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2010-10-11 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate

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Approved
Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate
October 11, 2010; 11 a.m.
St. Mary’s Hall Room 113B

Present: Judith Huacuja, Andrea M Seielstad, Bradley D Duncan, Heidi G Gauder, Joseph E Saliba, Leno M Pedrotti, Paul Benson, Rebecca Wells, Katie Trempe, Antonio Mari

Guests: James Farrelly, Tom Burkhardt

Opening meditation: James Farrelly opened the meeting with a meditation.

Minutes: The minutes of the October 4, 2010 meeting were approved.

Announcements: None

Old Business: None

New Business:
T. Burkhardt gave a presentation about the university budget in advance of his meeting with the Board of Trustees, university faculty, and Academic Senate. He reviewed assets and liabilities for 2010 and outlined general projections for 2011 and 2012. Overall, he reported generally positive results about the university budget for 2010. Despite declining investment income and private gifts from previous years, some savings to the operating costs resulted in a positive net balance. The university became a little more tuition dependent primarily because investment income and private gifts and grants went down. Post retirement benefits went up significantly for the medical side of retirement based upon present value calculation derived from market rates. However, the financial health of the university looks good overall.

With respect to 2011, he projected that UD will produce the same sort of dollars as last year because we have 496 more students enrolled this year (UD recruited 2060 students for its undergraduate program this year). We probably will not get the same increase in terms of UDRI and research contracts and private gifts are likely to be down, but expenses are a little down and healthcare expenses will be flat (i.e., no significant increase due to human resources benefits adjustments to employees) so 2011 also should produce overall positive results.

Looking toward 2012 and beyond, the university is considering a number of budgetary choices in an effort to continue the positive financial health while implementing other of the university’s goals and policies. Specific goals include: (1) increasing the number of students we have recruited (i.e., from 1750 students budgeted in past years to 1800-2000 students, and (2) maintaining a discount rate in the range of 42-43% (scholarships sponsored by endowment, amounts of money UD gives as grant, athletic). The university’s efforts to improve diversity as well as its academic profile as measured by the SAT are also priorities. The long-term financial health in challenging economic times is of utmost concern.

There is not yet a projection on how much the tuition will increase. The university is trying to project where it wants to be in five years. Increasing the tuition allows the university to do more and to recruit better students, but has implications as well. For example, increasing student enrollment may require adding new faculty positions and possibly expanding facilities, and decisions will have to be made about how to do that.
At the conclusion of the presentation, ECAS members raised a variety of questions and concerns. It was pointed out, for example, how the different goals are in tension with one another, necessitating decisions about priorities and value. Decision-making about these issues rests with the Board of Trustees in consultation with the deans’ and provosts’ council. ECAS members emphasized the importance of faculty input in such decision-making as well.

Questions were raised about the role of graduate programs in generating revenue for the university. Overall, they generate 15% of the university’s revenue stream, with variances between the different programs in terms of tuition rate, amount of revenue brought in, discounted rate provided to students, role of research contracts in funding, extent to which they are supported by part-time tuition, facilities and resources needed to support them, role of faculty research, etc. The majority of our students are part-time, and 2/3 of graduate students are in the school of education. Other programs, such as electro-optics, provide fully-funded opportunities for students and require research space and faculty research to support them. Funding formulas must take into account these differences and our capacity for handling additional students within each program.

Additionally, some ECAS members emphasized the importance of ensuring that other goals, i.e., attempting to increase the standardized test scores of entering students, not work against diversity goals, particularly with respect to our ability to recruit and retain women and students of color. The impact of giving discounted tuition rates to incoming students, rather than full scholarships, was also discussed, with concerns being raised about the impact this has on our ability to recruit and retain students of color and those from lower economic household incomes.

On the one hand, increasing tuition provides more flexibility to enhance programs and discount some students’ tuition. On the other hand, the sticker price may deter some students from coming here, particularly from lower socio-economic levels and/or first-generation college students. The discount rate for minority students is more than that of the general population. However, it was pointed out the importance of ensuring that appropriate services and support systems are in place to enable such students to successfully complete their education at UD. Being able to secure outside grants, i.e., from the armed forces, has been helpful in providing such services, including work programs that engage students in employment and training related to their field of study as well as defray the costs of tuition, room and board. The provost indicated that the Board, President, T. Burkhardt, and Provost were committed diversity but that challenges remained in balancing the different goals and developing and maintaining effective recruitment and retention policies and practices. ECAS members voiced support for this commitment.

The meeting was adjourned just after noon.

Respectfully submitted by Andrea Seielstad