

Provost's Newsletter

Academic Affairs at the University of North Florida

Fall Retrospect

Dear Colleagues,

I hope the semester nearing its conclusion has been a fruitful one for you and for your students. Before everyone departs for the break I want to take this opportunity to wish you a happy holiday and to bring you up to date on a variety of issues that have engaged our attention and energy in Academic Affairs this fall.

The task force that I was asked to convene has been productive. If you follow this link—<http://www.unf.edu/acadaffairs/taskforce1.html>—to its dedicated site, you will find meeting minutes as well as the proposed vision statement for UNF, the task force's attempt to articulate the trajectory of UNF's development into the foreseeable future. Next semester the task force will schedule several forums in order to seek broad feedback on this vision statement, as well as on a revised statement of the university's mission and goals to which the task force recently has turned its attention. These statements are of real importance because they will help establish the university's priorities and determine its allocation of resources for years to come. I encourage you to avail yourselves of opportunities for input as occasions to do so arise. You are certainly welcome in the meanwhile to share your comments with me or with any task force member.

The work of the task force is especially timely because the Board of Governors has indicated its intention to enter into "compacts" with each of the institutions within the State University System. These compacts, as yet still being defined, apparently will encompass, among other expectations, each institution's commitment to a specific amount of baccalaureate degree production and to targets of efficiency (i.e., retention rates and time to degree), as well as to projected program development both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Clearly it will be beneficial for us to enter into this conversation with a clear measure both of our capacities and our ambitions.

Capacity and ambition are always subject to constraints, and that is especially true in our current budgetary environment. All indications are that the State of Florida is facing further austerity in the year or two ahead. UNF already has capped freshmen enrollment and frozen the admission of lower-level transfer students. In the absence of robust hiring, restricting enrollment growth enables us to control student-faculty ratios and class sizes. In light of continuing negative budget forecasts Academic Affairs most likely will need to table temporarily proposals for new programs and concentrate whatever faculty recruitment it is able to support on existing programs. In the event that further budget cuts must be implemented, Academic Affairs will work consultatively to determine where those cuts can be made while doing the least harm to our academic mission.

The effectiveness with which we are carrying out that mission is receiving the full and urgent attention of the university's Institutional Effectiveness Team which, led by Associate Provost Doug Eder, is charged with preparing UNF's report of compliance for our impending SACS review. The due date for this report is this coming September (2008), which by my calendrical calculation means that it is fast upon us. I am grateful to every person—faculty member, chair, dean, director—within the division of Academic Affairs for the contributions he or she is making towards our reaccreditation effort. And indeed, it is precisely this kind of inclusive effort that is required to demonstrate that we are fully and genuinely committed to assessing the effectiveness with which we are carrying out the university's mission.



For those of you who have been following the national conversation on accreditation, you are aware that a number of university associations (which number among their members all the institutions that make up the SUS) are considering entering into a “voluntary system of accountability” (VSA) that would preempt nationally imposed accreditation standards while providing some degree of institutional latitude on how student learning is measured and reported. If the BOG determines that it would be wise for the SUS to participate in the VSA then the voluntary might well become involuntary, but for reasons that are in our own institutional interest.

Another component of the SACS review process is the preparation of the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan, which as I trust you know will center upon “community based learning.” Working parallel to the Institutional Effectiveness Team, a QEP development committee is currently in the process of transforming an initial proposal into a fully elaborated strategy, the goal of which will be to provide opportunities to all interested UNF students for situated learning and civic engagement.

In less than three weeks, it is with some sadness that I must report that we will graduate not only another class of students but a good number of our colleagues as well. More than two dozen of our senior faculty—among them more than a few who have been at UNF since its inception—will be retiring. Inadequate as it might be, we will attempt to recognize their contributions at a ceremony prior to graduation, and of course we will do our best to continue to build the university for which they have laid the foundation.

Mark E. Workman Provost and VPAA