Academic Chairs Council Meeting Notes for October 15, 2014

Dr. Roy St. Laurent, Executive Director of the ACC, convened the meeting at 1:05 p.m. in the Havasupai A/B room of the University Union. Thirty-three members attended all or some of the meeting.

Guests who included: Jennus Burton, Vice President Finance & Administration; Robert Norton, Comptroller; Becky McLaugh, Purchasing Director; Kerri Byrd, Director of Post Award; Jamie Axelrod, Director of Disability Resources; Dr. Denise Helm, Provost’s Faculty Fellow; Dr. John Tingerthal, Chair SETE Evaluation Committee; Dr. Dan Kain, Vice Provost for Academic Personnel; and Dr. Laura Huenneke, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs.

1. Development of business practices and policies impacting chairs and faculty, Jennus Burton, Robert Norton, Becky McGaugh, and Kerri Byrd

Mr. Burton spoke briefly about the process for implementing changes to campus business policies and practices: he noted that some policies are dictated by the Arizona Department of Administration (ADOA), while others are locally determined. Questions and comments from chairs included a request to involve the ACC in reviewing proposed policies prior to implementation on campus, particularly when there are workload implications for staff or faculty in academic departments. Vice President Burton acknowledged this as a fair request, although sometimes the University is given directives with a quick implementation timeframe. Dr. St. Laurent indicated his availability in the summer for consultation as needed when ACC members might not be available for a meeting or consultation.

Additional discussion centered on the eROA process. Chairs generally like the online request form and approval process, but did not like that the system automatically added a task to their Outlook calendar.

Concern was raised about the separate supervisor notification process for off-campus travel, especially as developing administration concerns regarding the tracking of University international activities (e.g., faculty attending conferences, faculty-led student academic experiences) increases. The current system, in lieu of a paper ROA for travel, requires faculty send an email to their supervisor informing them of upcoming travel (providing documentation for insurance coverage purposes). However chairs find that their faculty often do not notify them in a timely fashion: e-mail notification is less formal and often the information provided is vague. Diane Verkest (in Human Resources) would be exploring other alternatives for travel notification to supervisors given the feedback from chairs and others, and the increasing concerns around tracking international travel (for insurance and safety purposes).

Regarding the current requirement to provide local backup accounts for grants, chairs expressed frustration based on past experience with inaccurate budget information being reported to P.I.’s from the Office of Post Award Accounting Services and Fiscal Compliance (i.e., P.I.’s being told that unspent funds remained available). This has sometimes resulted in a P.I., or his/her department being “on the hook” for expenses, years after the grant has ended. Kerri Byrd reminded the chairs of the 90-day closeout period, during which the account is reviewed for unallowable expenses; she indicated that they only will charge expenses to a backup account if faculty or the department leadership refuse to work with her office on resolving unpaid grant expenditures. When there is a discrepancy regarding grant overages, Mr. Burton reminded the chairs about the formal process of resolving disagreements: first contacting the college dean, then the Vice President of Research (Bill Grabe), and if necessary Vice President Burton.

A request was made for revisiting the in-state travel hotel allowable rates, as current rates seem to be a poor reflection of actual room rates around the state. As these are set by the ADOA, Jennus Burton indicated that NAU can make a request that these be reviewed, but it is up to ADOA to do so.
2. **Usable Materials Center, Jamie Axelrod, Disability Resources (DR)**

Mr. Axelrod spoke briefly about the notice that was sent to faculty and staff concerning the Usable Materials Center. This resource is meant to create accessible course materials for those who need assistive technologies, promoting the principles of universal design. Anyone may use the online submission form and the upload tool to submit text or video files to assess its accessibility. If the material is not accessible, DR will convert the file to an accessible format. Currently the Usable Materials Center cannot be used to convert textbooks to an accessible format, these are still handled on a case-by-case basis.

There is currently no down-loadable tool to assess compliance with accessibility features. Mr. Axelrod encouraged faculty to upload materials and DR would review the materials and inform the faculty about its accessibility.

In response to a question concerning the timeframe from submission to conversion, Mr. Axelrod indicated that they generally handle requests in the order they are received, unless there is a note in the submission that the material is immediately needed for a student in a class. Of note, the office handled over 1,000 video conversions last summer.

Mr. Axelrod indicated that while some software tools can produce accessible documents, one would have to know how to accomplish this; Mr. Axelrod referenced training offered by eLearning, as well as additional forthcoming training opportunities.

The Usable Materials Center is not just for course materials. If departments have documents or videos on their website, these can also be submitted.


3. **Student Course/Instructor Evaluations, Drs. Denise Helm, John Tingerthal, and Dan Kain**

Dr. Helm indicated that Smarter Services is no longer supporting course evaluations, and has been bought out by the company CoursEval. NAU ITS has had to scramble to get the legacy delivery system in place for the Fall semester. The legacy system is a delivery system, not an evaluation system. Planning is moving forward with CoursEval for Spring semester.

Dr. Tingerthal noted that his role as chair of the SETE Evaluation Committee emerged out of a need to have someone not associated with the Provost’s office lead the group. The Committee is dedicated to several tasks, including evaluating the process of implementation of SETE and providing a summary recommendation about the SETE evaluation. It could take up to a year to finalize changes in questions on the survey instrument.

Areas of questions and concerns:
- The legacy system won’t provide the analysis previously reported by Smarter Services. Dr. Helm affirmed that if SETE questions are delivered via CoursEval in future semesters, then this analysis would be available, if we want to use it.
- CoursEval has been in business for a number of years, and currently is the course evaluation service provider at ASU. They bought SETE questions and the SETE proprietary analysis. CoursEval is a delivery system for course / instructor evaluations; reports to faculty and chairs would essentially remain the same.
- Evaluation results generated this semester will have to be manually uploaded into Faculty180.
- Faculty can get provide feedback about evaluation questions to the SETE Evaluation Committee. Email [John.Tingerthal@nau.edu](mailto:John.Tingerthal@nau.edu). Additionally, Maribeth Watwood, Robert Horn, and Heidi Wayment serve as ACC representatives on the committee.
On the SETE webpage and the Sharepoint site via the Provost’s page, there is information about best practices in using course evaluations as part of a faculty evaluation process. Dr. St. Laurent referenced articles from that page that suggest ways to increase student response rates.

Drs. Kain and Helm indicated that there is no University policy on the use of incentives to increase response rates; departments may offer guidance or direction.

Dr. Helm indicated that the task force that initially recommended the SETE pilot was focused on reducing staff workload: allowing for different questions for each course (or department) would be counter to that goal. There are question sets for each type of course (lecture, lab, doctoral seminar, etc.).

Course evaluations will be open for 10 days this semester, this is a stop-gap measure and not ideal. It would be better for the evaluation to be open for 3 weeks (for 16-week courses). Although the literature does not support a particular length of time, there are diminishing returns in increasing response rate, the longer evaluations are open. The Provost’s webpage provides information on the open and close dates. A concern was raised regarding whether course evaluations will be available to students after they receive final course grades. Dr. Helm indicated that best practices in the literature are varied. Chairs indicated that some departments would refuse to use course evaluations as part of faculty evaluation if the timeframe for student response extended beyond finals.

Concerns about the specific questions on the evaluation were explored by several chairs. If the SETE instrument is selected, it is a copyrighted instrument and questions cannot be changed.

Chairs discussed the free-response comment question on the course evaluation. Dr. St. Laurent noted that prior to using SETE, the system in use included comment questions that focused a student’s response (asking about strengths of the course/instructor and what could be improved), while the prompt to the comment question in SETE is vague. Dr. Kain noted that one consistency in the literature is that comments are not a very useful tool for assessing teaching effectiveness.

Dr. Tingerthal indicated that the committee is focused on assessing what the SETE instrument can accomplish. It provides feedback on the student opinion component of faculty teaching only. One chair expressed concern that the name of SETE (i.e., including “effectiveness”) implies it is measuring something that it does not and cannot measure.

4. Discussion with Dr. Huenneke

Dr. Huenneke announced the appointment of Dr. Helm and Dr. Cynthia Kosso as Provost Faculty Fellows this academic year: to continue work on substantive programs that were launched last year, but are incomplete. In addition to the course evaluation project, Dr. Helm is coordinating diversity efforts in the Provost’s office. Dr. Kosso continues working on policies and planning for summer sessions to achieve University goals, as well as to understand best practices in managing summer sessions. These are discrete projects being worked on for a short period of time that are moving forward important institutional efforts. Dr. Huenneke encouraged ACC to consider other projects of institutional interest in which faculty may want to invest their time, particularly in areas in which the institution is not yet ready to hire a full-time administrator.

Dr. Huenneke spoke about the timing of salary increases for exemplary performers.

- Concern has been raised by some faculty who are identified as exemplary performers and who subsequently receive a promotion raise in summer. For some small number of such folks, the promotion salary increase may be accompanied by a market adjustment increase. It is the perception that the combination of these increases effectively “wipes out” the effect of the exemplary performance increase. This is a complex issue. Dr. Huenneke suggested that the Faculty Senate provide feedback on elements of a strategy or philosophy around compensation, rather than providing feedback on a technical issue.

- In past years when raises were available, virtually no two years utilized the same approach to the implementation of salary increases. The current plan for the exemplary performer increases is to
run this program in the same way as last year. Whether or not there will be general salary increases this year is not yet known.

- Now is an opportunity for Dr. Cheng to consider her philosophy and strategy around compensation. This becomes an opportunity to make suggestions. Feedback related to compensation can be provided through the ACC or Faculty Senate, and might include consideration of a broader philosophy around salary compensation.

Dr. Huenneke shared an update on the state budget outlook from the President’s Cabinet meeting. She reminded the chairs that we are at a public university in a state with severe budget challenges. Economic recovery is not as strong as expected, and tax revenues are lagging behind projections. The state is monitoring the situation and has a few options. NAU continues to experience enrollment growth, which increased net tuition revenues. The Provost expects to learn more at Strategic Planning and Budget Committee meeting on October 17th (ACC representatives will also be in attendance). Dr. Huenneke indicated that President Cheng intends to invest in NAU, but strategically. Thus, there is a need to know where the best opportunities are for investment to advance institutional priorities. One chair asked about the opportunity to request new tenure-track lines. Dr. Huenneke said that she is still collecting requests from college deans; after sorting through those, the proposals with the greatest potential for positive impact will be passed along to the President. Priorities will be those proposals that have the potential to: increase the university’s success in bringing more students to campus; produce more degrees; or bring increase external research funding.

5. **Announcements/Updates from Dr. St. Laurent**

The ACC Executive Committee meets once every four week, two weeks off-cycle from the general ACC meeting. By unanimous decision of the Executive Committee, such meetings will now be 90 minutes long (up from 60 minutes). All ACC members are always welcome to attend, with the dates, location, and times listed on the agenda.

October 15th was the soft deadline for textbook requests to the Bookstore for Winter and Spring terms.

October 15th was also the deadline for submission of personal health (biometric) information to be eligible for the $10 per month reduction in health insurance premiums beginning January 1st.

Dr. St. Laurent provided additional updates from the President’s Cabinet meeting:

- The President hosted her first Cabinet meeting on September 22nd. She made it clear that she would use the body in same way that former President Haeger used it: for information dissemination to campus.
- The Capital Campaign has an intended close date of June 2016. It is expected to reach or exceed the fund-raising goal of the campaign.
- Participation in the submission of personal biometric information by employees reached 22% as of September 22nd.
- There is an online request form to invite President Cheng to events. It is available at [http://nau.edu/President/Attendance_Request/](http://nau.edu/President/Attendance_Request/).
- There will be a change in health benefit premiums, with percentage increases varying based on level of coverage (i.e. single, employee + one, or family)
- ITS has rolled out a required information technology security training. A commercial website, “StudyRoom” is approaching students on campus promoting their site as an environment in which students can share course information with fellow students. StudyRoom requests students provide it with access to their BbLearn shell. This may pose a security risk and is under investigation.
- A new International Pavilion (south side of Campus Heights) will begin construction in October. It will be paid for and managed by the Center for International Education, and will be open to all
students interested in an international experience on campus. The space will include an auditorium, classrooms, and residential space. There are approximately 1,100 international students enrolled on campus this semester.

- Concern was expressed regarding a proposed campus ban of all tobacco products and how the spillover of smoking behavior might affect the local community (including increased litter). The Faculty Senate reaffirmed their endorsement of the proposal, from the Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC). President Cheng has not yet indicated whether or not she will institute such a policy. A question was raised concerning what effect such a ban might have on smoking in the vicinity of university leased buildings not on the NAU campus.

- Changes are being made in Graduate College policies. This includes changes to how transfer credits will be accepted at the graduate level from other institutions: however it will remain the decision of program faculty, graduate coordinators, and chairs to make the determination of credit for transfer courses. Changes are also proposed to the grievance and appeal process for non-course related academic appeals by graduate students.

- The ACC Executive Committee hosted a non-binding straw poll regarding discontent with the duBois meeting space. An alternative venue on south campus that would maintain a conference square could not be identified for the remaining meeting times. Thus, the Executive Committee recommended having all meetings in the University Union. One chair expressed her preference to alternate ACC meetings between north and south campus.

The meeting adjourned at 3:06 p.m.