

Transformational Change Working Group

Monday, March 2, 2009

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Williams Family Room, Davis Center

PRESENT: Bob Taylor, David Barrington, Lynne Bond, Jim Burgmeier, Richard Galbraith, Domenico Grasso, Michael Gurdon, Susan Harrington, Sharon Henry, Clinton Jasperson, Stephanie Kaza, Chris Lucier, Kathy Manning, Eleanor Miller, Beth Mintz, Rodney Parsons, Julia Russell, Mara Saule, Sherwood Smith, Sondra Solomon, Annie Stevens and Steele Taylor

ABSENT: Sha Bradley, Patty Corcoran, David Neiweem, and Thomas Vogelmann

STAFF PRESENT: Catherine Symans

STAFF ABSENT: Gary Derr

Minutes from the February 23rd meeting were distributed and approved.

Chair Bob Taylor opened the meeting with the following comments:

- a. We've been given a specific task:
 - i. To discuss the possible reorganization of the undergraduate faculty for the purposes of:
 1. Promoting increased retention and graduation rates
 2. Promoting efficiencies (curricular, administrative, cost)
 3. Cultivating and displaying our academic excellence
 - ii. To report back to the President on these matters at, as he says, the level of "feasible concepts" rather than as "developed plans"
 - iii. To include in our report a consideration of the President's proposed reorganization scheme (the development of a single college) (as well as up to two additional schemes, plus how our current organization may or may not be able to address the concerns he has identified)
- b. The President has stated clearly that he does not believe that the three identified goals can be achieved within the current organizational structure of the university. The implication is that there are too many administrative, curricular, and academic dis-utilities in our current environment to allow for us to create the academic excellence and the academic environment required for the next level of student success.
- c. We have spent almost a month in conversation, looking at a number of key reports about UVM, and glancing at organizational models from other universities as well. It seems to me that there are a number of main points we can draw from these few weeks of discussion and study:
 - i. Many of us agree with the President about a number of the problems he identifies in his memo:
 1. We've discussed the "silo" problem, for both faculty and students

2. There is more that we can do to cultivate an excellent academic environment for both students and faculty, including developing a coherent first year experience, advising system, and general education curriculum for all students
- ii. We are probably not of one mind about whether or not the President is correct to think that this is a deeply or fundamentally organizational problem.
- iii. We have recognized that there are interests and “academic hierarchies” involved which would make any reorganization very difficult and, in some cases, traumatic for at least some individuals and groups in the community
- iv. The materials gathered to support the work of the committee may inform our judgment but not answer the basic questions for us.
 1. For example, we know that other outstanding universities have different organizational structures, but at best that suggests that that structure is not an absolute hindrance to such excellence – not that it is itself responsible for it (or that if we copied elements of it that it would achieve all that we hoped for it)
- d. For the sake of promoting the conversation we agreed to have when we joined this group, I offer the following comments to shape and stimulate our discussion of the President’s plan:
 - i. Even though it may be true that no organizational scheme can assure the outcomes we have been asked to promote, it does seem plausible to believe that some schemes would do more to encourage (at least some of) these than others. For example, bringing the entire faculty together into a single college may not break down all the silos, but it is not unreasonable to think that this might make it more realistic to imagine these silos being breached more easily over time than if the faculties continue to be organized into separate colleges.
 - ii. There are a great many things that can be done to improve the student experience outside of any academic reorganization, and could possibly achieve our goals without such a dramatic change in our conditions
 1. Residential learning experiences/colleges for all students
 2. Better and more consistent advising systems
 3. Perhaps even a commitment to more consistent and rigorous grading standards (along the line of first year law programs in many schools).
 - iii. Any scheme designed to attack one of the concerns before us may have perverse effects on another concern. For example, programs designed to increase retention may actually threaten academic excellence and integrity by not maintaining appropriate academic standards (and visa versa)
- e. When I think of our three primary tasks, I note the following:
 - i. The easiest analysis, it seems to me, concerns administrative and cost rationality. As mentioned in the last meeting, it seems likely that there are more cost efficient ways to organize the faculty and curriculum. Our

current structure is the result of historical accidents that were not the result of strategic or rational planning

- ii. Be this as it may, it does not answer the broader question of whether or not it would be academically advantageous to reorganize the university.
- iii. Lastly, I want to remind us that our task is to be thinking at a fairly broad level of generality.

A lengthy discussion followed these opening comments. There was general agreement on the following items:

- We should promote a common undergraduate core curriculum (refer to the COBE report)
- This should be developed through our current governance structure
- We should develop a more cohesive first-year experience
- We should move to break down curricular barriers between units
- We need to develop a closer relationship between resource allocation and student demand for courses
- We mustn't forget to consider the impact of any reforms on graduate education

Next steps: Chair Taylor proposed sifting through his notes and the minutes with the intent of imposing a little more order on the thoughts and suggestions that were made at this meeting and producing some notes towards a draft of a document to use as a basis for the group's next conversation. He will circulate his notes by the end of the week.

Next meeting: Monday, March 9th, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. in the Sugar Maple Ballroom, Davis Center