Finance Committee Minutes

2008-12-01

Present: Monika Ardelt
Jane Brockmann
Sam Brown
Kennie Merz
David Pharies
Paul Robinson
Andrea Sterk
Ken Wald
Caroline Wiltshire

Meeting commenced at 5:06 pm.

Minutes of the 19 November meeting were approved.

David opened with a report on the Dean’s meeting with Chairs and Directors, held last Tuesday. The Dean announced that current predictions suggest a 10% budget decrease for the coming year (equivalent to two or three small to medium departments) and asked chairs and directors for principles that might guide eventual cuts to CLAS. In addition, the Dean brought up the possibility (offered by the Provost) of suspending the “differential tuition” searches currently in progress, which would free about $1.3 million to offset cuts if legislation were changed to allow it; however, the Dean later postponed the decision whether these searches should be cancelled.

The Committee then turned its attention to assembling items for inclusion in a document to be discussed with Dean D’Anieri. Without specific attribution, the following items were considered:

- The absence of a clear mission statement for CLAS renders budgetary decisions more difficult. Perhaps the formulation of a mission statement is outside the purview of our committee, but we should encourage CLAS in this direction and may certainly make suggestions.
- For example, CLAS might identify its strengths – those areas in which it has an established or growing reputation – as foci for investment. These areas of strength may be geographical or thematic, and may well spread across departments or outside the College.
- In this regard, it was noted that some long-term commitment and continuity would be particularly welcome: in the past, areas have been singled out for cultivation, only to be deserted at a later stage. It was also noted that centers might be regarded as strengths, rather than as being vulnerable.
Though previous Finance Committee documents and the recent Senate Budget Council proposal differ in several ways, they do share certain valuable principles, such as the principle of shared governance; however, this specific principle is of limited applicability in the face of possible elimination of programs, as faculty cannot be asked to help identify programs to cut.

The view was expressed that simply reiterating our Committee’s message from previous years would not be productive. In addition to stressing the importance of such principles as shared governance and tenure protection, we should present new practical means by which to improve our budgetary situation.

Along these lines, little seems to have been done to encourage early retirement. The DROP program was effective for those in the state retirement plan; an alternative is needed for those in the ORP. It was suggested that some level of continued health care coverage might form part of such an incentive.

In view of the extreme seriousness of potential lay-offs, the reliability and accuracy of any data on which such decisions may be based is vital.

David asked members to send him suggestions for items (including some of those listed above) to be included in this next document, as he prepares a first draft.

A vote was taken (by secret ballot) as to whether the Finance Committee was supportive of the resolution to reinstate the three tenure-track faculty who were laid off this summer; the resolution passed.

It was agreed that our next meeting would be held on Monday, 15 December, at a time to be determined later.

Meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Paul Robinson