Meeting of Subcommittee on Upper-Division Cross-School Opportunities

November 2, 2009

In attendance were the Provost, Steve Allred, Del McWhorter (Chair), Crystal Hoyt, Joan Neff, Porcher Taylor, Steve Thompson, and Margaret Denton.

After a brief discussion of the subcommittee’s meeting with representatives of the School of Continuing Studies on October 19, the Provost offered comments about a proposed structure for facilitating cross-school opportunities. The structure, as diagrammed by Steve Thompson, was the subject of the subcommittee’s October 5 meeting.

Steve Allred made the following comments and observations:

1) We need to consider how people who are going to be involved in cross-school appointments are appointed. What will be the ongoing obligation of the department or school if that person leaves?

2) The proposed structure included an “Office of Interdisciplinary Programs” that would have faculty oversight. The Provost thought the idea of a faculty oversight committee a good one. Most likely the committee would consist of a representative from each school. He said that the coordination of the programs, however, might be something the Associate Provost could assume, at least for now. If the program grew in the future, we could revisit the idea of creating a separate position. This was an idea discussed at the subcommittee’s October 5 meeting.

3) In response to Steve Thompson’s idea that schools be compensated for cross-school courses that might take their faculty away from the school’s primary curriculum, the Provost remarked that it faced hurdles. He suggested a budget allocation process that supports the Richmond Promise. In the short run, a cross-subsidy might work, but the best solution would be new faculty lines.

Steve Thompson raised again the Business School’s concern about resource allocation. He noted that the perspective of the Business School is that enrollment numbers are very large and so adjuncts are a fact of life, but that having any one course taught continuously by adjuncts was not desirable.

Margaret Denton suggested something in between “adjunct” and “tenure”, that is, term appointments. The Provost commented that a term faculty appointment of 3 to 5 years is more stable, however, the long-term vision is to have these faculty on tenure track.
A three-step process may be a good way to approach the hiring of faculty:
Step 1: adjuncts to test the viability of a program
Step 2: visiting professor
Step 3: faculty line

Steve Thompson stated that while there seems to be a movement towards acceptance of courses beyond the business curriculum, certain departments like Accounting and Finance are strapped. The Provost suggested that we think in terms of departments rather than “The Business School” when we consider cross-school programs.

4) The Provost asked the subcommittee to consider suggesting language on the tenure and promotion of cross-school appointments, to think about recommending a paragraph to go into general guidelines for tenure. The subcommittee should address issues of who does the evaluation and how is it done. This would be included only in the general guidelines for tenure and promotion; details are spelled out in the different schools.

5) What about staff support? Steve Thompson suggested there be a second level of support staff to handle the scheduling of cross-school courses and to coordinate with other programs such as study abroad.

6) The Provost asked about a standard set of incentives for becoming a coordinator of a program. The Chair stated that the advisory committees of cross-school programs need an assessment process for quality control and viability. She understood that the Board of Trustees approved proposed majors and their termination, but wanted to know if that is the case for concentrations (it is not). The subcommittee concluded that while concentrations might not have to go to the Board, their approval of cross-school programs could help with the support of cross-school programs in general.

The subcommittee decided at the conclusion of its meeting that it needed to define “cross-school” in terms of programs rather than courses. If there is only one course outside of the school, is that enough to constitute a cross-school program? The subcommittee plans to examine what courses existing cross-school programs require in other schools as opposed to electives or a narrow set of electives. This will help to determine a threshold for a cross-school program. It will also help to answer a question posed by Steve Thompson: are there any needs that a cross-school program has that are different from a cross-department program in Arts and Sciences?

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Denton