each year, workload policies as relates to meeting departmental and university missions, faculty salaries, faculty retention, and faculty career development opportunities.

2) **Enrollment issues**
This includes determining how many students we serve, but also who they are, how well they are served, and how many we retain. Other items may include curriculum design; academic planning and assessment; and trends related to student recruitment.

Dr. Huenneke mentioned that NAU Marketing is moving to place more emphasis on academic achievement. In conjunction with this emphasis, Dr. Huenneke asked chairs to take a look at the criteria for measuring quality of programs that were developed as part of the Academic Planning Framework on the Provost’s website. Departments are asked to identify a few criteria that are most relevant to their programs and to build them into their review processes, including program review. She reminded all of the need to be realistic in planning and the need to streamline unit priorities in a time of limited resource availability.

3) Institutional mission as a doctoral/research institution

In support of NAU’s mission, the institution needs to emphasize faculty research / scholarly activity. This directly ties into evaluations underway in departments, colleges, and the institution as a whole about the types of graduate programs NAU offers. The Deans have been tasked with acting as a strategic task force to evaluate issues related to the graduate program as a whole. In addition, there will be an emphasis on examining how can we support / hire successful researchers who have the potential to bring external funding to the university. Expect joint programs in this area coming out of the Vice President for Research and the Vice President for Academic Affairs offices.

ACC members asked Dr. Huenneke the integration of Extended Campuses into the rest of the university. While some universities have allowed their extended campuses divisions to act almost entirely autonomously, and others have closely integrated decisions and administration of distance learning into academic colleges and departments, Dr. Huenneke notes that President Haeger’s strategy could be described as a mixture of these two, balancing costs and benefits. Dr. Cheng will, no doubt, bring her own perspective to how the University might best address this issue.

Another ACC question related to an apparent mismatch between University’s Marketing unit focus and alumni interests—Marketing focuses on the institution as a whole and alumni are primarily interested in the activities of the department units from which they earned their degrees. Dr. Huenneke responded that the mission of NAU Marketing over the last ten years has been focused on increasing and bolstering enrollment, to maximize support (scholarships, other discretionary funding) for increased enrollment. As enrollment begins to level off, Marketing has shifted some of its focus to the college level. They continue to need unit-level success stories (student, faculty, and programmatic) to help them build support for the university among alumni and other potential donors. Dr. Huenneke asked that departments share these stories when asked. To address alumni issues, she asked that chairs work with their college deans on alumni development planning.

Another question was raised about Graduate program goals, especially as related to how that College is funded. Dr. Huenneke commented that planning resources are currently being developed and evaluated but will receive even more attention at the budgetary level once Dr. Cheng has a better sense of all the issues.

Drs. Kain and Huenneke were also asked to look into summer 2014 SETE course evaluation issues that are circulating through email. Overall, some departments continue to have concerns about the entire SETE process. Both Dr. Kain and Dr. Huenneke expressed their intent to investigate any issues sent to them about this process.

The meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
Jennifer Saunders