Minutes
Ag Faculty Council
March 12, 2009

The meeting was called to order by President, Doug Hamilton. Those present included Doug Hamilton, Shane Robinson, Tom Royer, Joe Schatzer, Steven Marek, Fred Guthery, Eric Stafne, Kevin Allen, Deb VanOverbeke and Bob Whitson.

Dr. Whitson was asked to spend time reviewing the questions presented by faculty in the College. Questions and comments are below.

1. Would it be possible to allocated parking spots for visitors only around Ag. Hall. It is difficult trying to host meeting with agency personnel on campus and trying to direct them to the various parking lots and locations.

   From Diana Ward: Dr. Whitson asked me to follow up on questions asked during the Ag Faculty Council meeting yesterday regarding the use of the parking garage. I called and visited with a Jan Hernandez-Cook of parking services this morning. I inquired if we could use the parking garage for temporary parking of guests. Her response was that departments may use the parking garage at $1ea only if the request is during the weekend or during the summer months when the students are not around. Otherwise, the only ones able to park in the garage are those who purchased the special parking permit. She did say they are in the process of installing parking meters in the garage in the near future (next month or so) where guests may park and pay the meter. I hope this answers some of your questions. Please contact me should you have additional questions regarding this.

2. Are departments within DASNR evaluated for performance and productivity against each other? If departments are evaluated against each other on what bases are comparisons made? If so, can an objective comparison actually be made? If so, is it reasonable to believe that equal external funding opportunities truly exist for faculty with various subject matter areas of responsibility, some of which while essential, may not be the "hot button topic" or "top ranking national initiative?" If comparisons are being made amongst departments what effect on morale of faculty might this have if the faculty perceives it is an unjust comparison? Are comparisons amongst departments if they are being made likely to foster interdepartmental cooperation or hinder it?

   Departments are looked at within their own culture and performance criteria; the annual review of a department is conducted and in the evaluation we will talk about things that can be effective in areas for which the department has some tie (ex. Publishing, extension publications, teaching, etc.). These evaluations serve as a baseline for the department. Departments or units are looked at in comparison to how they are viewed by the outside world – the constituency groups they serve – and faculty evaluations are based on their unit expectations.

   Funding opportunities are not created equal among departments and some departments have to be more creative to find funding than others. When extra allocations are available, a department that never meets expectations may not get as much of the allocation as a department who always exceeds expectations. However, this year, we will be budget tight and more emphasis will be placed on grants. But, relatively we are fortunate compared to some institutions who are seeing 25% cuts.

3. DASNR current budget is approximately 95% salary expense. In past recessions this cost structure made it difficult to adjust to tight budget periods. Our current structure comes after several reasonably good budget years and is a result of the Division activity increasing faculty numbers. What percentage of DASNR's budget should personnel expense account for? Are we at the optimal level? If not, why not?

   In extension, this number is closer to 90%; in the experiment stations, closer to 85% of the budget is salary expense. In DASNR, we were fortunate to receive an increase to our base via the 2nd century initiative, the cluster hire and several other programs resulting in the hire of approximately 30 faculty positions over the past few years. People are where it is, and with people to get the job done, 80-85% of your budget will be in salary expenses. Is this the optimum level? Preference would be to lower this percentage, especially if we were told to cut 25% of our budget, but we have to feel good about the number of faculty we have in DASNR.

   If a vacancy occurs due to a retirement or an individual accepting another position, the vacancy will be evaluated to determine how to best fill the position to meet our most critical needs. At this time we do not have a hold on hiring, but the university or the governor could freeze positions in the future. But, that will not be our approach until we are told to do so.

4. In every budget cycle OSU in general and DASNR in particular argue that because of mandatory expense increases a flat budget is insufficient to maintain current programs. Many of these "mandatory" expenses come from decisions in previous years that implemented new programs with recurring costs. A prime example is the development of the bioenergy center in Ardmore Oklahoma. In light of our uncertain budget outlook which could result in several years of flat or decreasing budget is it fiscally responsible to continue with the Ardmore project which creates significant additional recurring expenses including annual loan payments?

   There is some truth in the statement that a flat budget makes it hard to maintain current programs because of increasing indirect costs, etc. The legislature has given/appropriated $10 million to develop the Ardmore facility, which will take 2 years to develop. The growth of Ardmore will depend on budgets and/or what can move forward without impacting our critical mission. This facility will open the door with 65-70 scientists located at Noble; faculty included will be fully tenured faculty within departments in Stillwater. The location provides great opportunities to train graduate students, have adjunct faculty from the Noble Research Center, and provide lectures via distance/telecommunications. Other institutions have asked to partner on the facility, but that would be a difficult thing to do. But, we will collaborate with them on research.

5. Is it anticipated that merit increases will be offered this year given the current budget?

   If it is feasible, yes, we want to do it. But, I would not anticipate it. The salary increases with promotions, etc. will be taken care of because the merit needs to be rewarded.

6. What is the increase in administrative costs incurred by the Division in the last three years?

   Administration will need to and will take part of the cut in budgets as we move forward. But, the reason we have three Associate Deans is to keep the ball moving. Adding the VP designation was

new to Dr. Whitson, who was challenged with balancing state (legislature) and campus (teaching, extension, research) – getting the extra $5.4 million took a lot of effort and we only received it is a result of selling DASNR to the state.

7. What is your vision for distance education given the Provost's recent movement toward consolidating all DL programs (campus-wide) into a central unit? What will this do to DL in CASNR?

   The DASNR guidelines for Distance Education evolved from the DASNR Unit Head meeting. If we can't raise tuition dollars, this is an option to increase enrollment. There is talk of, but resistance to, forming a campus-wide distance education center. The idea for an E-campus was heard at national meetings recently. At TAMU, some lectures have been separated from labs for distance learning advantages, allowing labs to concentrate in one time frame, bringing students to campus once. So, yes, there is some increase in importance given to Distance Education.

Old Business
No new business

New Business
No new business

Seeing no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Deb VanOverbeke
Secretary