



To: Susan Phillips, Provost

From: Susanna Fessler, Chair, Governance Council *Susanna Fessler*

Re: GOV discussion of the “Consultation Process Going Forward”

Date: January 6, 2011

Below is a compilation of comments from Governance Council members¹ about the “Consultation Process Going Forward” as you requested on December 10, 2010. I have edited the comments slightly to preserve anonymity and also to focus on the specific issue at hand (there were some comments that blended recommendations for the consultative process with recommendations for the next budgetary move), but I have not changed the content in intent.

There is one voice that appears twice here, and I have marked that with an asterisk.

Finally, I wanted to note that two GOV members verbally expressed strong support for the CAS Dean to be included in the next consultative body. These members felt that CAS in particular has suffered in the recent cuts, and that it will likely be equally vulnerable in future cuts.

COMMENT 1:

*GOV should take the lead in populating this committee. To a certain point, their deliberations must be kept confidential.

The Council most concerned with this issue is UPPC. Hence, the Chair of that Council should be on the Budgetary Committee. Of course, professional staff must be involved. As GOV, we should probably solicit nominations and self-nominations for this committee, but the request comes at a time when it is sometimes difficult to contact people.

Obviously, the committee must be broad-based in terms of units within the University. I would suggest that every academic unit be represented by at least one faculty or staff member. Looked at objectively, this would require that more than one person should be from CAS, but since the Chair if UPPC is in CAS, he would be one of them. I would suggest three from CAS total. I believe that makes 10 so far. I say this with the assumption that the current structuring of the University via these units remains in place. The Administration can decide how they want to populate the committee with their own representatives. More than 15 members seems excessive and unwieldy.

The committee should report back to UPPC and possibly to SEC for the sake of efficiency. The confidentiality issue is troubling. At a certain point in the deliberations, the committee will have to decide which units are at risk. Although I can appreciate the rationale behind the previous procedure, it clearly provoked a lot of anger and continues to result in inboxes flooded with messages and meeting after meeting after meeting. I wish I had a concrete suggestion for solving this problem. Perhaps a compromise between leaving affected units totally in the dark until the last moment and spreading potentially false conclusions all over campus can be found.

¹ The voice of the incoming chair of UPPC is also represented here.



In my view, the approach should be from the ground up. As I alluded to in a previous paragraph, the structuring of the University needs to be looked at, and this committee could take some steps toward streamlining its administrative structure. I would hope that its members would not need too much of the education the Provost refers to in her message.

I liked Ken O'Brien's approach, which I assume was made to faculty/staff: make the recommendation and walk away. Since all committees are advisory to the President, it's ultimately his decision.

COMMENT 2:

The big problem with a broad consultative approach is the educational aspects that the Provost properly alludes to. I served on Bag III and we spent a few weeks getting up to speed as to how things work. We got our information from the various Division leaders and I, for one, remained skeptical about the possibilities for spin and emphasis of what we heard. Every program was 'critical' and any cuts would 'devastate' the division and, thus, the mission of the university! To start that all over again with a mostly new group would be a total waste of time.

I would argue that a smaller, already educated group (not to say that some new members could not be added), continue the work. We had some strong, concerned individuals on that group who were properly concerned about the University and I saw essentially NO axe grinding. I, personally, could come up with a list of individuals to add to the group, if need be; community members who are committed to our university, who see it as their life, and who are willing to be involved in the hard decisions that will allow the University to get its act together and come out stronger and more robust (smaller, probably, but better).

I would add another thought: The longer term group should not be led by or populated by any top administration. No VP's Deans or others. They should be able to call on anyone they want for informational purposes, but not have those people sitting in on a regular basis or as part of the group.

While it might be true that this group might make some untenable recommendations, this would be the way to get everything on the table without dealing with as much "Oh, you can't do that!" issues.

COMMENT 3:

I think the **process** should include as many voices as possible, and with technologies such as Google forms, survey monkey, etc., it's relatively easy to provide everyone campus-wide with the opportunity to have their voices included in the discussions. This would enable everyone the opportunity to be engaged and feel their voices matter.

The development of the surveys should take place after the "committee" holds its information sessions. I'll defer to others to define the composition of that committee. These instruments will require skill and time to develop as they should be dynamic -- that is changing as we move forward.



The questions should be structured so that they are meaningful and will gather useful data. To be blunt, the surveys should not just be an attempt to placate, but rather an earnest attempt to collect information to make informed decisions. The results of such surveys/opinion polls should be made public (ensuring individual anonymity of course). This could be/should be a charge of the committee?

The ultimate decision of course rests upon the President - but here, even in a future which is uncertain, we have an opportunity to create a systematic method by which the university community can provide input to help create a leaner and more effective institution. Such a model of data collection, analysis, feedback and institutional modification should become an integral part of how the "new" university operates.

COMMENT 4:

While I think there is considerable value in the suggestions that have been made for serious long term looks at several aspects of the university's operations, including the proposal to constitute a committee to look at alternative revenue sources, I'm mainly concerned with the process connected with the next couple of budgets. In particular, the university will be called upon in the next few months to make binding decisions about the 2011-2012 budget. Departments have already been asked to plan for reductions based on assumptions about the level of state aid and tuition support that will be available; it now seems increasingly likely that these assumptions may prove to have been too optimistic. State deficit forecasts from several bodies have been edging up, and the in-coming Governor is on record as intending to balance the state's budget via cuts in spending rather than raising taxes. While the main debate seems likely to center around Medicaid and K-12 education rather than higher education, it seems likely that SUNY and UAlbany will be expected to absorb yet another sizeable hit in addition to those which have already been incorporated into the university's budget calculations.

Decisions about how SUNY and UAlbany will absorb this hit will need to be made relatively quickly. The Governor's budget is submitted in January for a fiscal year which starts on April 1. Legislative action on the budget is frequently late and the level of controversy which seems likely to result from some of the Governors likely recommendations may stretch the budget debate into the summer. Nonetheless, the University will almost certainly be expected to make significant, unpleasant budget decisions within a short time horizon of no more than several months. The University's short run alternatives for responding to yet another budget shortfall are severely constrained, but these constraints have to be taken as givens in this time horizon.

In this sort of ugly budget environment, the potential for conflict within whatever process winds up being selected is extremely high. It will be remembered that the university has had to absorb significant hits in its state funds allocation in the past four budgets. As a result of these hits, we are already down almost 70 faculty and something like 120 staff from five years ago. The President has articulated repeatedly the strategic premise, which has been reinforced by multiple budget advisory committees, that further budget cuts should not be absorbed by across the board reductions for all departments, but rather by targeted strategic cuts which preserve and build on the university's areas of strength. Given this premise and the significant reductions that have already taken place, it seems highly likely that further university budgets will require unpleasant personnel actions.



Given this unpleasant context and the need to make decisions quickly, it seems sensible to locate responsibility for whatever recommendations are to be made to the President in a group which is already well briefed on the budget and can act relatively quickly. Given the high potential for conflict, it also seems prudent to insist on some degree of confidentiality for the groups deliberations. Some parts of the university community are likely to see this process as an opportunity to continue fighting over old decisions, and the temptation to grandstand and protect one's own unit will be very difficult to resist, particularly if decisions are made in public.

One group which seems to fit these difficult specifications is the BAG3 group, which reported to the President last spring and has had one subsequent meeting this fall. This group meets most of Reed Hoyt's specifications for what an advisory group should look like—it is broadly representative of the span of opinion on campus, has been fully briefed on the university's budget situation and is already up to speed, and has had some experience working together. It also includes a significant number of UPPC members, which will make communication with this body easy. While some members may not wish to participate in decisions that may affect the jobs of university faculty and staff, this group might form the basis for an advisory body, with some limited number of additional members to insure the group remains broadly representative of the university community. I would suggest that GOV give some thought to incorporating this group into its recommendations to address the university's short term budget problem, as well as the longer term issues raised by several members.

COMMENT 5:

I strongly support the proposal above that BAG3 continue. I would then suggest that our task as GOV is to produce a roster of people (5-8?) willing to serve to replace those who wish to step down from BAG3.

COMMENT 6:

I too believe that the BAG3 proposal above makes a lot of sense. And getting a list of possible replacements for those unwilling to continue should be relatively easy to do.

COMMENT 7:

*BAG 3 has a huge number of people on it. I agree that administrators should not be on the actual group. Otherwise, we perpetuate the situation where ex officio committee members serve on councils and committees that eventually make recommendations to them. It has never made sense.

Going down the list, then, I'd scratch all Deans and the like, plus Michael Range unless he really wants to serve on this during his sabbatical. Some of you may not know Pierre Alric. He is a University Council member and attends more University functions than most of our professors. Adrienne Bonilla now works at CNSE, and I'm not sure of her new title--but I don't see any reason to disqualify her unless she has a real administrative position. I would not disqualify Chairs because we are much more faculty members than we are administrators.



Since I have just eliminated Linda Krzykowski, we need someone from the School of Business. Similarly, we need a librarian, and I'd suggest Trudi Jacobsen or Carol Anderson or Suzanne Turner. Since professors are simply listed as such, let's make sure that all constituencies are covered. I guess we would need someone from Athletics as well. And so on. But I think we have some criteria for making choices and recommendations.