

TO: Susan D. Phillips, Interim Provost

FROM: Senate Executive Committee

DATE: 22 January 2008

Dear Susan,

Congratulations on your appointment to Interim Provost at UAlbany. The Senate Executive Committee is eager to work with you to improve the educational experience for our students. The next SEC meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 28, 2008, at 3:30 pm, in UNH 306, and we hope very much that you will be able to attend.

In order to better prepare for this meeting, we would like to identify a few items that we believe require prompt attention.

1. Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

Background: At the fall 2007 plenary meeting of the SUNY-wide University Faculty Senate (UFS) held in Cortland, NY, it was learned that UAlbany, along with a few other SUNY schools, has joined VSA. Except for one campus, none of the local governance bodies had been consulted on this matter. SUNY Senators were dismayed about this apparent breakdown in administration-governance communications. The UFS passed a resolution to the effect that no SUNY school should participate in VSA without full consultation with local faculty governance. Despite the “voluntary” designation of the VSA, UAlbany governance, in particular, has not been consulted at all on this matter by the Provost/Officer in Charge. Our UFS Senator reported about VSA and the UFS resolution at the Dec. 17, 2007 Senate meeting, noting we were the only university center that agreed to participate. Concerns were expressed about the vagueness and uncertainties about the measuring of “learning outcomes” required by VSA, this being a very complex and potentially controversial item. Bruce Szelest, who had been left in charge of VSA by the departing Provost/Officer in Charge, stated at the same Senate meeting that UAlbany would simply not participate in the measuring and reporting of learning outcomes required by VSA. On the other hand, UAlbany’s participation in VSA is clearly documented through a link that appears prominently on the UAlbany homepage (under College Portrait). The last page of that link refers to learning outcomes, and it also provides access to examples of learning outcomes at UAlbany. By all appearances, UAlbany is thus participating fully in VSA.

Concerns: Since measuring and reporting learning outcomes are key components of VSA, there may be negative repercussions when – following Bruce’s statement – UAlbany will not post required test results and will thus be found in violation of critical aspects of the VSA protocol. On the other hand, if no action is taken, it appears that UAlbany will simply continue on track to engage in measuring and reporting learning outcomes without any consultation with and approval by governance, as is evidenced by the current UAlbany VSA webpages. Furthermore, as it stands, UAlbany is in violation of the UFS resolution. One option would be for UAlbany simply to withdraw from VSA

pending full consultation with governance, consistent with the UFS resolution. The matter will very likely come up at the Jan. 31–Feb. 2, 2008, UFS plenary meeting here at UAlbany, and it is important that our UFS senators can appropriately represent UAlbany’s position.

2. Freshmen Year Experience (FYE):

In fall 2006 Undergraduate Studies offered 30 sections of a version of UNI 150 involving about 600 freshmen as “pilot” for a FYE program. The particular course topic, and more generally, the whole concept of a FYE program, had not been discussed and approved by governance. Based on largely inconclusive results of this pilot, the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies submitted a proposal for a new course UFSP 101 Freshmen Seminar to the Interdisciplinary Studies Committee (IDS) of UAC late in the 2007 spring semester. The 2006-07 IDS was improperly constituted because it had only one teaching faculty member instead of the required three. Upon the recommendation of this - largely administrative - committee, UAC approved the course on May 8, 2007. In fall 2007, 43 sections of UFSP 101 were offered, involving about 800 freshmen. Naturally we are concerned that such a large program - involving about a third of this year’s freshmen class - is being implemented without proper discussion and approval by the Senate. Furthermore, in order to properly assess the merits of the program and the expansion of the fall 2006 pilot, we would need relevant data on syllabi, exams, enrollments, retention, and grades. One possible course of action could be to impose a moratorium on further offerings of UFSP 101 (note that UFSP 101 is not yet listed in the [online] bulletin) until such assessment has been completed, and until the concept of a large-scale Freshmen Year Experience program has been properly approved by the Senate and the (Interim) President.

3. Project Renaissance.

In spring 2007 a team of outside evaluators reviewed Project Renaissance, and their report became available in early summer. We would appreciate an update on specific actions that have been taken since then to address the concerns identified in the report.

4. Middle States Evaluation

To date, the consultation with faculty governance expected by Middle States’ guidelines and described in our Faculty Bylaws (cf. Article I, section 2.5) regarding this matter has not occurred. Our understanding is that the process should begin very soon.

We look forward to discuss these items and other matters with you on January 28, 2008.

2.5 Faculty Participation in Advisory Groups Outside of Governance Bodies.

Administrators may choose to advance their leadership vision for the University by constituting special committees and task forces, selecting individual faculty members because of their experience or expertise. Ideally, such advisory groups shall be constituted in consultation with the Governance Council of the University Senate and lines of communication with relevant governance bodies shall be enunciated. In any case, such groups do not represent the Faculty as a whole and advice from such groups does not replace approval by or formal consultation with the Faculty. Such groups may freely provide advice; however, for such groups to be considered part of the formal

consultative process, a majority of the faculty members must either be appointed by, or their recommended appointment approved by, the Senate Governance Council, as specified in Article 2, Section 5.5, and specific faculty members must be designated to regularly report to the Senate. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate shall be consulted in the composition of all major University level search committees and committees to select honorary degree recipients.