

Provost's Advisory Council
Summary of November 18, 2010 meeting

Judy Gordon (chairing for Rosanna DeMarco)	Thanh Tran Katie O'Dair	Renee Jones Colleen Griffith
Bert Garza	Thomas Wall	Jenny Baglivo
Pat DeLeeuw	Gilda Morelli	Callista Roy
Mark Massa, S.J.	Kathy Dunn (for Anthony Annunziato)	Don Hafner
Lillie Albert	Stephen Pfohl	Anita Tien
Joseph O'Keefe, S.J.	Harrison Kent	David Wirth
Marilyn Matelski	Timothy Crawford	
Diana Pullin		

1. The summary for the meeting of October 28, 2010 was approved, with the request that Jeff Bloechl's email communications prior to and following the meeting be included in the summary. The summary, as amended, will be sent to the President's Office. All summaries are posted on the Provost's Office website; members are encouraged to share the summary with colleagues.
2. Continuation of the conversation on assessment: Joe Burns, Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, joined the Council for continued discussion of the NEASC requirement that BC develop methods of assessment of student learning outcomes. It was reported that Dr. Barbara Walvoord, a specialist on assessment, visited the University recently to lead a workshop on assessment and help departments develop assessment plans. Dr. Walvoord noted that plans need to include three elements: (1) the goals of the program; (2) indirect measures (e.g., student self-reports) as well as direct measures (e.g., objective evidence) of learning outcomes; and (3) mechanisms for translating assessment results into program improvements.

A question was raised about whether the University would provide financial resources for the development of assessment plans. The Provost responded that while there may be assistance as assessment plans are being drawn up, the expectation is that departments and academic units will be able to sustain and maintain the plans using their own resources.

It was noted that most professional schools at the University have already been involved in ongoing assessment, as required by accreditation agencies representing professional groups. However, development of assessment plans will generally be new to the College of Arts and Sciences.

Questions were asked about the Core, its goals, and the form that assessment of its outcomes (both across the University and within the professional schools) may take. It was observed that oversight of the impact of the Core has rested largely with Arts and Sciences, and that it would be appropriate to explore how to involve faculty in professional schools with undergraduates more closely in assessment of the Core. Questions were raised about whether professional schools are expected to report assessment activities to the University. The response was that NEASC will expect to

see how assessment of learning outcomes in all academic programs, including the professional schools, is proceeding.

It was noted that Boston College is expected to submit a report to NEASC in early 2013 about the University's assessment efforts, hence, reports of assessment progress must go to the President no later than Fall 2012. Members of the Council were asked to share this information with colleagues across the University.

3. Jackie Lerner, Professor of the Lynch School and acting chair of the University Council on Teaching, joined the Council for a conversation about interdisciplinary teaching at Boston College. The report of the UCT on interdisciplinary teaching noted a number of benefits to interdisciplinary activities, including:
 - a. Interdisciplinary learning is valuable for students in that it provides them with the experience of integrating information from a variety of disciplines, a skill important in the real world;
 - b. Students and faculty find interdisciplinary learning and teaching challenging and rewarding;
 - c. A variety of opportunities exist across the University for interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

It was also noted that challenges in assigning student credit hours, faculty workloads and support, and developing opportunities for collaboration can serve as impediments to increasing interdisciplinary opportunities.

The UCT has presented a number of proposals that may mitigate these challenges:

- a. Crediting up to three faculty teaching in an interdisciplinary course with 100% of all the student credit hours, where all collaborating faculty attend each class session;
- b. Examining Core and undergraduate major requirements, in light of the desire to encourage more interdisciplinary teaching;
- c. Offering incentives and support to faculty and departments to increase interdisciplinary interactions, perhaps in the form of funding to cover needed courses; partial release time from other courses or additional support during the summer;

Comments from members of the Council noted that it may be helpful for the UCT to develop definitions for interdisciplinary teaching and, that interdisciplinary teaching comes from interdisciplinary research.

The Provost invited suggestions and feedback from the Council about a number of questions relating to interdisciplinary teaching:

- a. How much emphasis should the Provost's Office place on interdisciplinary teaching? For example, should priority be given to search requests that may result in enhanced interdisciplinary activity?
- b. Should concrete targets be assigned for the amount and degree of interdisciplinary interaction?
- c. How should Boston College develop norms for interdisciplinary teaching?

Next steps:

1. Members were asked to send comments and feedback about these questions in particular and interdisciplinary teaching in general to the Provost.

4. Provost's Report:

It was reported that the use of University funds for office and departmental holiday parties has been approved for this year. Such parties must take place in University facilities, with BC Dining Services the exclusive caterer for such events, using holiday menus that have been developed by Dining Services. For events where alcohol is included, only wine and beer may be served, with BC Dining Services employees providing service. Off-campus events will not be funded by the University, nor will food or beverages purchased off-campus.

The next meeting of the Provost Advisory Council will be Thursday, February 24, 2011.