

## **Minutes from the Special UUCC Meeting with Provost Hackett on May 1, 2019**

Provost Hackett called a special meeting of the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee on May 1, 2019, to address concerns that had been raised by members in recent months, and to discuss concerns she heard from a prior meeting with the Faculty Senate. Representatives from the College of Humanities and Sciences also brought paper copies of possible discussion points and distributed these at the meeting to members who requested a copy. Below is a summary of the topics and themes of discussion during the meeting.

### **Academic freedom and retaliation**

- Provost Hackett reaffirmed the president's and her commitment to academic freedom and that members should not feel their vote in favor of or in opposition to a proposal would place their job in jeopardy. Debate and disagreement are part of the university culture, and she wanted to make clear that retaliation toward faculty, staff or students was not acceptable. Provost Hackett stated that any UUCC member who is concerned about retaliation based on their vote at any point should raise the issue directly with her.

### **Chair of UUCC**

- Dr. Hackett summarized the history of who had chaired the UUCC since her arrival in 2015. She indicated that assumption of the chair position by an administrator in the provost's office had followed the practice in place when she arrived in 2015. The current UUCC guidelines state that the committee is to be chaired by a member, but it was her understanding that the membership had agreed in 2016 to allow an administrator to continue to serve as chair, as had been the practice for several year prior. She indicated it was up to the UUCC membership to decide whether to revert to the guidelines and have the chair be appointed from the UUCC membership. There seemed to be consensus that the practice of appointing a current UUCC member to serve as chair should resume, though no formal vote was taken.

### **Voting**

- Dr. Hackett addressed the issue of what information is collected during votes on motions. She confirmed that no names are recorded during votes, by voice, by hand or online, and that only tallies of votes are recorded and retained.

### **Availability of information about UUCC**

- Provost Hackett discussed the concern that information regarding UUCC was not widely accessible. It was clarified that all members and associate deans in the schools/colleges have access to the Blackboard site, where meeting schedules, minutes and workshop information are available. Prior UUCC guidelines are also on the site.

### **Membership**

- The issue of eligibility for membership on UUCC was also discussed. Currently the guidelines state that members should be "Full-time faculty, tenure-track or term, or

program representatives.” Dr. Hackett suggested that UUCC members discuss this and decide if exceptions to these criteria should be made for any current members, if needed, and whether the guidelines should be revised.

### **Clarification of processes and procedures**

- During the meeting there were requests from members for clarification of the following processes and procedures:
  - o Order of submission and approval of new programs and associated courses: Clarification is needed as to whether new programs and related courses are submitted together, or if courses need to be submitted and approved before the program.
  - o Clearer communication about deadlines: Concerns were expressed about what approvals need to be complete by specific deadlines before a course/program proposal is added to the UUCC agenda, as units have no control over how long approvals take in the steps that follow school/college approval.
  - o Clarification of what information is required in CIM, particularly in the assessment field: Concerns were raised around perceived inconsistency of when information needs to be in the CIM system in order for a proposal to reach the UUCC. Questions around information required for the assessment field was specifically discussed. Dr. Hackett indicated this needs to be addressed as it relates to VCU’s fifth-year accreditation report.

### **Concerns related to B.S.Ed. proposals review in February 2019**

- Concern was expressed that members of UUCC felt pressured regarding their review and vote on the B.S.Ed. proposals in the February meeting. Dr. Hackett indicated that there was considerable context missing from the discussion, which involved the deans of both the School of Education and College of Humanities and Sciences. She discussed several elements, including state-level actions in addition to the incomplete information about discussions between schools/colleges around resources, that made these proposals special and out of the ordinary. She acknowledged that there was a lot of information the committee did not have and the timeframe and volume of related information made the reviews challenging for this group. Members who reviewed the proposals also indicated that their review was not fully informed given the missing context. The provost affirmed the president’s and her commitment to shared governance and that it is up to the faculty to approve proposals or not. Her concern in this case was to ensure that UUCC members had accurate information to inform their review, and that the review was also informed by the larger statewide teacher shortage, which the proposals sought to address.
- There was considerable discussion around the lack of a letter from the dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences prior to review and vote by the UUCC. The provost acknowledged there had been many discussions between relevant deans and the provost about budget and resources and the lack of letter gave the impression that discussion and agreement on resources had not occurred. She also acknowledged that the new budget model will necessitate earlier conversations between deans around

resources and that the provost's office has and will work with schools and colleges to provide resources early in the process for launching new programs.

- Concerns were also raised that some comments between members during discussion of the B.S.Ed. proposals were not appropriate. The provost requested members contact her directly to provide information about any inappropriate comments and she would follow-up.

#### **Resolution of concerns prior to proposals reaching the UUCC**

- Members expressed frustration about having to address unresolved issues between units/schools/colleges at the UUCC step in the review process, such as whether or not syllabi are included in the proposal with sufficient course information and relevant acknowledgement or support from other academic units potentially impacted by the proposal. Review of the B.S.Ed. proposals was discussed as an example of this issue. There was also discussion that a former UUCC chair working in the provost's office had intervened in the past to resolve these kinds of issues prior to allowing proposals to be added to the UUCC agenda.

#### **Need for better and clearer communication**

- Throughout the discussion members highlighted the need for better communication between the provost's office and UUCC members. Members requested that more attention be given to communicating information about deadlines, expectations for review, and providing necessary context for proposals that might generate questions and concerns. Members also suggested that effort should be made to more broadly share information that would be helpful for all UUCC members, and not rely solely on representatives from individual schools and colleges to have a complete background and understanding of the discussions related to items from their units under review by the UUCC.

In closing, the provost indicated that any further questions or concerns from members can be sent to her or Dr. Jamie Cooper.