

# Provost Report to the Faculty

March 2014

## Faculty Searches

Many of you have played a role in our 2013-14 hiring cycle, which included 34 searches for tenure-line faculty. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the care with which you have approached this important work and for your attention to candidates' potential contribution to our campus as a whole. As of this writing, 13 candidates have accepted our offers, and several more offers are pending. There are a greater number of acceptances at this point in the hiring cycle than in the recent past. We have also had a more diverse pool of candidates. These trends did not happen by accident. Most of our searches this year began earlier in the fall semester, allowing departments and programs to not only hire early but to increase the likelihood of getting first choices in highly competitive job markets. Ensuring a diverse pool of candidates starts with active department recruitment efforts, job postings that make explicit the desirability of hiring candidates that enhance our diversity, provost approval of candidates invited for campus interviews, and when appropriate, active targeting of candidates from underrepresented groups through SUNY's Faculty Diversity Program or the use of target-of-opportunity hiring.

## Department Profiles

Last year I asked the Office of Institutional Research to develop department profiles for all of our departments and programs. I am pleased to note that these profiles are now posted in *my.newpaltz.edu*. The profiles, which will be updated annually, provide essential information about departments and programs, including expenditures, instructional costs, student FTE, degrees awarded, and other data that I hope will result in more data-informed decisions in academic departments and schools.

At the last Chairs' Forum, Julie Chiarito and Lucy Walker from Institutional Research presented data from the latest Delaware Study report, a copy of which was distributed to all chairs and deans. The Delaware Study is a national study of instructional costs and productivity based at the University of Delaware, and it has been used by nearly 600 universities since the early 1990s. The report will allow faculty to compare New

Paltz data on teaching loads, direct costs of instruction, research and service productivity with national data.

Decisions should never be made exclusively on the basis of any single set of data. The information provided in both the department profiles and the Delaware Study should be reviewed by faculty and administrators in the broader context of the challenges and opportunities facing an academic unit. The data is a starting point for conversations about program improvements and evidence-based decision making.

### Middle States Accreditation

Associate Provost Laurel Garrick Duhaney and I attended an MSCHE workshop last week to learn about the preparation of the Periodic Review Report (PRR) that we must submit by June 1, 2016. The PRR is due five years after the decennial self-study and must provide a “retrospective, current and prospective analysis” of our institution, demonstrating that we continue to meet MSCHE standards for accreditation. The Commission makes clear that the PRR is not a “mini-self-study” but an effort to document continuous progress. In six sections, the PRR must address such issues as institutional responses to recommendations from the previous evaluation and enrollment and finance data and trends. Over the coming days, Associate Provost Garrick Duhaney will be putting together the PRR Committee to help our campus prepare for this very important report.

### Assessment of Student Learning & Curriculum Mapping

The assessment of student learning is usually an important part of any accreditation process. Accreditors, along with the federal government, want evidence that the \$175 billion of taxpayer money spent on higher education results in increased student learning. Our campus has done a good job of developing a culture of assessment; nonetheless, we still have work to do. The 2011 MSCHE Evaluation Team Report had one recommendation for our campus:

Although assessment is, per the Self-Study, formally ‘in place in most units,’ SUNY New Paltz should put into place meaningful assessment for all academic units, and all syllabi should include learning outcomes or objectives.

Our PRR must demonstrate substantial progress in meeting all parts of this recommendation. One often-overlooked component of the assessment process is “closing the loop” – i.e., taking the results from an assessment of student learning and using them to develop measures to improve learning. In my view, this is the most meaningful part of the assessment process. Closing the loop requires department/

program faculty to (1) discuss problem areas that have been identified in the assessment process, (2) develop and implement concrete actions to address the problem, as well as metrics to assess progress, and (3) evaluate improvements after a year or so and make additional or new adjustments as needed.

The role of the faculty, who are charged with ensuring the quality and integrity of the curriculum, is central to ongoing assessment and improvement of student learning. Department efforts to map their curricula are clearly consistent with this effort. Done properly, curriculum mapping will help align course, program and institutional objectives; identify learning outcomes that need closer assessment; identify courses that directly support program outcomes; and help identify curricular gaps and redundancies. As departments and programs continue their mapping efforts, they may wish to view how other institutions have used curriculum mapping to enhance assessment: <http://assessment.uconn.edu/primer/mapping1.html>.

### Online & Hybrid Instruction Update

The recent vote approving a faculty development process for those interested in teaching online is a significant step in our ongoing efforts to build New Paltz's online capacity. Rapid technological change and new online pedagogies require that we provide ongoing training and support for faculty engaged in online teaching. To that end, we will be moving towards development models that emphasize workshops and faculty mentors who can assist and guide our faculty as they develop hybrid or online classes. The Teaching & Learning Center will take a leading role in these efforts, as is appropriate for a center that is focused on promoting excellence in teaching.

Our online offerings continue to grow. Provost Fellow Ken Nystrom, who has been working in this area for my office, has noted that total online enrollment for the 2013-14 academic year reached 1,679 students, representing 22 percent of our student body. We continue to adapt existing face-to-face courses for online delivery, and though we have been cautious in developing fully online programs, we are actively moving in that direction. It is strategically critical that we build our online capacity and offer online courses and programs, particularly in professional and graduate studies, so as to better serve the community and the state, meet the demands of our students, and maintain our enrollments in an increasingly competitive higher education environment.

### Interdisciplinary Studies Update

Following up on the report presented to me by Anita Gonzalez and her working group on interdisciplinary studies, Provost Fellow Lee Bernstein has spent much of this year

consulting with campus constituencies and faculty governance on how we can better organize our campus interdisciplinary programs. In his report to me on the state of interdisciplinary programs on campus, Professor Bernstein notes that we have 18 interdisciplinary programs on campus and seven interdisciplinary centers or other initiatives.

There has been significant growth and interest in interdisciplinary programs on campus in the last few years. The six interdisciplinary programs with majors have seen their enrollments increase by 250 percent between 2007 and 2012. New major initiatives have been launched that will enhance the role and visibility of interdisciplinarity on campus, including the hiring of a Digital Humanities faculty member, the launch of the 3D Printing/MakerBot Innovation Center at New Paltz, and the proposal from the Liberal Education Committee for a new First-Year Seminar that will be specifically interdisciplinary.

The growth and interest in interdisciplinary studies on campus have not been accompanied by the support structures necessary to sustain their success. Dedicated leadership and space, along with improved coordination and communication with academic departments and deans, will be critical to strengthening interdisciplinary studies. Three steps we can take immediately are:

- Establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between interdisciplinary programs and academic departments, outlining their shared duties and responsibilities and noting how interdisciplinary work will be counted in the tenure-and-promotion process.
- Have departments and interdisciplinary programs work closely to plan and coordinate class schedules, ideally projecting several years into the future, to ensure that departments and programs can offer necessary courses in a timely fashion.
- Develop an interdisciplinary program website that can provide guidance and information on our various programs and initiatives.

This latter element is the first step in the creation of a Center for Interdisciplinary Studies that can serve and promote interdisciplinary study and activities on campus. (One example of such a Center can be found at [SUNY Oswego](#).) My hope is to launch this Center next year, providing both the space and leadership our interdisciplinary efforts will need to succeed.

### Reappointment, Tenure & Promotion

No one should be “surprised” by decisions contained in an RTP letter. Problem issues, along with potential solutions, need to be clearly and consistently communicated to

candidates starting in their first year, when expectations can be set and corrective action taken. Departmental standards and expectations documents can certainly be an important tool here, but there needs to be more. In my view, chairs must play a central role in mentoring their faculty and assessing the progress they are making. We do a disservice to our faculty if we do not point out problem areas and offer candid and constructive advice on how to address problems early on. Our feedback to faculty must be conveyed in reappointment letters as well as in personal conversations. I understand that these communications can be difficult to have with colleagues and friends, but if we are to uphold excellence in teaching, scholarship and service and not create false expectations, we must be firm and consistent in our messaging to our colleagues about what it takes to achieve tenure and/or promotion.

Over the coming months, I will work with the Academic Affairs Committee to explore ways to provide regular annual feedback to faculty, including developing campus-wide guidelines for annual peer observation of classes and guidelines on the use of SEI comments in faculty evaluation. I believe these measures will help ensure that faculty receive appropriate feedback. As we work on these issues, I am interested in hearing from faculty about your experiences and ideas on how we can most effectively provide useful and timely feedback on progress towards tenure.

#### Erasmus University-Rotterdam

I was recently contacted by the Dean of Erasmus University College in Rotterdam who, with a small team of colleagues, will visit our campus and several other liberal arts colleges in our region. The delegation is interested in discussing ideas about the liberal arts and sciences, as well as the potential for student and faculty exchanges. The Erasmus University Rotterdam is a highly ranked university in Europe looking to expand its approach to the liberal arts, and the team's visit confirms our reputation as a leading public liberal arts college in the Northeast.

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

Sincerely,

Philip Mauceri  
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs