Report and Recommendations Regarding the Structure and Organization of the CLAS Dean’s Office

21 November 2008

Dean Paul D’Anieri requested that the Faculty Council gather information and explore possible new structures and organizations for the Dean’s office.

Current Situation

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences consists of 21 departments, 29 centers and institutes, 10 programs, and 7 campus-wide initiatives. The organization of the Dean’s office is a hybrid system predominantly organized by portfolio, with a partial and recent overlay of divisional associate deans. The current staff consists of six associate deans and one assistant dean:

Allan Burns, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs (Social Sciences Liaison)
Sheila Dickison, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Bernard Mair, Associate Dean of Information Resources and Technological Programs (Sciences Liaison)
Albert Matheny, Associate Dean for Student Affairs
Jim Mueller, Associate Dean for Administrative Affairs (Humanities Liaison)
David E. Richardson, Associate Dean for Research
Margaret Fields, Assistant Dean and Interim Director of the Biological Sciences.

Subcommittee Review of Some Peer Institutions

A subcommittee of Ron Randles and Susan deFrance first examined the organization of the Dean’s offices of arts and sciences colleges at a number of institutions to ascertain the most comparable peer colleges, then concentrated on the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. All four had hybrid systems based on the divisional model. Basic conclusions drawn from their research and conversations with associate deans at those comparable institutions are the following:

(1) The divisional model is an effective organization for complex and diverse colleges like arts and sciences. Although each of the schools has used this model for a differing number of years, none are interested in changing; in fact, Urbana-Champaign just recently reestablished the divisional model after disbanding it in the 1990s. The divisions of each school reflect the local situation (Chapel Hill, for instance, includes the fine arts with the humanities; Urbana-Champaign has only two divisional associate deans).

(2) The divisional model is only as effective, however, as the quality of the associate deans.

(3) Each school has a varied mix of divisional deans and portfolio staff (assistant and/ or associate deans, other staffing).
(4) Faculty governance is an important part of each college’s organization.

Meetings with Chairs and Directors

The Council held three open discussions with the chairs and directors, and would like to thank the chairs and directors who were able to attend one of these sessions. Although the sessions were divided according to the electoral divisions in the College Constitution, chairs and directors were asked to come or send a representative to one of the following meetings, even if the meeting they could attend was not their divisional one:

Humanities: Friday, 3 October 2008, at 9:35 am;

Behavioral and Social Sciences: Friday, 10 October 2008, at 9:35 am; and


Discussions centered around five major questions used to organize those meetings. Chairs and directors were asked to discuss these questions and to offer any other comments or suggestions they might have.

(1) What factors do you feel determine your department’s, program’s, or center’s share of college resources?

(2) What factors do you feel should determine your department’s, program’s, or center’s share of college resources?

(3) What are your department’s, program’s, or center’s needs?

(4) Are you satisfied with the current organization of the Dean’s office? If not, why not? How would you like to see the office re-organized?

(5) Are there issues that the current structure of the Dean’s office does not address adequately?

Discussion, Comments, Suggestions, and Conclusions from Meetings with Chairs and Directors

(1) Nearly all chairs and directors thought that the factors determining a department’s, center’s, or program’s share of College resources are not clearly stated, evaluated, or consistent from year to year.

(2) Strategic planning is lacking, and the current system does not allow for or foster such planning and evaluation.

(3) Concomitantly, the meetings for the Annual Program Reviews were considered unhelpful. They did not lead to any response from the Dean’s office. In the last few years, the meetings appeared to be taking on a more negative and adversarial tone. They need to be revised and rethought.
(4) A large majority of chairs and directors supported and called for a change in the current hybrid structure. Although the details are to be thought through, some variant of the divisional model should be considered and implemented.

(5) Reasons offered in support of the divisional model:

(A) The size and diversity of the College require a scholar/administrator with in-depth knowledge of each division and its component units. Chairs and directors need to have confidence that their departments, programs, and centers are understood in the particulars so that they can be thoughtfully and wisely evaluated according to both common and individual metrics in light of the College’s and the University’s strategic plans. Such planning and evaluation need to be based on detailed understanding of each program, center, or department.

(B) In order to have thoughtful strategic planning and evaluation, an associate dean with major authority in the division would be responsible for

(i) understanding astutely the programs and departments in that division;

(ii) working closely with the chairs and directors to prioritize resources, concerns, and hires; and

(iii) representing the division to the Dean and the other associate divisional deans.

(C) The divisional model could attract scholars of repute to provide service as a divisional associate dean.

(6) Problems, difficulties with the divisional model:

(A) The divisional model does not immediately address the functioning and placement of interdisciplinary departments, centers, and programs.

(B) The difference between centers and departments also needs to be recognized in any reorganization.

(C) The divisional model places another administrative level between chairs and directors and the Dean. For most, the perhaps less immediate access to the Dean in the divisional model was not sufficient to overcome the advantages mentioned above.

(7) Other suggestions and comments:

(A) Develop clear and consistent metrics with the faculty of each department, center, or program; negotiate such metrics then with the Dean’s office, in order to work from and evaluate according to the agreed-to mission.
B) Address the infrastructure of the college, as well as gender inequity. Hiring and layoffs occurring at the same time are problematic.

C) Develop long-term strategies, in order to make sure programs are not destroyed by attrition or inattention.

D) No matter what organization, change the culture and communication of the Dean’s office. Clarity of communication (both timely and direct) is needed, as well as a non-adversarial culture within the college.

E) No matter what organization, utilize a search process of faculty committees to advise the Dean when replacing the positions of associate deans.

Recommendations

(1) The Faculty Council recommends that the Dean implement a hybrid model of college organization and governance that includes the following:

A) Divisional associate deans: e.g., two or three divisions of departments, perhaps with a third or fourth for interdisciplinary centers and programs;

B) Portfolios retained at some level of staffing: e.g., research, student/undergraduate affairs, tenure and promotion, and information and technology;

C) Faculty governance through the Faculty Council and the Finance Committee.

(2) The Faculty Council further recommends that, because several departments and programs will span more than one division, and because many centers are not structured like departments, each department, center, and program should be asked to vote in which of the divisions it wishes to be as the first point of contact on the dean’s level.

(3) The Faculty Council recommends that the Dean and the Faculty establish a brief and realistic strategic plan that sets supportable goals, expectations, and rewards as a first step to improve communication and evaluation.

(4) The Faculty Council recommends the development of clear and consistent metrics with each department, center, and program.

(5) The Faculty Council recommends the use of faculty search committees advising the Dean in the searches for the positions of new associate deans. These searches should be internal searches.