

Provost Report to the Faculty

May 2013

As the academic year closes, I want to review the year gone by to provide you with an overview of how we are positioning ourselves to deal with the challenges and opportunities ahead. We must be alert to new ideas, initiatives, trends and constant improvements as we restructure to adjust to the shifting terrain of higher education. Many groups and committees across campus - from the Liberal Education Committee and the Strategic Planning Steering Committee to the Interdisciplinary Task Force and the Academic Advising Task Force - have been working diligently over the last year to help us respond to a variety of issues and challenges. As I review our progress in Academic Affairs this past year, I am very impressed by the dedication and innovation our faculty, staff and students have demonstrated. This is our greatest strength and what will help us successfully fulfill our mission in the years ahead.

Interdisciplinary Studies

Early this spring I charged Provost Fellow Anita Gonzalez with examining the structure of interdisciplinary studies on our campus and forming a faculty interdisciplinary task force to offer recommendations on ways we can support and enhance interdisciplinary programs (see attachment). In my visits with faculty in our interdisciplinary programs, I consistently heard about the need for common space, better funding and stronger leadership. The task force recommendations echo these concerns and offer a number of proposals which I am reviewing. I am committed to strengthening interdisciplinary studies, which help us transcend the silos and territoriality that too often inhibit creative thinking. Working with members of the task force, I hope to move forward on a number of these recommendations next year.

I want to thank Provost Fellow Anita Gonzalez for leading this effort, as well as the members of the committee for their hard work: Preeti Dhar, Julie Gorlewski, Sara Hsu, Aaron Knochel, Dan Labbato, Susan Lewis, Eve Tuck, Jennfer Waldo, and Michelle Woods.

Graduate Studies

I met recently with Associate Provost & Dean of the Graduate School Laurel Garrick Duhaney and the Graduate School Strategic Planning Committee regarding their

ongoing discussions about refocusing and growing our graduate programs. Over the last several years we have seen a dramatic decline in graduate student enrollments. This decline has largely been among part-time students, especially in the School of Education. While most programs have been stable or experienced only minor declines, graduate enrollments in the School of Education have declined precipitously – 25 percent in the last ten years. This pattern is not unique to New Paltz. With the exception of Binghamton, Stony Brook and Empire State, all other SUNY campuses with longstanding education grad programs have seen declines to varying degrees. It's worth pointing out that in this context Empire State has seen a substantial increase in enrollments – 309 percent. As everyone is aware, Empire State primarily delivers its coursework online, which greatly appeals to part-time student populations and/or students who work full time.

Evaluating graduate programs moving forward, we will need to find ways for some programs, particularly those geared towards professional preparation, to deliver their content in new ways that more effectively engage their primary student populations. We need to find opportunities to develop new programs, strengthen the marketability of existing programs, and phase out programs that are no longer appealing. Because declines in graduate enrollments have an impact on the wider campus community, as the revenue lost needs to be made up in other ways, we must be sensitive in our distribution of resources and look to new areas for development and expansion.

Online Education

As most of you know, I have worked this year to enhance the infrastructure of our online programming. This has meant searches and hiring of personnel to assist and train faculty in both the technology and pedagogy of online teaching and learning. These efforts will be housed in the Teaching & Learning Center, consistent with its mission of supporting faculty development. I have also been working with campus governance committees and others to craft an online policy that will help guide our efforts, recognizing that such a document must be continuously updated given the rapid changes in both technology and pedagogy.

I have been asked on a number of occasions about MOOCs. Although I have no plans to propose MOOCs on our campus, individual faculty may certainly propose them. As those of you who have followed MOOCs' development realize, there is much uncertainty regarding their effectiveness and financial viability. Some suggest that MOOCs represent a bright new future for academia, while others point to the potential for an academic Armageddon, should MOOCs become well established. The fact of the

matter is that it is far too early to fully understand their potential impact. MOOCs continue to evolve as private companies search for ways to make them a profitable enterprise and as faculty and administrators examine how we can effectively measure and assess student learning. While I think it is important to be open-minded, we also need to exercise due diligence to ensure that effective teaching and learning are taking place.

Liberal Education

Yesterday I met with the Liberal Education Committee to hear about their progress on the charge given them earlier this year. They presented many new and innovative ideas with significant potential to enhance the education of our students. Over the coming months the committee will refine some of its proposals and present them to the broader campus community. I commend the committee for the seriousness with which members undertook their task, and I look forward to working with them.

Changing Leadership

The end of the academic year will see a turning of the page for two of our schools. After 31 years at New Paltz, Dean Hadi Salavitabar will step down from his current post in the School of Business to become Provost of the College of Saint Rose. Liberal Arts & Sciences Dean James Schiffer will return to the faculty after serving in his current position for five years. I have moved to fill these vacancies with strong interim leadership and to begin the process of searching for permanent deans. As we undertake these two national searches, my focus will be on ensuring the widest and deepest pool of highly qualified candidates from which to select the next deans.

I have met with the chairs and directors of LA&S as well as with representatives from the LA&S Senate; I have also met with the faculty of the School of Business. In both cases, I solicited nominees for the interim dean positions, from which I could choose an individual. At the same time, I discussed the process of searching for the permanent deans. Both dean search committees should have no more than 8-9 members, including faculty, students, a department chair (for the LA&S dean search), and a member of the Business Advisory Council (for the Business dean search). Each committee will also include a current dean to provide a needed perspective on the administrative tasks required of the position. I have asked LA&S academic departments and Business faculty for their recommendations, from which I will select search committee members.

Yesterday I named Dr. Stella Deen Interim Dean of LA&S for the July 1, 2013-June 30, 2014 period. Dr. Deen served as Interim Associate Provost & Dean of the Graduate

School during 2010-11, chaired the Liberal Education Task Force in 2011-12, was chair of the Department of English for four years, and co-chaired the Campus Facilities Planning Task Force. She will bring to this position a commitment to the liberal arts and a strong record of service to the institution. I hope to name the interim dean of the School of Business shortly.

Earlier this year, we conducted an internal search for the position of Director of the Honors Program. Over the last few years our Honors Program has expanded rapidly and taken on a much more active role in student academic life. I am pleased to announce that Professor Patricia Sullivan, who served as interim director for the past two years, has been appointed director. Please join me in congratulating her.

I chair the search committee to fill the position of Vice President for Administration & Finance, previously occupied by Jackie DiStefano, who stepped down in November. We need to proceed quickly in our search for Jackie's replacement because the VPAF position is crucial to all of us on campus – never more so than now, as economic uncertainties persist even as the budget crisis has subsided. RPA Inc., a search firm contracted through a competitive bid, has begun the task of advertising and recruiting candidates. The search committee will work with RPA throughout the summer on identifying and interviewing highly qualified candidates. There will be opportunities for the campus community to interact with the candidate finalists during the on-site visits, most likely in late July. Our timeline, though ambitious, is certainly doable and is expected to result in a new VPAF on campus early in the fall.

Accreditation/Program Reviews

Many of our programs are nationally or even internationally accredited. Accreditation affirms the quality of our programs, provides important feedback on areas for program improvement, and assists us in attracting faculty candidates to our campus and in making students more successful in their pursuit of employment or graduate school enrollment. This year, the School of Business received AACSB accreditation, the result of years of preparation. Receiving accreditation, however, is only a first step: accredited programs must continue to meet accreditors' standards in order to maintain accreditation. Our art programs are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). A team from NASAD visited with the department and school late last month, and I was very happy to meet with them. Although their final report has yet to be issued, I am confident that our outstanding art programs will be re-accredited.

Three other academic program evaluations were completed this year: English, Mathematics and Philosophy. In reviewing these programs' self-studies, I was very impressed with the comprehensive and frank self-assessments done. I certainly learned a good deal about these programs from the documents provided and the reports of the external reviewers, all of which were quite positive. Taken seriously, program reviews can inform decisions regarding resource requests and allocations, helping faculty decide such issues as which courses to add or eliminate from the curriculum or how space should be allocated more efficiently. I commend these departments on their reports and the quality of their programs.

Policies & Processes

In previous reports to the faculty I have mentioned the importance of having a rational set of policies and procedures to guide decision-making throughout the institution. One of my goals during my first year as provost was to review with fresh eyes our policies and procedures for the purpose of creating greater clarity, rationality, fairness, effectiveness, and efficiency. Although this is an ongoing process – and I welcome suggestions of areas where you think revisions or rethinking would be useful – I believe progress has been made. I have put forward new or revised policies and procedures involving (1) faculty utilization, (2) online instruction, (3) visiting scholars and professors, (4) qualified rank, (5) search and hiring processes, (6) summer chairs, (7) administrative review of academic deans, (8) faculty-line replacement requests, and (9) low student enrollment in classes, to name a few.

This effort must be ongoing if we are to continually improve how we accomplish our central mission.

Final Thoughts....

As I conclude my first year here, I've been reflecting on my experiences thus far as provost. When I am asked by those outside academia what a provost does, I often respond with a vague phrase about running "the academic side" of the house. I am well aware that this is not exactly an accurate statement, so when I looked around for a more exact description, I came across the following on the University of Iowa's website:

One might try to explain what a "provost" is by starting with the origins of the word. Unfortunately, the original definition of the word "provost" was "keeper of a prison." The Provost Marshal of the Norman invaders in 1066 was infamous for torture and merciless cruelty. And suspected deserters and drunks during the American Revolution were very poorly treated in their respective "provost prisons."

Needless to say, I am glad the current use of the title no longer reflects this history! Being provost today means serving as an advocate and supporter of our academic mission and all that it involves, from the hiring and tenuring of faculty to making sure that our students have access to cutting-edge knowledge and the skills they will need to succeed in the endeavors they choose to pursue. I have been helped in this regard by the enormous wealth of experience and wisdom I have found here on campus – from the president, my cabinet colleagues, deans, chairs, and the faculty and staff.

Many of the decisions that emanate from my office will impact students and faculty not only today but well into the future. These decisions are not about “making a statement” but about ensuring the quality of our academic programs and the long-term well-being of our institution. I take this responsibility seriously, and it is why careful deliberation is essential before making a decision. In making decisions I must ask: What does the evidence tell us? What is the context of a particular issue/problem? What are the advantages and disadvantages of all potential options? Most importantly, I want to hear views on these issues from others, especially those with contrary perspectives. Almost all policy and process changes coming from the provost’s office have been discussed at the Academic Deans Council, which provides me with an important perspective on the potential impacts on different units. As provost, I must feel assured that decisions are based on rational and fair criteria and are not the result of arbitrary choices, ideological predispositions, or personal exchanges.

Finally, I wish to extend an invitation to all members of the faculty to recognize and celebrate this year’s winners of the Provost Awards for Faculty Excellence. Immediately following the May 10 Faculty Meeting, we will host a reception to honor the awardees: David Applebaum (Excellence in Scholarship), Julie Gorlewski (Outstanding Pre-Tenure Faculty), James Halpern (Excellence in Professional Service), Aaron Isabelle (Excellence in Teaching), and Andrea Varga (Excellence in Teaching).

I know many of you will be spending part of the summer working on various projects. Even so, I hope that you find time to use the summer to relax and enjoy the season in the company of friends and family.

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

Sincerely,

Philip Mauceri
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs