

Convocation 2008

Report from last year

Last year the Academic Senate was pretty active and passed numerous policies and resolutions. Two of them were rather important with substantive changes and far reaching consequences for our students and faculty. I am certain these changes were for the better. Or, at least I hope they will be.

GE Policy

First, after much discussion and debate spanning several meetings, the Academic Senate unanimously passed the General Education policy. The GE policy was brought in alignment with the Chancellor's Executive Order, the units reduced, and much of the complexity in navigating GE requirements was streamlined to reduce barriers and improve student success. It should also markedly improve retention and graduation rates which are constantly increasing. I believe the President will talk about graduation rates in his address. The new GE policy was considered such a welcome change and beneficial to the students that the Academic Senate passed a resolution to apply it retroactively to the fall 2007 cohort of students.

Textbook Accessibility Policy

Second, and once again after some debate, the Academic Senate unanimously passed the policy on “Timely Accessibility to Instructional Materials.” This policy, when fully implemented will assist all students, and especially disabled students to obtain their textbooks and instructional materials by the beginning of the semester rather than a few weeks into the semester as has been the case in the past. As a consequence of this policy, I expect the textbook adoption rate to increase significantly and the cost of textbooks to decrease due to timely and bulk ordering.

Academic Senate Blog

In response to feedback from the campus community that they were unaware of the “goings on” in the Senate (Who does?) and felt powerless regarding the issues under consideration and discussion in the Academic Senate, the Academic Senate blog was developed. The agenda, minutes, and all items under consideration are regularly posted to the blog prior to the meetings, and the blog allows the campus community to provide input, feedback and amendments to their duly elected senators in time to bring them to the attention of the Academic Senate. I would encourage all of you to utilize the blog this year, thereby facilitating communication with your senators and increasing grassroots involvement with **your** Academic Senate.

This year, the Academic Senate will be debating the RTP Policy, the GVAR policy, the Chairs Policy, and the Advising Policy among some other policies that are being worked upon by Senate Councils. We expect to have vibrant and lively debates on each of these topics, and your input will be most welcome.

Retreat and outcomes

Last year, the Academic Senate Retreat focused on “Educating the Next Generations and the role of Advising and Academic Technology in Student Success.” The input, comments, suggestions and recommendations from the Retreat were posted on the Academic Senate website and shared with key decision makers across the divisions to improve teaching, learning and support functions for the students. To a large extent, the Advising Policy which the Senate will be debating this year is a consequence of the Retreat. Students constantly complain about the complexity and inconsistency of advising on campus. In addition, recognizing the key role of faculty in advising students for success, the Academic Senate has instituted a “Distinguished Faculty Advisor Award,” which will become effective this year along with ongoing awards for teaching, research, and service.

Retreat topic

Last Tuesday, the Executive Committee discussed at some length the topic for this year's Academic Senate Retreat which will take place on Friday October 17th. While we have not reached a conclusion, from the discussion it would seem that the focus will be some combination of faculty role/faculty productivity, student success/institutional success in a comprehensive /teaching intensive – research driven university. Anyone know what that means!! **Confused!** You are not alone. Thus, the need for a conversation and clarity in direction. But, on a serious note, in a university, faculty work and productivity is integral to the success of both the students and the institution. While we do have a new mission and vision, many faculty members feel it is necessary to have a discussion on plans about how to achieve the mission, so that work may be prioritized to improve productivity. Also, the revised RTP policy will be debated in the Senate in the fall. A good time to focus on faculty work since RTP and faculty work are seemingly related.

WASC Accreditation

The reaccreditation process with WASC is moving along. The first of two reports is due to WASC in December 2008. We are applying the finishing touches to that report which will be shared with the campus community for

their comments and input. The report is called the Capacity and Preparatory Review, or **CPR** report. Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation!! That was my reaction, too. Then I realized it makes perfect sense. You have to ensure that an organization, very much like the individual has to be alive before it can kick, or be effective. Thus, the need for resuscitation. It should come as no surprise to you that CSULB has been resuscitated and is indeed, alive. Whether or not we are kicking, (no puns intended) will be the subject of the second report on Educational Effectiveness or EER. Who makes up these acronyms? I am certain the WASC people wanted to be doctors, but ended up in higher education.

Differences

There are key differences in the reaccreditation process at CSULB this time around as compared to the last time. This time around, it is an integrative process involving many more individuals from the various divisions including faculty, staff, students, and administrators. This time around, instead of accreditation charting its own path and being left on the wayside once the reports are written, it has become part and parcel of our ongoing initiatives and efforts for outstanding achievement through continuous improvement. This time around, CSULB has taken a pioneering step in creating a WASC Outreach Committee, whose dual purpose is to make the

campus community aware of the accreditation process and most importantly, to extend opportunities to the campus community to engage and participate in the myriad and varied projects that are necessary for accreditation.

Call for participation

To engage and extend opportunities to the campus community, with the whole hearted support of both the President and the Provost, I sent out a call for participation to the campus community in May 2008 seeking individuals with the interest and expertise to assist with the various research projects. I am pleased to inform you, that despite the lateness of the call and the end of the semester looming, significant numbers of faculty, staff, administrators, and even students responded enthusiastically to engage with the process, and we will definitely try and utilize their expertise in some way, shape or form.

Opportunity should not terminate at the threshold of admission or employment, but for purposes of equity and to maintain high morale and performance, it is crucial that ongoing opportunities be created and made available to “all” campus community members. With the broad call for participation, I am glad that we have taken a small step in that direction.

Think what an impression this campus engagement and participation will make to the WASC visiting team when it comes to CSULB in March of

2009. Please try to remember the date – March 2009. I say “March,” you say “2009.” March!

Potential

This brings me to the crux of what is a university – a universe of opportunities. And its biggest asset – not machines, certainly not money, but People – Human Resources, You and I. Diverse Human Resources, not in the traditional sense in which we understand diversity, but diversity in thought, diversity in knowledge, diversity in skills and techniques, and diversity in expertise. The university is a vast storehouse, and has tremendous amount of specialized talent and potential. In this ever shrinking and flat world, if we are to remain competitive in the global arena, whether it be in technology or business, medicine or banking, education or science, even at the Olympics, we will have to learn to develop and utilize the specialized talent and potential inherent in each individual of the university, instead of continuing to focus on a “cookie cutter one size fits all approach.” Do we expect star swimmer Michael Phelps to also excel at Track and Field? Can we really expect the fastest man on earth, the Lightning Bolt, to also be an outstanding gymnast? Do you think all round gold medal winner Nastia Liukin can also shine as a weightlifter? Was our alum Misty May Treanor a valedictorian with a GPA of 4.0? No, yet we

celebrate them, as we should. Now is the time to celebrate the varied contributions made by each and every member of the campus community, and tap each individual's full potential so the institution can move forward at a magical pace.

Conclusion and Simplicity

Finally, I was struck by a fascinating article I read in the LA Times by Jeffrey Kluger titled "What's the big deal? It's the little things." In it, Jeffrey Kluger writes about the concept of "Simplicity" – the idea that simple things can be surprisingly complex, and complex things can be deceptively simple; the idea that small causes can yield huge effects. He provides several examples: how the beginning of World War 1 which resulted in 8.5 million deaths and attributed to Bosnian Gavrilo Princip assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand turned on the Bosnian's craving for a sandwich – Can you believe that? A sandwich! I bet it was a Turkey Swiss from Subway. Another example: how major league baseball commissioner Bud Selig's hesitation in giving up his position was responsible for George W. Bush becoming President. Please don't go looking for Bud Selig now.

According to Kluger, "choke points" are the keyholes in complex systems that can sometimes shut those systems down entirely. The London cholera

epidemic of 1854 was stopped cold by physician John Snow by tracing the contamination to a single water pump and shutting it down, thereby providing a simple fix to a complex epidemic. Now, I could name some choke points in our immense and complex organization, but I urge each of you to utilize your potential in uncovering choke points among the systems that you interact with, bring them to the fore, and convince others of the benefits of taking appropriate action.

I conclude by adapting Kluger's conclusion: It is Presidents and Provosts who determine university events and direction – but now and again, it can be us “sandwiches” too. Yes, we can.