

Provost Report to the Faculty

April/May 2014

Dean Searches

I am pleased that Dr. Laura Barrett has accepted the position of Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at New Paltz. Dr. Barrett is the founding dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Armstrong Atlantic State University in South Carolina, where she has been dean since 2009. Prior to that, she had been faculty and department chair at Florida Atlantic University. She has a strong and wide-ranging record of accomplishments as both a faculty member and an administrator, and I am confident that she will provide LA&S with the strategic leadership and deft management required to keep the College on an upward trajectory. I want to thank Interim Dean and Associate Professor Stella Deen for the excellent leadership she has provided the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences over the last year.

Our search for a Dean of the School of Business will continue next year. We are currently in the final stages of contracting a search firm to assist us in our national search for the next dean. A new search committee will be duly appointed. I want to congratulate Interim Dean and Associate Professor Chih-Yang Tsai for his strong leadership of the School during this period. As previously announced, Kristin Backhaus, Professor in the School of Business, has agreed to serve as interim dean while we carry out the search for a new dean in 2014-15.

We will soon be launching a national search for the Dean of Fine & Performing Arts. A search committee is being selected and we are in the process of selecting a search firm.

Four-Credit Courses

Over the last several years there has been increased interest on campus in moving toward a system based on four-credit courses. Many institutions have made the transition to four-credit systems in recent years, including Elon University, University of New Hampshire, Portland State, Binghamton, Keene State, and the College of New Jersey. If done properly, a move to four credits can enhance student learning by providing greater depth in the subject matter and incorporating more venues for experiential learning.

Nonetheless, the transition to four credits does have a number of potential drawbacks: there will be challenges in redesigning new scheduling blocks; a new system for transferring credits from community colleges and other predominantly three-credit schools will have to be developed; students will take fewer classes and the number of classes offered will have to be reduced; the breadth of classes that students will be exposed to will naturally decline; clear standards will have to be developed to define added activities during the extra hour of the class. If not approached in a thoughtful and comprehensive way, a move to four credits can result in extending class time without sufficient “value added,” while also limiting the breadth of students’ education and the overall effectiveness of student learning.

Given the institution-wide implications for such a move and the number of related issues to be addressed, it is important to pause and consider how best to move forward. I have initiated conversations with the deans and with department chairs and program coordinators and will ultimately convene a group of faculty and administrators from across campus to examine the issues, study their impacts, and offer recommendations on how to proceed. In the meantime, I will expect any new proposals for four-credit courses to be accompanied by strong justification, including a detailed and thorough explanation of how the course will support and strengthen the curriculum and improve student learning.

Wilderness Act 50th Anniversary Commemoration

President Christian announced in his faculty report that noted author Richard Louv will be our Distinguished Speaker on October 21, as part of our campus commemoration of the Wilderness Act. Last week, I met with a group of faculty interested in this commemoration to share and discuss ideas about how our faculty, staff and students can participate in events that educate and engage them around this theme. There were many great ideas that ranged from panel discussions and film showings to organized hikes and field trips to historic locations, among many others. In the coming weeks we will be working to reach out to the campus community and potential external partners to plan events for this coming fall. Stay tuned!

Academic Affairs Strategic Plan Priorities

In my September 2013 Report to the Faculty I outlined eight areas in Academic Affairs that are important for advancing our Strategic Plan, and I want to take the opportunity here to review our progress in these areas.

1. Successfully complete the searches for the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences and the Dean of the School of Business

As I noted above, we have successfully completed the search for the Dean of LA&S and will continue our search for the Dean of the School of Business in 2014-15.

2. Implement key portions of the Graduate School Strategic Plan

There have been significant advances in planning and implementing key elements of the Graduate School's strategic plan, which was adopted earlier in this academic year. With graduate enrollments declining throughout the region and the country, we must rethink the programs we offer and how they are organized. We cannot continue to support graduate programs that are suffering declining enrollments and are not undertaking serious efforts to address these declines. With so many programs on campus under resourced, we must re-allocate resources away from programs that are not successfully addressing the need for meeting enrollment challenges.

Several graduate programs have included more online, hybrid or weekend classes to reach new student populations. New ways of delivering graduate coursework have been adopted in the School of Education, which has seen a significant decline in enrollments over the last few years. A new cohort and mentor-based model was adopted in a revised Educational Administration program, a model that will soon be replicated in other school programs. At the same time, SoE has launched the Autism Institute to serve an important need in the region.

There have been successful international recruitment efforts this year, particularly with India, which has significantly increased graduate enrollments in engineering. These efforts will continue and expand as we look to additional partnerships in future years. In addition, the Graduate School, along with my office, will be working to expand 4+1 programs that draw upon our academically strong undergraduate population and provide students with an opportunity to earn a New Paltz undergraduate and graduate degree in five years.

3. Continue our work developing clear written guidelines on the expectations and standards for Reappointment, Tenure and Promotion

Most departments now have in place new or revised RTP guidelines that will help candidates have a clearer understanding of expectations and provide decision-makers an important instrument in mentoring and evaluating faculty as they move towards tenure and/or promotion. Departments should certainly continue to revisit these guidelines periodically and address any remaining issues that are unresolved.

4. Continue to build online teaching and learning efforts

After developing key policy in this area last year, a new verification process for online teaching was written and approved. This process will ensure that faculty who teach online have the necessary tools to be effective. Ongoing faculty mentoring and additional instructional designers will be essential if we are to build the needed infrastructure to support online education.

5. Support interdisciplinary studies

My March report mentioned some of the first steps needed to increase support for interdisciplinary studies, including a greater use of MOUs with departments, closer coordination on scheduling courses, and improved websites. While this remains a work in progress, I believe we have made great strides in understanding the issues involved and moving forward to resolve problems.

6. Rethink the purpose and structure of the Teaching & Learning Center

This is a priority specifically mentioned in the campus strategic plan. One of the most consistent messages I have heard from faculty across campus during my two years as provost has been the need for more ongoing professional development. Teaching and learning are certainly a central aspect of faculty development, but the needs for professional development among our faculty are diverse and we must find ways to broaden the mission of the TLC. One priority mentioned in my September report was providing greater development opportunities for mid-career faculty. In order to move effectively in this area, we need to have a unit that is able to address a full array of faculty development needs on campus.

Over the coming months my office, including Provost Fellow Ken Nystrom and others, will continue to consult with the TLC Advisory

Board and other campus constituencies as we plan a new direction for this important Center.

7. Work with the Liberal Education Committee and the faculty to assess and plan for recommendations

During this past year I attended several forum presentations by the Liberal Education Committee and met with committee chair Paul Kassel and others, sharing my views throughout. I did not think it appropriate for me to participate in the debates on the particulars of the Liberal Education/GE proposals at the faculty meetings. It is my strong belief that shared governance provides that these decisions are primarily, although not exclusively, in the purview of the faculty. In my brief statement at the April 11 faculty meeting, I pointed out the benefits of some elements in the proposal as well as aspects of the proposal being debated that needed further thinking. I was not taking a specific position. However, my role as provost requires that I ensure that curricular proposals meet standards of academic integrity, currency and excellence can be implemented, adhere to SUNY requirements, and are consistent with our core educational values and institutional mission. I evaluate each proposal with these characteristics in mind. Although I will not take a stand on any particular proposal, I do believe that our current GE needs to be revised to reflect the changing needs of our students and address new realms of knowledge and pedagogy.

Staying in Touch

One of the challenges of the provost position is staying in touch with faculty, staff and students. The volume of administrative tasks, decisions, meetings and emails that need to be addressed each day make it easy for a provost to become isolated in his/her office. Where my schedule permits, I have looked to find opportunities to participate in campus events. Faculty are engaged in a variety of activities, and attending talks, conferences or meetings about research, teaching and service gives me the necessary insight to understand and appreciate the great work and contributions you make every day. My participation in these events also deepens my understanding of what the Provost's Office can do to facilitate this work.

Remaining in touch with students is also a challenge for provosts. Provosts normally do not have regularized interactions with students, and yet serving our students is our central mission. Meeting and hearing students at events such as Accepted Students

Day, the Honors Program thesis presentations, and the BFA and MFA thesis exhibitions, are wonderful opportunities to celebrate the work of our students. Engaging my VPAA counterpart in student government and participating in the Scholar's Mentorship Program have been especially rewarding experiences.

For those of you who have visited the 8th floor of HAB recently, you may have noticed some of the stunning photography that now lines our hallway. These photos were taken by our very talented students in the Photography program and were selected in conjunction with Professor Francois Deschamps, who worked with the students and with Margaret Kemp to make this happen. We plan to continue these student exhibitions on an annual basis. If you are in HAB, please come to the 8th floor to view the exhibition!

A final piece of my effort to stay in touch is to teach a class. This coming fall I will be teaching Latin American Politics. I took on this commitment not only because I love to teach and feel strongly that teaching is at the core of what we do as faculty, but because it allows me to get a better sense of the student and faculty experience at New Paltz. As provost, this is invaluable.

Recognitions

The faculty listed below were recently recognized for their outstanding contributions. **Please join us after the faculty meeting on May 2nd in the lobby outside LC 102 for a reception honoring the awardees.**

Provost Awards for Faculty Excellence

Ted Clark, School of Business, for the award in Professional Service

Hamilton Stapell, Department of History, for the award in Teaching

Navin Viswanathan, Department of Psychology, for the Outstanding Pre-Tenure Faculty award

Eve Waltermaurer, Department of Sociology, for the award in Scholarship

Chancellor's Awards for Excellence

Joan Barker, Department of Art, for the award in Adjunct Teaching

Karen Bell, Associate Dean, School of Education, for Excellence in Professional Service

Sue Books, Department of Secondary Education, for Excellence in Teaching

Paul Chauvet, IT/Computer Services, for Excellence in Professional Service

David Hobby, Department of Mathematics, for Excellence in Faculty Service

Mary Kastner, Department of Design Services, for Excellence in Professional Service

We are all very proud of the accomplishments of our faculty and staff. Congratulations!

As always, feel free to share your thoughts on these or other issues with me. I hope you all have a restful and productive summer!

Best regards,

Philip Mauceri
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs