

Provost's A&S Strategic Planning Committee

Meeting Notes 1.10.23

- A. The provost requested that the group go around the room and share the following:
 - a. 1) Their thoughts on the town hall
 - b. 2) Their recommendations for what the next phase of this committee should be or what the next step should be.
- B. Provost Bradley confirmed that the new dean for the college will be asked to pick up the work started by this committee.
- C. A committee member stated that they are convinced that the college can't continue with business as usual. The town hall also showed them that any plan that comes from this committee will be a hard sell for a faculty assembly vote. They don't see how any kind of proposed structural change to the college would pass a majority vote since so many faculty don't seem to understand the gravity of the college's budget situation. Another committee member stated they agree.
- D. A committee member expressed that there should be a focus on how to increase revenue and then build a structure around that. They believe this group should wait for the new dean before making a decision on how to move forward.
- E. A committee member expressed several lessons they learned in this process:
 - a. They had the most optimism when the committee split into subcommittees and wished they would have started gathering feedback from others across the college earlier. They believe hearing from other college members was really insightful and they were intrigued by the Grand Challenges model.
 - b. They now view the budget model as a mechanism designed for A&S to fail. There are a few reasons for this. One is that tuition return per credit hour has not increased with tuition increases (in regular tuition or Dual Credit), so Central Administration captures an increasing share of each tuition dollar. Another is that when faculty leave, the lines return to Central Admin but then the College has to cover the instructional costs by paying PTLs, so in effect this moves our accounts receivable off our books but leaves our accounts payable on our books.
 - c. Third, they agree that the College has a major need to improve retention. However, if we increased retention and had more tuition dollars come in, we could grow, and that would look great, but then expenses would grow to meet the new revenue and we would again be desperate for tuition dollars and vulnerable to any decline. It seems the college will always be dependent on tuition which creates a constant crisis.
 - d. They believe since COVID, the college has had its most difficult years (i.e., students moving to online, fewer and fewer 18-year-olds enrolling into college, etc.). They believe the front-line college should be given the most grace at a university when crises like these happen to give them time to figure out these external circumstances.
 - e. They stated that investing in retention is the single thing that could have the most impact on the college.
- F. The provost stated that the university has provided approximately \$2 million dollars to help the college recover from its budget challenges. Other colleges also had financial challenges, but A&S was indeed prioritized.
- G. A committee member expressed that they believe there are internal and external circumstances contributing to the budget challenges of the college. They feel that the college is unfairly being blamed for the financial challenges they've been experiencing. They think it would be a great idea to put more resources and bandwidth into recruitment and retention services. Responsibility and blame for the

college's problems should also be put on prior leadership of the college. They acknowledge that it isn't right to only fixate on the college's external circumstances and not acknowledge the internal problems; but they want to make sure administration also doesn't overly focus on the college's internal problems.

- H. A committee member said this has been a good learning experience for them and they see now that the college cannot continue on its current path. They believe there's a communication opportunity for the college due to her conversations with industry partners. She learned that they've been pushed to work with schools like the Speed school; A&S is never really part of the conversation they've told her. She believes the college should take a more active role in getting out into the community and making industry partners aware of what A&S produces.
- I. A committee member agreed that better communication is needed for both student recruitment and fundraising. This committee made them more aware of what initiatives other departments in the college are doing. They believe retention should be a priority. The Student Success Center needs more support and more staff; their services need to be better promoted with the students.
- J. The provost stated that the university's retention rate this past year was 62.4%, and that needs to be much higher. The provost office has been supporting a number of university-wide retention initiatives. For example, the provost was encouraged by the positive student academic growth results that came from the Math Xcelerator intervention program.
- K. A committee member thanked the provost for facilitating this whole process. They expressed that getting the chairs' buy-in is key to getting faculty buy-in. He asked the provost and committee members to remember that there are "big box" programs and "boutique" programs (e.g., Pan-African Studies) across the university. He provided several recommendations:
 - a. The next phase of this committee should bring in the chairs
 - b. There should be better and more consistent communication. He feels that one month we hear from the president that we have the highest incoming class and the best budget, but the next month we hear from the provost that it's not so.
 - c. There needs to be a structure to incentivize or penalize faculty behaviors aimed at student retention. They believe that is the only way to get current behavior to change.
 - d. A committee member thanked the committee members for their candidness. They agreed with a lot of what was already said but want to emphasize the importance of optimism. They said optimism isn't just a mindset; it's a practice. For example, the trust sessions put on by administration felt inauthentic to them and believe those sessions actually backfired. When she spoke to other faculty who attended, they said it felt like a forced, top-down conversation. She said she doesn't know how to build optimism, but she does think we can't just talk about it and tell people to smile. We have to do optimistic things. She agreed that chairs should be involved and recommends that Thinktank sessions be utilized to imagine a new way.
- L. A committee member expressed their biggest takeaway has been what they've learned about each of the members and how building connection at the individual level contributes greatly to trust and understanding. This committee has proven to them the importance of personal connections.
- M. A committee member stated they believe the best progress started to come toward the end of the year. Their biggest takeaway from the committee has been that everyone delved deeper into what the issues of the college are. They also believe that the knowledge gained and individual relationships built have been of huge benefit. Moving forward as a college will need more of this – and they agree that it might need to include the chairs. They believe the college is full of brilliant people who can figure this out.

- N. A committee member disagreed with the idea that incentives/penalties are needed for faculty to get involved with student retention. They believe there are too many underprepared undergraduate students that come to A&S to make faculty members responsible for getting them prepared to meet their course rigor.
- O. The committee member who proposed the idea of incentives/penalties clarified that they never meant for individual faculty members to be held responsible, but departments and the college at large should be held responsible. How is it that other institutions with similar student populations have better student retention rates?
- P. Another committee member said they believe it would never be appropriate to incentivize/penalize individual faculty members because then it would create the perverse reaction of lowering standards and switching to a “everyone will pass” approach.
- Q. The provost asserted that lowering standards is absolutely not being advocated. He believes we need better methods of identifying at-risk students earlier.
- R. A committee member stated that a budget is a document of values. It shows how the money is going to things that we value. If we value retention, then we need a budget model that incentivizes retention. We need to remember, however, that incentives are a blunt instrument because they can cause desired changes in behavior as well as undesirable ones.
- S. The provost closed the meeting by expressing his thanks to the committee members for their participation. His office will send out a survey that will allow for anonymity and the responses that are submitted in that survey will go into the summary report that he will provide to returning Provost Gonzalez.
- T. A committee member requested that some kind of closing statement be given at the next Faculty Assembly meeting. The provost agreed and said he’d send a communication out to the college to let them know this committee has come to a close.