

# Provost Report to the Faculty

February 2014

I hope everyone had a restful winter break and a good start to the new semester. Like many of you, I spent the winter break catching up on work, as well as on some reading – finishing a new biography of Woodrow Wilson and reading the ambitiously titled, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, which uses a vast set of quantitative data to put forward some thought-provoking propositions.

Before classes began we held our annual Chairs' Retreat to update department chairs and program directors about initiatives on campus and to delve more deeply into campus-wide concerns. This year's program included conversations about speaking to race in a classroom setting, the role of chairs in alumni and friends development, and how construction on campus could impact the way faculty and students interact. Being a department chair can be both the most difficult and most rewarding leadership position on campus. As a front-line "supervisor" of faculty, chairs are put into the position of making challenging personnel decisions that directly impact colleagues and are essential for the department and institution. At the same time, chairs can play a crucial role in positively transforming a department by setting strategic priorities, working to cultivate the strengths of their faculty, raising the visibility of department programs and activities, recruiting students, and building community.

On January 17<sup>th</sup> we held our third new-faculty orientation program, which covered a number of topics in detail for faculty who joined our campus in 2013 as well as faculty who began in 2012 and wished to participate. In the past, our new-faculty orientation took place over the course of one day during which a whirlwind series of topics were covered. This year we decided to spread our orientation process over a year-long period with greater focus on specific issues. The most recent meeting, for example, included presentations on academic advising and online learning.

## **Deans and Academic Leadership**

The search for a new Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is continuing. Fortunately, we have a deep pool of excellent candidates, and we will continue the search until a new dean is selected. The search committee and I will be reviewing

potential candidates in the pool, and I have asked the committee to provide me with the names of additional candidates for campus visits.

As all of you know by now, I closed the search for a new Dean of the School of Business. This is certainly disappointing, but I believe we needed a broader and deeper pool of candidates from which to select the next dean. I want to thank Chih-Yang Tsai for stepping up to serve as Interim Dean of Business during this academic year. His leadership has provided a steady hand during this transition period. We will reinitiate the search for a new dean later this spring, as we look to make the School of Business a source of cutting-edge programs in a rapidly changing business world. In the late spring we will also begin the search for a new Dean of Fine & Performing Arts.

The successful conclusion of these searches will be critical to our success as a campus. The days when deans could be content working as middle managers of their schools/colleges are long gone. Deans must still manage their schools, especially in the areas of budgeting, personnel decisions and donor development, as well as provide a compelling vision. However, today's deans must also undertake broader responsibilities as members of a senior academic leadership team, where they are collective decision makers with the provost in developing and advancing the academic mission and strategic priorities of the campus. A successful dean cannot be a mere "advocate" for her/his school but must lead by bringing forward ideas and initiatives that strengthen both the school and College. As a direct report to the provost, deans participate in a broad range of institutional discussions and decision making, requiring them to maintain perspective on the entire range of the College's activities, including different forms of service, academic programs, scholarship/creative activities and the centrality of our educational mission. These are great challenges, but our schools and our institution offer great strengths and assets that make such leadership positions very attractive.

## **Sabbaticals**

The long-awaited resumption of one-semester sabbatical leaves at full salary resulted in a significantly larger pool of applicants than in the recent past. Last year we received 21 sabbatical applications compared with 38 this year. This is a significant divergence from recent patterns when the number of applications aligned closely with available sabbatical funding. Though the number of sabbaticals funded this year is in line with those of recent years, given the larger number of applicants, the success rate was lower.

As I noted in my August 2013 sabbatical call letter, "To ensure that we are able to award as many sabbaticals as possible within our budgetary limits, there must be an equitable

basis for evaluating applications.” To that end, I worked with CRAL to highlight four key factors to inform the committee’s application review and recommendations: 1) value to the campus and professional growth, 2) appropriate time to meet goals, 3) reasonable and realistic work plan and, 4) positive past performance and/or potential for success. The committee’s recommendations followed their traditional categories of “strongly recommended,” “recommended,” “recommended with reservations,” and “not recommended.” I considered CRAL’s recommendations in light of my own assessment of sabbatical application files and the agreed-upon factors before sharing my recommendations with the president. The final decisions reflect the highly competitive selection process we anticipated in August: available funding for 2014-15 sabbatical leaves will support all “strongly recommended” applications but leaves many worthy proposals unfunded. I understand the disappointment of those who were not successful during this year’s sabbatical award process, and I have asked CRAL to share feedback about individual proposals in the hope that it will help faculty prepare for next year’s round of sabbatical awards.

### **Resource Allocation**

All indications are that we will be getting far fewer funds to allocate for new priorities than in the past several years. In light of this, the Academic Deans Council reviewed and discussed 33 requests for recurring allocations from schools, and five such allocations from other academic units. As I read through the requests, I found most to be meritorious, with a basis in real needs. It is clear to me that schools and departments gave careful thought in crafting these requests. Based on priorities outlined in the strategic plan, dean recommendations, and the provost criteria I laid out last year, I will be prioritizing requests for cabinet consideration. It is likely however that we will be funding significantly fewer requests than last year.

### **Equity, Compression & Stipend Review**

Last semester my office began a review of Chair/Director stipends. There appeared to be no clear or consistent documentation to support these stipends and how they were developed. This is apparently the first comprehensive salary analysis done in Academic Affairs, at least in the recent past.

In undertaking this analysis, we identified several key metrics that allow us to compare departments, including number of full-time and part-time faculty, TA/GA, and staff supervised; credit hours attempted and completed; and majors in the program or department. These criteria have been applied to all departments and programs,

resulting in some changes in chair/director compensation that will soon be communicated.

The complexity of the analysis of chair compensation has drawn our attention to the need to review other salaries across departments. Initial impressions indicate that some compression or other disparate impacts may have emerged over time and been influenced by such factors as fiscal restrictions and inconsistent starting salaries. We expect compensation reviews to continue, and as we move forward, I ask that chairs and deans join me in paying more conscious and careful attention to starting salaries and salary ranges, balancing the need to remain competitive with the need to consider budget realities. We must understand that some critical adjustments may happen in the short term, while others will require substantial and sustained expenditure of resources, perhaps over a number of years.

We hope that this analysis will lead to establishing best practices that can better shape hiring and retention throughout the institution. This work is being done in recognition of the time and dedication of chairs, program directors, and faculty in general, and it reflects our desire to support their continued service in and outside of the classroom.

### **Academic Rigor**

Over the last few months, Vice President L. David Eaton has shared with deans, chairs, and others data from the Admitted Students Survey, which indicate student perceptions of New Paltz and other institutions to which our students applied. While New Paltz was most associated with such characteristics as “fun,” “friendly,” and “comfortable,” our major competitors – including Binghamton, Albany, Geneseo and others – were viewed as more “challenging,” “intellectual,” and having a strong “academic reputation.” As President Christian noted in his January report, although this is not a fair representation of our standing, it is the perception of our campus, and perceptions matter, especially as we try to attract students with strong academic records to New Paltz.

The survey should serve as a wake-up call to all of us to sharpen our focus on academic excellence and a rigorous intellectual experience for our students. We need to re-commit ourselves to fostering an educational experience inside and outside of the classroom that prioritizes ideas, inquiry and discovery. This commitment must be expressed in our everyday discourse with students, colleagues, parents, business and government leaders in the state. It also requires that we challenge our students to work hard – to do their very best – so that they can realize their full potential. An appropriate opportunity to engage in this discussion will be during the presentation of the new

Liberal Education curriculum. As we look towards these recommendations we should ask ourselves whether the proposals provide the academically rigorous experience we want our students to have during their time at New Paltz.

We must think hard about the pedagogy we employ and the assignments we require: Do they push our students to do their best work? Are they challenging the assumptions and expectations our students have when they enter New Paltz? I know this is a difficult task in an era of grade inflation, but it is a necessary task. If we are to continue to attract and retain high-performing students in a highly competitive environment, we must commit ourselves to setting high expectations for our students. Clearly our major competitors are doing so – and succeeding.

### **Working Group on Race, Gender and Identity**

At the Chairs' Retreat in mid-January, I invited Professors Karanja Keita Carroll and Anne Roschelle, along with Tanhena Pacheco Dunn, to discuss how faculty can engage issues of race and gender in the classroom, particularly in light of a number of racist incidents on campus during the fall. The discussions that took place engaged everyone present and reinforced my belief that there is a real hunger among faculty for both dialogue and concrete programming on race and gender. As I mentioned in my November report to the faculty, we need to have a group of faculty who work with colleagues across campus to engage them on these issues. I am currently in the process of reaching out to faculty who can help accomplish this important initiative. Over the coming weeks, this group will discuss how we can best develop academic programming (coursework and other curricular elements), organize forums and other activities across campus that foster dialogue and understanding of race, gender and identity, and empower our faculty to talk about these issues in the classroom.

### **Communication & Media**

The Department of Communication & Media has faced a variety of challenges in recent years, many of which stem from a substantial growth in majors and the impact of external change on its fields of study. Last semester, full-time faculty within the department reached out for assistance in addressing ongoing concerns about productive academic exchange and effective student support. In response, Interim Dean Stella Deen and Tanhena Pacheco Dunn met with individual faculty, and their conversations illuminated current challenges as well as historical issues that have affected department members' ability to effectively carry out their work. These conversations, along with similar discussions in the past, have led to a recommendation to divide Communication & Media into two departments, one encompassing

Communication Studies faculty and the other including Digital Media & Journalism faculty. In my meeting last week with department faculty, almost all faculty expressed support for such reorganization, which I believe will better serve students and foster more productive collaboration within and outside of LA&S.

Changes to a department's structure and creation of new departments are not matters I enter into lightly. While there are many administrative details to be worked out, including governance review, this change will help us better position the departments to think and plan strategically about each program, perhaps reexamining key programmatic enhancements suggested by the most recent (2010) external program evaluation. We hope to have the logistics of this change ironed out and in place by Fall 2014 so that new faculty joining these departments may begin their New Paltz careers in a climate of growth and support.

### **Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching**

I am delighted to end this month's report with the news that Joan Barker, Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Art, has been selected to receive the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Adjunct Teaching for 2013-2014, the inaugural year for this award. Joan has taught in our Photography program since 1994 and has consistently demonstrated a passion for her art and for teaching that has inspired students and colleagues alike. Please join me in congratulating Joan on her selection for this well-deserved honor.

As always, feel free to share your thoughts on these or other issues.

Best regards,

Philip Mauceri  
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs