

Department Chairs Meeting
October 2, 2008
MINUTES

Kerry Pannell opened the meeting with a reminder of the new meeting format which began with questions about announcements e-mailed by Heather Whitis:

Inauguration Receptions: Given difficulty predicting the number of students, alumni, faculty members and emeriti who will attend departmental receptions, it may be necessary for the activity to spill out into building hallways (remembering that there may be classes in session nearby). Dr. Casey wants minimal disruption of academic activities and the intellectual life of campus, so classes should not be cancelled for students and faculty members to attend the open houses.

Inauguration Procession: Mary Dixon will provide specific instructions about marching order. If chairs are aware of faculty members who will not attend (or emeriti who will attend) please notify Neal and Mary.

Classroom scheduling: Ken Kirkpatrick confirmed that all classes have been assigned rooms, though it's not possible to meet all requests for tech classrooms large enough to match the maximum enrollment (there are 3 more tech rooms than last year, however, Carol Smith and Ken will continue to work together to address priorities and increased demand). To ease scheduling difficulty for students getting into the classes they need, it was suggested that MAO revisit the issue of scheduling. Ken will discuss with MAO.

Kerry introduced the main discussion topic: departmental self studies. Chairs raised concern last spring about the frequency of self-studies and whether 5-year intervals are too short to implement new ideas before doing another review. Kerry noted a similar discussion taking place on the ACAD listserv and she reported on the timing of self-studies at similar schools: Luther - 7 years, Augustana - 5 years, Berea - 10 years, and Benedictine - 6 years.

A suggestion was made to allow schedules to differ by department, with written guidelines for each, but allowing flexibility; when one self-study ends, make decisions about the logical timeline for the next one. Neal Abraham confirmed that we've agreed to ask about timing of the subsequent review as each department does its strategic plan. He noted that the current external review plan shows new flexibility and openness to these discussions (inter-review intervals now range from 5-10 years, with 6 and 7 years being among the most common).

Other suggested models included: a 10-year cycle, unless there are major problems within a department which require more help; a full self-study every 10 years coming out of a strategic plan, with only certain things identified to review again sooner; use of COF interviews for chair reappointment to gage the health and wellness of a department and to make suggestions about timing of the next review; something between three-year goals and a major study; an AQIP model in which the department identifies projects to work on; and numerous calls for general simplification of the forms and the process.

Another suggestion was that department and program leaders recast one- and three-year goals to be more along the line of progress reports on items identified in the strategic plan resulting from

a self-study. These reports could then become part of the next plan. Use those toward being a continuous process rather than being disconnected.

Concern was raised about departments being held to implementing ideas which were revealed honestly in the self-study process, even if those issues were resolved in the strategic plan.

Specifically related to COF interviews of all department members, Neal indicated that this might address uneven power within departments (by hearing all voices), though others expressed concern about not being equipped to manage the result of exposed tensions, not being clear about the desired result of the interviews, and discontent triggering a self-study (which could be perceived as punishment).

There was agreement about the need to continue to review and revise the self-study document with guidance from departments and programs. This is particularly important for programs; RAS is not the audience in their case. The guidelines for an intermediate review on certain projects should not be the same as for a comprehensive self study.

Other difficulties in self-studies included the need for a year or more of advanced planning to implement alumni surveys that might be useful in a self-study (Kelley Hall has sample surveys and Bill Tobin can help formulate and implement surveys, though Neal cautioned about using alumni survey data to drive strategic plans as the responses may not be representative samples and may not focus on the goals of a department's classes); the difficulty of continuity associated with transition of chairs (are there other ways to help departments keep track of issues?); and lack of time during the academic year to concentrate on bigger issues which might be addressed by departmental retreats (these are generally approved and funded by the VPAA when requested).

In summary, Kerry reiterated calls for a simpler outline, clarity regarding how the self-study fits into the RAS process, and the proposed 10-year self-study schedule with project updates.

Kerry asked for input to help prioritize other discussion topics for the remainder of the year. The following had been identified as possibilities last spring:

- Grade inflation problem (rigor and grading across campus)
- Writing intensive courses shrinking in departments outside English
- Terms for chairs of departments
- Discussion with Admissions (students not ready for college)
- Intellectual culture among students is low
- Winter Term and its mission on campus and how it's administered

Another suggested topic was the increase in the number of international students and related issues of appropriate support, tutoring and employment for and of international students, and also sending our domestic students out internationally.

It was proposed that pertinent people be invited to join in discussion of these topics.

Recorder, Jane Griswold