DASNR Faculty Council Meeting Minutes

March 3, 2017

Meeting called to order at 2:00 PM, 106 Ag Hall.

Roll call:

Dr. Tom Coon, Dean and Vice President, Division of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources

Dr. Rodney Jones, Agricultural Economics (Chair)

Dr. Li Maria Ma, Entomology and Plant Pathology (Secretary)

Dr. Eric Rebek, Entomology and Plant Pathology

Dr. Robert Matts, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Dr. Ramanjulu Sunkar, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Dr. Ranjith Ramanathan, Animal Science

Dr. Samuel Fuhlendorf, Natural Resources Ecology and Management

Dr. Ryan Reuter, Animal Science

Dr. Michael Buser, Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering

Dr. Tim Bowser, Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering

Dr. Shelley Mitchell, Horticulture and Landscape Architecture (Vice Chair)

Dr. David Davis, School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration

Dr. Tyson Ochsner, Plant and Soil Sciences

Dr. Jon Ramsey, Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership

A. Questions for Dr. Coon, Dean, Vice President, and Director of DASNR (Dr. Coon’s responses are in RED below each question submitted by faculty and staff)

1. Dr. Owens has requested possible lab improvements from departments, but it is unclear what sort of improvements are acceptable. Apparently safety-related retrofits (e.g. safety showers and eyewashes) are not allowed. Can we receive a list of previously approved lab improvements DASNR has agreed to support for examples?

Yes, we will post the improvements made on the OAES website under the “Experiment Station Enhancements” tab on the left. Safety issues are definitely acceptable under this program. We have replaced GFCI receptacles near sinks and Facilities Management is currently preparing the engineering drawings to add safety showers in the D wing of NRC. The latest requests also included an eyewash station in at least one lab. The program is aimed at infrastructure in the labs rather than towards laboratory equipment (e.g., freezers, benchtop instruments).

1. What is the status of the previous propositions to network-monitor crucial (costly) pieces of research equipment (e.g. ultralow freezers), so that researchers can be informed automatically and in a timely manner as to when outages occur?

I checked with Dwayne Hunter in IT and all of the freezers that were identified by the department heads have been outfitted with sensors. If there are additional freezers that were not previously identified, then we need to know about those so please let your department head know and contact Erich Wehrenberg.

1. Insufficient voltages, electrical surges and outages over the past 10+ years in the B-wing of NRC have resulted in damage to numerous ultralow freezers ($10,000+ each), growth chambers, incubators, freezers, fridges, PCR thermocyclers, computers, etc. Many of these pieces of equipment are too costly to repair or replace with available funding sources and, in most cases, irreplaceable research specimens, reagents, and data have been lost. The erratic electrical supply is a serious impediment to the research programs in the NRC. A reliable electrical supply should be considered critical infrastructure for maintaining a competitive research program at OSU.

We were not aware of wide swings in electrical service, and we have asked Facilities Management to do an audit to see where the problem is. These are issues that are important to call to the attention of your unit head so they can assure that it is being addressed. We do not know why the B wing would be any more susceptible than the other wings in NRC. We’ve asked Facilities Management to begin study of this and they are seeking more specific information so they can target the location of the issues. We will work with department leadership to ensure they can identify and resolve the malfunctions. In the meantime, it would be prudent to use surge protectors on laboratory equipment and inform unit heads of any disruptions.

Val Gladden operates the greenhouses and growth chambers in NRC and has not experienced the electrical brownouts mentioned here. The problem may be overloaded circuits and old equipment but we need more specific information about the labs affected.

1. What is the status of initiating the department head search for BAE?

We expect Dr. Veenstra to be in place at least through July 1. Resolving ongoing shortfalls in the department budgets and creating a balanced operating budget for the department has been our primary concern prior to opening a search for a permanent department head and it remains the focus of our assessment. We will be reviewing this progress later in March. However, we will not commit to a certain date until we have resolved the department’s budget issues.

1. Almost all, if not all, of the programs in the last 35 years were only in Ag, not the entire University, justified by the separate state appropriations for the Station and the Service. Those were initiated by Ag administration and recognized the differences in the budget and staffing models between Ag and the rest of the university. Current predictions are that OAES and OCES will be faced with another 10% cut in funding. Retirement incentive programs got Ag though rough times in the past. Will Dr. Coon reconsider and pursue a retirement incentive program similar to the 2009 program?

*This question was a follow-up to a question asked prior to the fall 2016 meeting. Here is the fall 2016 question and Dean Coon’s response:*

*Fall 2016 Question: With persistent budget issues and high numbers of senior faculty are there any renewed thoughts regarding buy-outs? What are your thoughts on reduced time appointments for faculty approaching retirement?*

***Fall 2016 Response: There has been no interest expressed by OSU administration*** *for using early retirement incentives to address the budget challenges, and I am not convinced that they will help us address our budget challenges. These are costly initially because they involve essentially paying someone not to work without having the salary savings to use in covering whatever essential functions are not being served by the faculty member. And this is at a time when our budgets are already strained.*

*We have a number of cases in which faculty have retired and then come back to work on a part time basis, and some of those situations have worked well. It may be possible to gradually reduce an appointment until a later specified retirement date, but we have no experience in this as I understand it*

As mentioned in the previous statement, the cost of these programs does not address our budget challenges. The 2009 program instituted in DASNR did not result in significant short- or long-term savings. The two-year payout was costly and some positions were critical in nature and had to be re-filled. I reiterate that there are no plans to implement a voluntary retirement incentive program in DASNR and that such a program is not feasible for addressing our budgetary shortfalls. I am not aware of any university level plans for a retirement incentive program.

1. Realizing we are in a tight budget and will be for a while, is administration still considering some kind of career track for non-tenure track faculty?

OSU Faculty Council is presently working with OSU Administration to enhance our current offerings for NTT career paths as well as appropriate titles. A draft policy and new draft titles are under revision and I expect them to be announced shortly. In the past, DASNR has made use of NTT titles outside of the guidelines that OSU provides. For example, Research Associate is a temporary title with a maximum 5-year appointment, although DASNR has several persons with this title who have been employed longer than the maximum of 5-years. We will be aligning all of our titles with OSU’s new structure after the new policy and titles are in place, but without causing any disruption or disadvantage to current employees.

Part of this process will include titles that are available for faculty reappointment and promotion, requiring all DASNR departments to prepare Reappointment and Promotion guidelines for NTT positions. While funding for NTT promotion raises is not in place at this time, we must address this issue as budgets rebound in the future.

1. How is the “revenue failure” that was just declared going to affect DASNR’s and departmental budgets?

The information provided by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) is that we will experience a 0.6 percent annualized reduction. This amounts to a reduction of $122,176 in state funding for OAES and a $133,324 reduction for OCES. This results in these revised allocations for each agency:

OAES- adjusted new FY17 state allocation = $21,537,363

OCES- adjusted new FY17 state allocation = $23,502,576

For CASNR, the reduction will be absorbed by General University funds, with no reductions in our allocations.

The OAES and OCES agencies will absorb these (and any future) FY2017 rescissions from funds held in reserve from FY2016. The State Treasury withheld too much from our allocations in FY2016, as they did for all agencies, and by law were required to return those funds to the designated agencies in FY2017. Both of our agencies have held these reimbursed funds in reserve specifically to address any revenue rescissions in the current fiscal year. In short, we were prepared for this.

1. As we contemplate re-organizing our cooperative extension system we appear to be committed to shrinking it while maintaining a much of the current configuration as possible. That is a recipe for failure. If the legislature is not convinced that the current benefits of our system justify their investment they are unlikely to maintain that level of investment for a smaller version. The hallmark of the land grant university system has been the transfer of research based information to agricultural producers and other decision makers. Estimates on the return on investment of land grant research and extension are always based on the assumption that the structure is providing a seamless mechanism to move information and technology from basic research to applied research to adoption by producers and allied industries. Given that the transfer of research based information is the foundation of the success of the land grant system why are we not focusing our re-organization of extension around that principle? That criteria would allow us to identify and concentrate on the areas where we have the greatest comparative advantage. Would it not be beneficial to analyze how progressive producers receive information and adopt technologies and align our extension budget, technology and human resources to maximize technology transfer? Instead of eliciting information from system participants would we not be better served to concentrate on the needs, attitudes and information delivery preferences of tomorrow’s progressive producers? When businesses undergo strategic planning a common question is “if you were to design you business from scratch to best compete in tomorrow’s market place what would it look like? Would we not be better served by taking a similar approach?

First of all, it is important to avoid the conclusion that because our budgets were reduced, legislators must have concluded that our services don’t justify their investment. The legislature did not single out OCES and OAES for reductions. Rather, the entire higher education system was targeted for significantly higher reductions than any other arm of state government.

Secondly, it is clear that with the budget cuts OCES and OAES have taken, we must reduce our workforce AND the focus of our work. We simply cannot support the breadth or depth of services and programs we have provided previously. We face two key strategic questions: 1) what program areas should we address?  2) what is the most effective and cost-efficient means of delivering those programs?

Extension has traditionally delivered in four program areas: 1) Agriculture and Natural Resources; 2) Family and Consumer Science; 3) 4-H Youth Development; and 4) Community Development. In the past, we have attempted to manage these in an integrated way, frequently calling upon staff in one program area to assist with other areas at key times. In most cases, this called for ANR or FCS staff to assist with 4-H. Our staffing model was similar across all program areas, with a focus on having expertise in all areas in each county.

With these budget reductions, AND with the changes in technology that affect our program delivery options, we have concluded it is best to consider staffing differently for the different program areas.

The direction taken by Extension with the limited budget we have is to place priority on staffing most intensively for the 4-H program. It is clear from survey information and advisory groups that 4-H is the highest priority Extension program among clientele and that it is the program most familiar to and valued by legislators. 4-H programming requires a local presence of Educators in every county in order to recruit, screen, train and support volunteers who help to deliver our 4-H programs. Although there is benefit to having an educator for FCS and for ANR in each county as well, it isn’t as critical to use that staffing model as it is for 4-H.

The vision for moving forward with agriculture programming in the future is to focus on having educators who are more specialized and who work across county lines. This model will depend on a set of online resources and tools in order to reach the variety of producers who can benefit from our services. It also will allow for other partners, including county government, and perhaps industry or commodity partners, to invest in these more specialized educator positions. Similarly, we may be able to recruit partners to help fund FCS educator positions either within a county or across county lines.

This does not mean that we have abandoned serving agricultural producers or FCS clients, regardless of their scale or use of information technology. Rather it means we will be doing so with a structure that fits with a variety of producers, from large scale commercial to small scale artisanal, and with a variety of other community audiences while ensuring the county-level support for 4-H.

This series of changes will allow us to transition to a more “specialized” delivery system that will better serve the progressive producer AND other producers in the future. It will require putting new resources (if and when we receive them) back into the system in a different way and in a way that may be similar to that suggested by the person asking this question. It will also require investments in staff development and developing new tools for developing and delivering Extension content.

OSU has had a very strong synergistic relationship between OAES and OCES. We are committed to maintaining that synergy even as funding sources create tension between basic and applied research and the translation of research findings into practice. Funding sources may drive a tendency to divide research from Extension, but our challenge is to position ourselves with teams that include both research and Extension expertise so as to benefit from competitive funding sources for our integrated mission.

As a Division, we serve clientele that range from 4-H youth to college students to adults in food and agriculture industries, natural resource management, and family and community development. Our challenge is to develop new models for engaging with each audience in meaningful ways that help them to improve their lives. Our value proposition is that our integrated mission enables us to do this more effectively than if our missions were split out into different organizations. And with or without budget reductions, that is the challenge of land grant institutions in the 21st Century.

1. Why is Facilities Maintenance allowed to overcharge us for projects that we have to use them for? My little office was billed over $800 for 29 man hours of painting, and I know they weren’t in there 29 hours. Another faculty member had to spend $135 for two screws and shelf hanging. When I switched offices, I waited two weeks for my phone to switch because they told me they needed to do it. Figuring they had to reprogram something, I left my phone. Finally someone came by and physically switched my phone from my old office to my new office (no reprograming needed, just unplug/replug) and when I asked whether I could’ve done that, he said no, because it was his JOB! I hate to see state money wasted like this! What can we do to get the charges down to affordable?

Facilities Management has several tiers of services. The painting services can be considered non-billable baseline services or billable services. This will be determined at the time the scope of work is developed. For billable services, FM costs compare to vendors providing services to other federal contractors. I would expect 29 hours of painting to run closer to $1000 in addition to materials.

At times FM will hire other contractors, as approved by the Board of Regents, to bring a job to completion in a timely manner. However, we must consistently have all work coordinated by FM, regardless of the actual group providing the service for remodeling, construction, etc. If you have been billed for work that didn’t occur (for instance the 29 hours of painting), I would suggest your department head follow-up with FM.

Jane Fuhlendorf in my office manages a list of baseline services. Some of the projects completed this year include ventilation of restrooms, updated water fountains in several buildings, new flooring in Ag Hall restrooms, hallway painting, updates in the Animal Science lobby, replacing loose or broken floor tiles, painting in public areas and classrooms, etc. While only a few projects are completed each semester, we welcome your input.

In the case of large construction projects or extensive additions/repairs/remodeling, Randy Raper will work with Long Range Facilities Planning as needed to get designs, funding, approvals, etc. in place and will manage the projects through completion.

FM does not make switches to phones. In the case of your phone being moved, telecommunications services is typically very responsive in scheduling the work given sufficient lead-time of a week or so. This work is scheduled through telecom@okstate.edu or helpdesk@okstate.edu. Contact your department head’s office if you need further clarification on phone service.

1. I was told from my department head that there is a salary increase associated with a positive post-tenure review for Full Professors, however, I have not (to my recollection) seen any policy statement on this distributed to faculty. Could Dr. Coon please clarify this?

I am not aware of an official policy to provide a stipend upon successful cumulative review. There is a statement agreed to by the Faculty Council and the Council of Deans that I will share with you. It was the basis of a practice that has been in place since June 2015 to provide tenured professors who undergo successful cumulative review a $5,000 increase in salary. This was implemented in order to address ongoing salary compression issues for fully promoted faculty. I have not heard of plans to discontinue this practice.

DASNR had the option of implementing this when the provost made the program available, and at that time we chose to adopt the practice so as to ensure that DASNR faculty are not treated differently from other faculty on campus. However, funding for these raises for OAES and OCES appointed faculty must be provided by our agency funds. OSU only funds the raises for faculty appointments on General University Funds. At this time, we will continue to follow the OSU practice.

1. The Controlled Experimental Research Laboratory has been designated for demolition under the Ag Master Plan that was developed last year. Is there a timetable for when CERL will be demolished and how should faculty/departments that use the facility begin planning for the eventual space loss?

This is part of the Master Plan but there is no immediate plan to replace the building, so there is no need to plan for space loss or moving. The Agriculture Laboratory Building included in the Master Plan will include space for environmental chambers and laboratories currently housed in CERL. We will not abandon space in CERL until new space has been created in the new Agriculture Laboratory building.

1. I would like to know the feasibility of hiring a departmental student advisor who would handle advising of undergraduate majors at the freshman and sophomore levels for the NREM department. Advising undergraduates at this stage of their college career takes a tremendous amount of faculty time, and there Is a great deal of turnover in students at this level due to frequent changes in major. This dedicated advisor could be responsible for assisting with enrollment and class scheduling, as well as changing majors, adding and dropping courses, pre-requisite overrides when necessary, etc. This does not preclude beginning students from approaching faculty for career mentoring, and in fact, this should be encouraged. Before the junior year, students could be assigned to a faculty advisor for the remainder of their program. Most of the coursework in the first couple of years is fairly prescribed, so the mechanics of assisting students with enrollment, etc., could be more effectively accomplished by a full-time advisor, taking some of the pressure off of faculty for teaching and research. Thanks for your consideration.

CASNR is known for providing a high-quality, research-based, experiential education with an emphasis on student success both in and out of the classroom. Part of CASNR’s reputation is tied to the connection of its faculty and students in every academic department – a connection that includes academic advising, classroom instruction, student organization involvement, research experiences, career mentoring, service learning contributions, study abroad opportunities and alumni relations. CASNR’s culture of faculty advising for all undergraduate students is valued by students and alumni – and is one of CASNR’s unique characteristics. Prospective students and their parents also value this faculty/student relationship and often mention this as a selling point in recruitment conversations.

The Banner transition, coupled with student enrollment growth, has created some challenges in our faculty advising model. Some of these challenges are temporary as we all learn the new computer system. However, the challenges of student enrollment growth may be more difficult to address for all areas of instructional need, including academic advising.

Teaching students to take more responsibility for their scheduling needs is one approach that can decrease time needed to determine semester course plans. Dr. VanOverbeke met with the advising coordinators last week and asked them to work with her to identify strategies for increasing student independence and preparation with regard to course planning and scheduling. Additionally, Drs. VanOverbeke and Hickman will also work with this group to identify ways to simplify scheduling processes and provide additional faculty support and training as appropriate.

Non-tenure track faculty positions are an option for addressing some undergraduate teaching and advising needs. We are currently piloting this approach in the department of animal science and look forward to evaluating its progress later this summer.

1. Dr. Clary has made it clear that she supports and encourages teaching large courses, especially general education courses. However, she also seems to not have any issue with faculty regularly teaching small courses (e.g., <5 students). During these times of reduced budgets and lower FTE’s in departments, it seems that the college should be strongly encouraging departments to not be teaching such courses as the cost/student is so much higher. Has there been any plans to encourage departments to possibly combine courses or delete courses that consistently have low enrollments?

Dr. Clary is concerned about low enrollment courses and has regularly discussed this with academic department heads. Departments are strongly encouraged to review their curriculum maps and course audits to determine how these low enrollment courses fit into the undergraduate or graduate curriculum. In some cases, offering courses less frequently would increase course enrollment and also allow room for additional content courses to be taught. In other cases, more significant program changes would be needed. Reducing course options and/or combining course content are other approaches to consider.

1. I have recently talked to some of our staff and they have said that Banner has improved, but there are still some issues with it (e.g., our staff member said that it now takes her 2-3 hours to handle payroll when it took only about half hour at most before Banner). At least in this case, it seems that instead of increasing efficiency, Banner in fact has decreased efficiency. Is the College aware of such issues and what are their plans to alleviate these problems?

Reconciliations and other account balance inquiries are still taking longer to complete than they took in the previous system. Banner is a new information system and as such it requires a new set of programs, queries and reports to fully realize its benefits. In that respect, i.e., given the need for new operational software, Banner is not yet fully implemented. Improvements are gradual, and we continue to update fiscal staff periodically with one on one assistance in departments and small group workshops to implement changes and best practices in Banner, along with training provided by HR Training Services. Progress is slow. Adding new programmers to central administrative staff might help to accelerate the progress, but funding cuts would require investments that otherwise would go into direct support for instruction (faculty lines).

1. Please thank the Dean for changes to the ventilation systems in Ag Hall 400J and Ag Hall 300H. The situation is immensely improved.

Please continue to be diligent in bringing building maintenance issues to the attention of your department heads.

1. VP Weaver created an advisory committee to discuss how academic departments operate and interact with the OSU administrative and financial systems. The committee solicited input from staff (including DASNR staff) about how the implementation and use of Banner has been going. The committee met in November, but there has not been any feedback from the committee. Could Dean Coon please provide an update on the committee?

Dr. Mike Woods has agreed to represent DASNR on VP Weaver’s advisory committee of department heads from colleges across campus. The purpose of the committee is to “provide Joe Weaver (VP for Finance) with a better perspective as to how academic departments operate within the administrative and financial systems”. The committee met in November 2016 for the first time and also met in February 2017.

The first meeting was spent discussing the issue of OSU Tulsa and how the Stillwater campus interacts with the Tulsa campus. This is a big issue for some colleges –but not DASNR. The second meeting was a follow-up and VP Weaver invited several OSU Tulsa administrators to join the group. Most of the meeting was spent on the OSU Tulsa topic. I think this is an important topic as OSU needs a strong and visible presence in Tulsa and the metro area. There are some administrative issues in how the two campuses (Tulsa and Stillwater) interact. So—worthy and important discussion but not a major focus for DASNR.

Dr. Woods brought a few items to the attention of VP Weaver:  Banner in general, travel reimbursement, and grant administration.

* Banner --  Dr. Woods solicited input from all department heads in DASNR regarding Banner (some of them likely went to their staff for background and suggestions) and compiled a list of suggestions for improvement or adjustment from several of the Heads. Most suggestions involve the challenge of having to use multiple Banner screens to acquire information we used to get under the old system with a single screen. There is also the issue of encumbrances on the PAYORG reports being handled better. The committee has not yet had the opportunity to discuss these Banner issues as a committee. If others have suggestions please share with your Head who can pass on to Dr. Woods. Please NOTE—I think every month we get better in dealing with Banner. Some things will simply take time. However, any suggestions for improvement are welcome.
* Travel Reimbursement – Joe Weaver actually brought this up. He shared some data he had collected regarding travel claims. It is interesting to note that for the time period he looked at, DASNR had 30 percent of all campus (including Tulsa and OKC) travel claims –by far the largest among all colleges and units. VP Weaver was concerned about the sometimes long lag between the actual trip and the first date a travel reimbursement for the trip was filed. I believe he worried the reimbursement was sitting on a desk somewhere. Dr. Woods did point out many in Extension travel a lot—and some folks only file travel once per month. There was some discussion of considering centralization of travel reimbursement processes. We have shared this information with DASNR Fiscal Affairs for their assessment.
* Grant Administration -- Dr. Woods has shared information with VP Weaver regarding GCFA. One concern is the need for more timely billing of expenses for approved grants. Some funding entities are complaining because billing is not going to the funding entity in a timely manner. Another concern noted was the large amount of time it is taking to enter budget data into our system after a grant is approved. PIs are having to wait to spend on an approved grant. There are a lot of needs for redistribution actions which are not always easy in Banner. This has been shared with VP Weaver –no response yet.

Please provide additional input on this topic to your department heads so that we can continue to move forward to improve the administrative and financial systems going forward.

B. Old Business

1. Approval of meeting minutes from Dec. 5, 2016.

 Meeting minutes were approved.

C. Committee Reports

1. CASNR Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee (Robert Matts)

 No report.

1. DASNR RPT Committee Report (Max Melstrom)

No report

1. Teaching and Advising Workload Committee (Rodney Jones)

No report

D. New Business

1. Is there a need for slight wording clarification in AFC bylaws (Rodney Jones)

 See attachment.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Meeting minutes prepared and submitted by Dr. Li Maria Ma, Secretary, on behalf of DASNR Faculty Council.