

Provost Report to the Faculty

April 2013

One of the tasks I set for myself during my first year as provost was to meet with the faculty of every academic department and program on campus, and I am pleased to say that with a few weeks left to the academic year, I've almost accomplished this goal. My main purpose for these visits, beyond getting to know our faculty, has been to hear about the accomplishments and challenges each department faces. As you know, every department/program is unique, shaped by the perspectives of the discipline(s) and its institutional history. Nonetheless, I found some common themes during my visits. First and foremost was the seriousness and dedication with which faculty approach their teaching and scholarship. In so many departments, I heard about the many prizes, recognitions and other scholarly successes achieved by the faculty, along with their teaching success. Coupled with this, however, faculty spoke of the low morale in their departments. Many departments do not have adequate facilities to carry out their activities, while others are short of necessary staff. All expressed disappointment with stagnating salaries and a sense that work has increased over the years.

In New York as across the country, the trend over the last two decades has been a relative decline in state funding and support for public universities. The reality is that this is a trend that is not going to be reversed any time soon, even as the economy improves, given state priorities and policies. As a result, we have to be far more creative in finding revenue from alternative sources to just keep doing what we are already doing – high quality research and effective and innovative teaching. As you all are aware, we have increased our fund-raising efforts to help support key campus priorities. To be successful here, we need to be more active at the department and the school level in fostering donor relations, something we have neglected for many years. In addition, we need to promote external funding opportunities for our faculty. (See below.)

I understand that the demands on faculty time have increased, as they have across all professions throughout the country. The appeal of academia for many of us was a work environment that would allow us to pursue our interests in teaching and research as well as exchange ideas with engaging colleagues, while not being ground down by the routines and regimentation of the corporate world. Of course, the reality for most academics was never quite that idyllic. But it is clear that over the decades, rules and

paperwork have gotten more complex, communications – along with expectations of quick responses – have accelerated, and quasi-administrative tasks have multiplied as demand for faculty to engage in outcomes assessment, advising, student recruiting, community outreach, and committee participation have increased. Economic and technological changes along with a more competitive higher education landscape and increased demands from federal and state governments, as well as accrediting agencies, have all combined to increase work demands in higher education over the last twenty years. There are no any easy fixes to this issue. For starters, we must find ways to streamline processes and meetings that unnecessarily eat into our valuable time – one focus of the draft strategic plan. Moreover, in the new normal of academia it is more important than ever to ensure that the boundary between work and personal lives is clear and respected (e.g., limiting our e-mailing once we leave work) and that we seek out activities that can enhance our overall well-being.

SUNY Seamless Transfer

As many of you know, the SUNY Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost has been working on developing a seamless a transfer policy for system campuses, carrying out the December 2012 Board of Trustees resolution on this topic. The SUNY Provost Office has worked with different constituencies including presidents, faculty governance leaders, members of the SUNY Student Mobility Committee, and system staff members on this effort. The December 2012 resolution was two years in the making and based on SUNY system research on student enrollment across SUNY. Once a final policy has been communicated to us, our campus will review it and, if needed, look to revise existing policies to better meet system goals.

How we manage transfer student mobility is certainly an important issue. Nationally, one-third of all college students transfer at least once in five years. Forty-six percent of SUNY graduates are transfer students, with 26 percent of transfer students going from four-year institutions to two-year institutions and 36 percent of transfer students moving from two-year institutions to four-year institutions.

Strategic Plan & Academics

By now most of you have heard of, and hopefully reviewed, the draft strategic plan, which can be found online at <http://strategicplanning.newpaltz.edu>. The co-chairs of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, Professors Patricia Sullivan and Stella Turk, have presented the outlines of the plan to several different groups and held three open forums, receiving very useful feedback. As the draft plan makes clear, this effort builds off the Vision Points that former President Steve Poskanzer developed, focusing and

projecting them into the immediate future. Unlike many strategic plans, which include defined and specific action steps that all campus units are expected to implement, the New Paltz plan outlines broad goals that are essential to strengthen the academic mission of the College. The draft plan calls for the creation of a Strategic Planning Council to advise the campus on translating the plan's goals into multi-year actions. These will become more specific and focused with further planning. Certainly the first major initiative in the plan will include institutional-level support and enhancement of the best teaching and learning we can achieve. That might involve, for example, expanded faculty development, infrastructure for more student-faculty research collaboration, new administrative structures to support interdisciplinary teaching, improved models and support for academic advising, and continued progress on course scheduling – actions that span department or program curricular or academic matters. It is also important that departments and programs see themselves in most of the goals set out in the plan. The success of the plan will depend in part on schools, departments and programs identifying elements that speak to their needs, interests and priorities and working to achieve them. In the fall, faculty should engage in conversations about the plan to find ways of advancing its goals within their own units. I will look forward to working with faculty as they identify ways to build on the plan to advance school, department, and College goals.

Book Order Compliance

Among the provisions of the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) is the Federal Textbook Price Disclosure Law, which went into effect on July 1, 2010. HEOA's "textbook affordability provisions" require colleges to include on their Internet course schedules the ISBNs and retail prices for required and recommended textbooks and supplemental material by the time of registration. Inclusion of this information (or a link to it) on the Schedule of Classes allows students to plan ahead for book expenses so they have more time to shop for books in a competitive environment. In order to ensure our compliance with this federal law, I have distributed a memo to deans, department chairs and program directors outlining a new process that will help us to avoid the potential penalties associated with noncompliance. Firm deadlines have been established for submitting information to the Bookstore, and regular updates on missing information will be provided to chairs/directors to facilitate follow-up with their faculty. As you know, The Bookstore at New Paltz is the only textbook vendor that provides direct support to our campus in the form of CAS funding, and the Bookstore's new "Best Price Promise" offers additional purchasing incentives. Faculty are nonetheless free to direct students to other providers.

Searches & Hiring

Throughout this last year we have been working to streamline and rationalize the search and hiring process to make it more efficient and effective. Working with Tanhena Pacheco Dunn, we have been looking at all aspects of the search process with an eye to consolidating some of the paperwork involved. This is still a work in progress. My hope is that eventually we will have a completely electronic search process that will ensure that all materials can be easily accessible and move through a clearly prescribed process, reducing the possibilities for miscommunication or lost documentation.

Of the 27 searches that were started since last fall, only 11 have been completed as we approach the end of the academic year and the start of summer. Clearly, our search process moves far too slowly. In a highly competitive climate where institutions move quickly to hire the best candidates on the market, at our current pace it is inevitable we will lose good candidates to universities that are more nimble than we are. We must look to ways to accelerate processing, reviews and decisions on candidates. At the department level, there should be a plan and strategy for searches that encompasses configuring the search committee, developing the job description, establishing a timeline, and using existing networks to spread the word about an opening before the official charge of a committee. Once a charge has been made, we need to make sure that searches start as early as possible and are completed in a timely manner. The hiring of new faculty is one of the most important decisions we make at the College, and we need to ensure that we are doing all we can to successfully conclude searches while making the best possible use of our valuable time.

Provost Office Challenge Grants

Our faculty are engaged in many activities that enhance student learning, advance knowledge and improve people's lives – from research, scholarship and creative activities to curriculum development, pedagogical enhancement, student-faculty research, and service learning. Because on-campus support for these activities is limited, it is important that we encourage faculty to pursue external grant funding in support of these activities. There are many additional benefits to pursuing external grants: they provide faculty with the ability to significantly ratchet up the quality of their work. Think about any research you have done in the recent past and what it would have meant to have more money to travel to critical archives or to meet individuals for on-site interviews or to gain access to a larger/more diverse sampling pool. How much more effective will teaching become if there are resources to learn about or participate in projects that lead to the development of cutting-edge pedagogical techniques. Grant

activity not only provides more resources to accomplish your goals, it also means that your work will be more widely noticed among your peers, potentially opening the doors to greater collaboration with faculty at other institutions.

I want to make sure that we do as much as possible as a College to support faculty efforts in their work, which is why I will release an RFP for the Provost Challenge Grants in May. Up to five awards for \$3,000-8,000 will be available for faculty to engage in activities that will lead to an application for an external grant. Applicants will be expected to submit a grant proposal, among the other requirements that will be mentioned in the RFP. The application process is open to all fields represented on campus. The RFP will provide a timeline for the process with a deadline for proposals in early November.

Many grant proposals are often rejected with comments or suggestions for revisions and resubmission. Just as no faculty member walks away from a manuscript or an exhibition proposal that has gotten feedback for changes and resubmission, faculty should not be surprised or discouraged by an initial rejection of a grant application. Persistence is always an important component to ultimate success. Along with changes in support structure, there must also be a cultural change if we are to succeed in increasing our grant activity. Faculty and administrators must view grant seeking as an integral part of our campus life. Faculty need to be encouraged at all levels in pursuit of grants. In practice, that means that the research and writing that goes into grant applications, which often is equivalent to what's needed for an article, should be counted in some way in the tenure and promotion process. I will do my best to ensure that these efforts "count" in my reviews and would urge faculty, chairs and review committees to think about recognizing the role of grants, both successful and unsuccessful, in the RTP process.

Recognitions

Many of our faculty were recently recognized for their outstanding contributions, including the following:

Provost Awards for Faculty Excellence

David Applebaum, Department of Philosophy, for the award in Scholarship

Julie Gorlewski, Department of Secondary Education, Outstanding Pre-Tenure Faculty

James Halpern, Department of Psychology, for the award in Professional Service

Aaron Isabelle, Department of Elementary Education, for the award in Teaching

Andrea Varga, Department of Theatre Arts, for the award in Teaching

Chancellor's Awards for Excellence

Richard Bodenschatz, Associate Dean, Office of Undergraduate Admission, for Excellence in Professional Service

Hon Ho, Department of Biology, for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities

Stacie Nunes, Department of Physics & Astronomy, for Excellence in Faculty Service

Bruce Sillner, Center for International Programs, for Excellence in Professional Service

Stella Turk, Department of Communication Disorders, and Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, for Excellence in Professional Service

Jack Wade, Department of Theatre Arts, for Excellence in Teaching

In addition, we congratulate **Jeff Baker**, Senior Press Operator, Printing Services (Office of Communication & Marketing), who has received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Classified Service.

I would also like to recognize Professor **Kathy Goodell**, head of the Department of Art's Painting & Drawing program, for receiving a 2013 Fellow Grant in the category of Creative/Fine Arts from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. This is a very highly selective award, and we are all very proud of her accomplishments. Congratulations!

Feel free to share your thoughts with me on these or other issues.

Sincerely,

Philip Mauceri

Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs