Graduate Affairs Committee Minutes

February 13, 2017

Members Present: Robert A. Vaughan, Jr. (Chair), Andrea Allen, Erin Nagel, Judith Ogden, Celeste Walley-Jean, Mari Banks, Mark Watson, Patricia Smith, Susan Copeland, Craig Hill, Victoria Foster, Marci Butler (for MeriBeth Stegall), Thomas McIlwain, Josh Kitchens, Melanie Poudevigne

Members Not Present: Michael Dancs, Emily Harbert, Kelli Nipper, Charles Elfer, Dennis Attick, Charlie Harris

Guest: Scott Stegall and Reza Kheirandish

Meeting called to order at 2:30 p.m.

The minutes from January 23, 2017 meeting were table until the next meeting.

Dr. Vaughan introduced Provost Demmitt. Below are notes from Dr. Demmitt’s address to the committee.

There have been three budgets revisions for FY17 & FY18 due to cuts, with a cut of approximately $800,000 each time. As a result, some non-tenure track faculty haven’t been renewed and we have been unable to fill vacant positions. The reduction in lines has reduced the number of courses taught by full-time faculty to 78%, which is less than the goal of 80% established about 6 years ago when Micheal Crafton was Provost. While a 2% decrease might seem small, it has the potential to have a large impact on our students. We believe that full-time faculty by the nature of their appointment are not only more committed to the institution and our students provide, but also they help to enhance retention and increase student performance in courses.

The good news is that we will show an overall enrollment increase for the next year so we don’t anticipate a large formula funding cut for FY18. However, because the Board uses a 2 year average to determine formula funding, any increases in FY19 might still be small. Also, the current political climate might continue to limit tuition increase requests.

We will continue to have unfunded mandates and increased expenses in the next year. Merit raises, while necessary and welcomed, do translate to an increase of $46,000 to offer the same schedule next summer. Also, the BOR doesn’t typically cover 100% of the merit increase proposed by the Governor. At present, Clayton State will need to find the funds to cover approximately $170,000 in salaries and an additional $131,000 in benefits. In addition to merit increases, each year salary increases from promotions increase our budget by $50,000-$70,000. Finally, we also want to be able to support faculty travel, mini-grants for research and professional development, and other activities that contribute to the life of a university.

My goal is that we are able to meet these expenses without having to reduce any more faculty lines of funding for travel and supplies. We can do it if we can do it if we manage our resources well and grow by about two percent per year. Our future is not bleak. We are not looking at furloughs or other drastic steps. But we need to be prepared.

So while we have turned things around and are much more stable footing, these yearly increases will still put us in the position of needing to make budget cuts if we do not make any other changes. One of the areas we need to look at, along with others, is how we award release time.

Release time increases the cost of instruction because additional salary is needed to hire additional full or part-time faculty to cover classes. If coverage for classes cannot be found the results is usually tuition revenue reductions that effect the overall budget or faculty who are not on release time may have larger sections of students to cover enrollment.

We realize that changing course release policies is hard to do. Any decisions need to take into account a variety of factors, such as:

* Differences by major (for example, MBA vs. Archival vs co-listed courses all have different tuition rates and course expectations)
* What are other institutions in our sector are doing in order to:
  + - remain competitive
    - ensure that we are treating our faculty professionally
  + The different types of work that faculty do outside the classroom need to be considered because they all take time and are important to achieving our mission
    - PACE
    - Student research
    - Internships
    - Recruiting
    - Committee
    - Thesis committees
  + Various costs associated with release time
    - Complex to calculate because of tuition waivers and differences in tuition rates
    - Changes a little every semester
    - The sheet you have gives a one semester estimate of how much the university invests in graduate courses

It is because of the complexity of these issues that we have not rushed this process. Again, there is a lot that needs to be considered and the purpose of this meeting isn’t to extract a solution but, instead to get your input. Next year we will set up a task force to look at the issue more deeply, collect additional faculty input, and study the broad range of factors that need to be considered before any changes to our current policy can be made. In the meantime, decisions about release time are up to each college.

Meeting adjourned at 3:23 p.m.

Submitted by Elizabeth Taylor