DASNR Faculty Council Meeting Minutes

Dec. 5, 2016

Meeting called to order at 1:00 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. Max Melstrom, Agricultural Economics

Dr. Robert Matts, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Dr. Ramanjulu Sunkar, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Dr. Ranjith Ramanathan, Animal Science

Dr. Shane Robinson, Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership

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

Ms. Deb Garrard Foster, Nutritional Sciences

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

Dr. Gopal Kakani, Plant and Soil Science

Dr. David Davis, School of Hotel and Restaurant Administration

Dr. Jon Ramsey, Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership

Dr. Cheryl Mihalko, Horticulture and Landscape Architecture (Vice Chair)

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. Based on information provided in the administration’s FY 2017 Budget PowerPoint (<https://news.okstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/FY2017%20OSU-System%20Presentation%20as%20of%206-16-16%20-%20FINAL.pdf>), slide 9, “State Appropriations & Tuition/Fee Revenue As a % of General University E&G Revenue”, the state’s contribution declined from 69% in 1980 to 23% in 2017.  If the decline in the state’s contribution continues at the same rate as between 2002 to 2017, it will approach zero in another decade. What do you see as the long-term consequences of the state’s funding trends for the experiment station, CES, and Oklahoma agriculture, and how can this move toward the look and feel of a “private institution” be consistent with the “land grant mission”?

It is correct that 23% is from state appropriations, but it is worth noting that tuition does not make up the other 77%. The 77% certainly includes tuition and fees as well as a variety of other income sources from grants, gifts, auxiliaries, etc. (see slide #5 which has state appropriations at 15% of the total for all agencies).

Obviously the implications for the “land grant mission” are not encouraging. The issue/problem is much wider that just Oklahoma State University, and affects the other land grant institutions in Oklahoma (Langston University, College of the Muscogee Nation) and across the nation. Oklahoma is not alone in experiencing the reduction in investment in public universities, including the land grant institutions.

My perspective is that OSU is given the responsibility to steward the land grant mission in partnership with Langston University and College of the Muscogee Nation. I have visited with upper administration at OSU and with colleagues at other land grant universities. If the land grant mission is going to be privatized, I think we need to prepare for that by thinking through alternative structures for conducting that mission, such as creation of a non-profit corporation to carry out the mission. But from my perspective, OSU will not give up the land grant mission. We’ll simply need to be creative in resourcing it with other means. That’s not easy to do, and will stretch our institution unlike any previous threat. But it is important for us to plan ahead for that potential.

1. 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?

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.

1. What are the financial forecasts for next year? Especially with rumors that the state is facing a $700 million shortfall.

The financial forecasts will be formalized with a meeting of the state equalization board set for Wednesday, December 21. At that meeting, the board will receive forecasts from the State Treasurer and will set the general revenue forecasts that will be used for budget appropriations in the 2017 Governor’s Executive Budget and in the 2017 session of the Oklahoma Legislature. The monthly reports to date for FY 2017 show a slight shortfall from what was projected for the FY2017 budget planning, but to date the shortage is within the 5% allowed by state statutes. If the revenue reports fall outside that threshold, that will qualify as a revenue failure and will lead to reductions in state spending required by state statutes. How the Governor chooses to address a potential revenue failure remains to be seen.

It seems safe to assume that revenues are not going to improve in the near future. The $700 million shortfall for FY2018 is a given. Whether it goes beyond that will be determined at the Equalization Board meeting on Dec. 21.

1. How are priorities being set to refill open positions?

We are painfully aware of the impact vacancies have on our ability to carry out our mission. With respect to county Extension positions, we will be cautious in filling positions only by making them available to current employees. We will not seek external candidates for county office positions unless there are very unique circumstances (e.g., external funding for the position). For Departmental positions on campus, we consult with Department heads routinely to gauge the impact of departures on our ability to conduct our key mission responsibilities. In cases where the position needs to be filled in order to fulfill other obligations, we will work with the department head and among the agency funding lines to find a way to staff for that programmatic need.

1. In light of budget concerns for the next couple of years, is there a plan to fill critical gaps in research, teaching, and extension created by departures of tenure-track faculty due to retirements or other reasons?

In all cases, we consult regularly between department heads and DASNR Associates on the gaps that are created by departures and the options for filling those gaps. In some cases, where the expertise is not available and the need for it cannot be compromised, we have approved filling positions, often with a slight change in the relative appointments from the position that was vacated in order to optimize our agency funding resources. Until we have a reliably stable funding environment, we will need to continue in this way. Some vacancies may be filled in the future once we have absorbed the full impact of the budget reductions into our recurring budget.

1. What is your strategy for retaining tenure-track faculty that are still at OSU, but feel overburdened by additional responsibilities placed upon them due to faculty attrition?

I rely greatly on Department Heads and faculty to create a productive and attractive work environment for faculty. The Provost’s office has contributed to this through the COACHE survey of faculty working conditions, which helps to identify those factors that can be particularly helpful in retaining faculty. I consult with Department Heads on positions and faculty that may be at risk of being attracted away and prefer to determine in advance what we can do to make sure the faculty member is finding the environment and resources available in Stillwater as sufficient to meet their needs. When vacancies occur that are not replaced the refocusing of department resources is likely best left mostly to the Department Head with some consultation with the Associates and the Dean’s office. Changes in appointments must of course go through the Associates and the Dean’s office. Counter offers have been made but not in every circumstance, and in proposing counter offers, we carefully consider the circumstances of the current faculty to ensure we are being fair.

1. Attached Question for Administration (PDF):
   1. Why are there no exhaust fans in Ag Hall 400J or Ag Hall 300H?
   2. Why are the windows sealed in Ag Hall 400J or Ag Hall 300H?

We want to ensure that faculty, staff, students, and visitors in Ag Hall feel welcome and comfortable and that restroom facilities are functional and clean. Having visited Ag Hall 300H we agree the caustic smell is still a problem, even after significant recent ventilation upgrades. It should be noted that OSU’s energy management guidelines do not allow for unsealing or opening the windows.

Additional changes are being made immediately to the air handling in the bathroom. Presently, the HVAC systems for Ag Hall run from 5:45 AM-8:00 PM on Monday-Thursday and 5:45 AM-5:00 PM on Friday. The fans for the restrooms have traditionally been tied to this schedule. In an effort to provide more ventilation the fans will run 24 hours per day / 7 days per week in the south wing restrooms after repairs are made. The fans were turned off on 12/2/2016 to repair leaks in the exhaust system. The fan were intermittent for a few days while these repairs were made, and have run 24/7 since then.

Other changes being made during the semester break are:

* All urinals in the south wing will be converted to auto-flush to prevent unflushed waste water causing odor
* All urinals will have a freshening screen in place, to be provided by the custodians
* Toilets on the third and fourth floors of the south wing will be converted to automatic flush
* Air diverters will be installed on fresh air supply vents to create a more thorough ‘mix’ before being exhausted, which will aid in more efficient odor removal
* Measurements of supply versus exhaust will be taken and appropriate changes in exhaust will be made to create a permanent negative pressure to aid in prevention of odor build-up

We believe these changes will improve the quality of the restrooms in Ag Hall and specifically 300H.

While we didn’t observe odor in 400J, it is believed the modifications described above will improve all of the restrooms in the south wing.

If you have any other questions or concerns feel free to reach out directly to your department head or to Jane Fuhlendorf in the dean’s office.

B. Faculty appraisal and development template

Dr. Coon explained how The Annual Faculty Appraisal and Development Program Form (Draft) (Form Draft here on) was generated and mentioned the limitations on how much could be changed in the current format at this stage of development. Dr. Michael Buser and several other council members expressed their concern about the time consuming process in filling the section “GRANTS AND CONTRACTS” in the Form Draft. Dr. Coon suggested, as a solution to the concern, to change this section to a more CV-friendly format so copying and pasting from CV would be allowed to reduce the time in filling this section by faculties. The Primary Area in this section (Teaching, Research, and Extension) could be listed as subcategories in the CV-friendly format, as suggested by Dr. Li Maria Ma. Dr. Coon indicated that a cover page could be included for signatures by the faculty member as well as administrators (which is missing in current Form Draft).

Dr. Tom Royer suggested to include some examples in the Form to help to differentiate “Output” and “Outcome”

C. Early reappointment/promotion policy

Dr. Coon explained the memorandum on “Clarification and considerations for early reappointment and promotion reviews”. Council members expressed their appreciation to Dr. Coon’s effort to clarify terms such as “exceptional” and phrases such as “sustained excellence over an extend period of time”. Dr. Cheryl Mihalko suggested the memo contain clarification with regard to early tenure from assistant professors. Scenario: an assistant professor applies for “early” consideration of promotion on his/her fifth year, he or she would be left without transition time if the “early” application is being denied and subsequently applied again on the seventh year (two year waiting period). Or, is it true that once denied there is no second chance application for “early” consideration applicants. Dr. Coon suggested withdraw the “early” application if the review from the department is unfavorable so to eliminate the two-year waiting period. Dr. Rodney Jones and others emphasized the importance of including “credit for prior service” in offering letter to in-coming faculties.

D. Old Business

1. Approval of meeting minutes from Sept. 20, 2016.

Meeting minutes were approved.

E. Committee Reports

1. OSU Faculty Council update (Tom Royer)

No report.

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

No report

1. DASNR RPT Committee Report (Dr. Max Melstrom)

The DASNR RPT committee will continue with the approach adopted last year, which is:

“The DASNR RPT Committee will examine the documentation provided by the faculty member, the standards that have been adopted by the department, the external review letters, annual appraisal/review documentation, and the statements or recommendations provided by the departmental RPT committee and department head for fairness in procedure and review at the department level and for consistency within DASNR.”

The committee sent letters to the departments which documented the issues they uncovered in the last RPT cycle:

1. Some departments were not compliant with OSU Policy and Procedure 2-0902

2. Several issues related to external recommendation letters were identified.

3. Several packets had content dated out of the appropriate chronological order, which brings into question if all required documents were available when decisions were made.

The committee expects 18 RPT actions in DASNR, including 13 for promotion and the remaining five for reappointment.

E. New Business

None

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

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