Chairs Cabinet, October 31, 2014 Minutes


Absent: Baum and Constant

Guests: Ellen Rasmussen, Steve Freeman.

Provost – Discussion regarding the issues related to the growth in enrollment and the impact of the students.

There was discussion regarding the Open Forum held in association with the recent GSB meeting – it was a very well attended (SRO). The students had very few questions about academic issues (e.g., availability of classes), but more concern was expressed about CyRide, health center, housing, and testing center issues.

The comment was made that even with the increase in the enrollment, students are staying on track with respect to getting the courses they need.

Take home message from the Provost - Meet with the students to discuss issues and remove the faceless administrator label. Students often do not know how best to raise a concern – who to go to. Encourage students to engage the administration.

There was a brief discussion about how departments should best interact with students in their majors. Departments were encouraged to include students in some capacity on committees related to curriculum.

There was a brief comment about the transfer of credits from Community Colleges. There are also plans to expand the testing center hours and availability.

Tuition (Board meeting) – 1.75 % appropriation request and tuition, students supported a modest tuition increase; however, at this time, it looks like the tuition will be 0 % for the Iowa resident undergraduate students. There will be increases in non-resident, graduate, and professional student tuition at the 1.75 % level.

Note: It was mentioned that the students at the Board meeting supported modest tuition increases.

It was noted that this will be the 3rd year in a row of a tuition-freeze. While the desire to keep tuition as low as possible, collective comments from the Chairs indicated that a tuition freeze puts a burden on budgets and delivery of quality education to the increased numbers of students.

There is some feeling that the Tier 1 efficiency study may facilitate discussion of future tuition freezes as “efficiencies” are realized. In this same vein, the
performance-based funding proposition at the State level may also provide challenges with respect to requesting future tuition increases.

Veronica Dark – Reminded the group about the Pew Report on Undergraduate Education and that this should be reviewed and potentially made available to department chairs once again in the context of these efficiency reviews.

Ellen Rasmussen – lead a discussion regarding the use and functionality of ISU classrooms

Issues were addressed at the policy and implementation levels, she mentioned that the committee received valuable input from faculty related to IT assistance in real time in the classrooms.

On the policy front, classroom issues are often related to scheduling as opposed to lack of available space.

Large service courses in Math, English, general Chemistry, etc. present challenges for both scheduling and IT.

To date, the University has had a budget of $250,000 for classroom improvements. This amount will be increased to $1.5M for annual expenditures to improve the classrooms.

The question was asked as to how should faculty be involved with renovation of general classroom space. The Chairs were asked to encourage their faculty to be engaged in this process and take the time to respond to any questionnaire or survey regarding classroom issues. It would be particularly useful to obtain comments from faculty that use specific classroom and that a list of faculty using a given classroom should be available.

Comments were made regarding the need to provide “real time” service with respect to classroom technology. For example, this needs to be decentralized to be effective as a centralized ‘help group’ cannot get to a given classroom in a timely fashion.

It was also suggested that standardizing the equipment in the 212 general use classrooms would be helpful but it is realized that new equipment will be installed and different from older equipment still in use. It was suggested that easy to follow instructions regarding the use of the IT equipment would be useful especially Tips for troubleshooting.

Utilization of classrooms often relates to the right number of seats (i.e., not too large for the enrollment), and the fact that optimal classrooms are often in use for another course or are in a different building.
Question: Does ISU have sufficient lab space and was this covered in this report? Not at this time as lab space is currently considered departmental space.

Question: How does the scheduling of back-to-back classes impact scheduling? There was discussion about instructor interactions immediately after class, flow of students in and out of the class room, etc.

Some discussion about using the rooms to max capacity, however, it is realized that it may necessary to use a 100 seat room for 75 students.

It was stated that the average age of classrooms at ISU is 62 years (i.e., built in 1952).

Question: Should ISU invest funds on 62 yr old buildings or plan for new classroom buildings?
Response: While other universities do have central classroom buildings, ISU does not have use this approach; in addition, there is a feeling at the Board that there may be more on-line courses and that new buildings would not fully utilized. A comment was made that faculty might want to change pedagogical approaches and that the current concepts of classroom space may be evolving suggesting that it is premature to invest in classroom buildings.

It was stated that the Faculty Senate could be a valuable resource with respect to classroom use and renovation, and that there is a standing committee for facilities.

Steve Freeman – Discussion of Post-Tenure Review
Three changes to the post-tenure review
1) Replace ‘superior’ with “exceeding expectations”.
2) It is recommended that the salary increase for a ‘superior’ rating be deleted. It was discussed that the specter of a salary increase created stress within the peer review process.
3) Clarification: there was a concern that the Chairs had no voice in this peer review, The Chair can voice agreement or disagreement with the peer review, and this does not mean the Chair can “change” the peer review.

Question: If there is an opinion between the Chair and the peer review, how does this affect the “action plan”. Who is responsible for implementing the action plan, e.g., will members of the peer review be involved in the action plan? Yes, they should be involved. Basically, the Department Chair is responsible to make sure the action plan is implemented.

There was a discussion regarding the “carrot and stick” perspective related to the post-tenure review process. In this regard, if there is a stick associated with the peer review process, should there be a “carrot”(i.e., the Salary increase) as well? There was plea that this issue be discussed at departmental faculty meetings and to ensure that the Senators know the feelings of the faculty in this regard.
Comment was made that ISU does not want the peer review to only be a negative process.

It was felt that the proposed changes in categories may help alleviate angst about ranking the individual under review.

Provost – The departments were encouraged to develop guidelines for making the determinations (meets expectations, exceeds expectations)

There was general agreement that it is hard to be superior in all categories and that maintaining the requirement puts an undue burden on the review committee and/or is unfair to outstanding faculty.

There is ongoing discussion about the development of video monitoring policies. Recorded conversations need all parties to agree. **Need clarification!**

Meeting was adjourned at 9:30 AM.