



Letter to the Campus,

From time to time, I will use letters to describe pertinent information and approaching issues. It is fortuitous that I was able to take part in several infrequent events which happened to coincide with my first month on the job. These events included our ten-year review from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, two special meetings called by Governor Walker to address issues of research, economic development and workforce preparedness, and a day-long retreat for the state's Chief Academic Officers that focused upon strategic issues. Against this backdrop, I want to outline several matters which will require our attention in the coming months and years.

The Northwest Commission's Report

The Northwest Evaluation Team visited our campus in October 2004. We received a draft copy of the team's report on November 11th, and President Millner will appear before the Northwest Commission on January 11, 2005 to provide our initial response to the report. In the context of Review Team reports, ours was an overwhelmingly positive report. I believe this is a reflection of the deep commitment of our faculty and staff to the education of our students.

The report included formal commendations in four areas. The campus community was praised for a remarkably strong and coherent sense of mission; for providing enhanced educational opportunities through successful fund raising efforts; for facilities planning, maintenance, and construction; and for greatly improved access to library resources and services. In light of the 1994 report which cited numerous concerns about our library, the team's commendation of the Stewart Library is especially rewarding.

The report contained two formal recommendations. The first recommendation concerned our general education program. The Northwest Commission recommended that we "regularly and systematically assess the general education curriculum, and document that assessment activities lead to improvement." In 2003, prior to the accreditation visit, Faculty Senate leadership identified the need to review our general education program. The Northwest Commission's recommendation makes the assessment of general education an even more essential and pressing issue. In responding to the recommendation we will need to act quickly but thoughtfully. Given the nature of our general education program, our discussions must involve a large cross section of the academic community. Faculty leadership, deans, department chairs, and administrative staff will be involved in a formal effort to assess both the core and breadth components of our general education program.

The assessment of general education will require us to ask far reaching questions which touch many aspects of our students' undergraduate experience. It will be interesting to explore how our recent efforts to engage students in collaborative work with faculty, such as undergraduate research, service learning, and other experiences, enhance our students' education. It will also be necessary to explore connections between outcomes for our general education program and those we have identified for our academic majors. Our focus upon general education will occupy our attention during the upcoming semester, and I encourage you to take part in the conversations.

, "improvement be made in the mentoring of part-time faculty, as well as in expanding their professional development opportunities." Our response to this recommendation, will build upon the work of several WSU programs and departments which have already begun to address the needs of their adjunct faculty. It seems reasonable to draw upon the best practices of these programs. It also makes sense to devote particular attention to those areas where the use of adjunct instruction is especially concentrated. Interestingly, 17 departments account for 72 percent of adjunct instructors on the WSU campus.

I am gratified that the evaluation team, "was impressed...with the enthusiastic and obvious commitment of the Weber State faculty to the university's mission, their students, their academic disciplines, and the

institution itself." At the same time, various passages within the report implied that we review the recognition, support, and rewards the university provides faculty as they pursue their duties as teachers and scholars. Under the direction of this year's Faculty Senate leadership, plans are already underway for our First Annual Faculty Forum, scheduled for February 24, which is intended to showcase and celebrate faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities. To my knowledge, this will be the first such event on the WSU campus, and it will be a fitting complement to our student research forum scheduled on March 28. Details regarding the Faculty Forum will be forthcoming soon.

Academic Program Planning

In 2001, the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) declared a moratorium on the development of new degree programs which severely curtailed discussions of new program development. In October 2004, the Regents removed the moratorium with the expectation that we carefully develop plans for new academic programs. These plans must reflect consideration of the needs of the state, the complexities of funding, and the roles of the varied campuses in the USHE system.

As we consider the undergraduate and graduate programs we wish to develop, we must approach our planning efforts with diligence. Discussions in 2003-04 focused upon the academic programs best suited for WSU Davis. Other conversations examined the curricula we wish to deliver online. As we move forward, we need to develop an integrated academic plan which reflects the multi-campus nature of WSU.

Looking Ahead

I look forward to opportunities to explore the issues described in this letter with the WSU community during the coming months, and to learn more about other issues that are occupying the attention of our faculty, staff and students.

In closing, I want to thank my predecessors in the Academic Affairs Office for providing a strong foundation to build upon. Special thanks are in order for Jeff Livingston who has served in the Academic Affairs Office on two different occasions, and who now serves as interim dean of the Goddard School of Business and Economics. Plans are underway for two searches which will take place in spring semester. One search is to find a permanent Dean for the Goddard School, and a second search is to replace Kathleen Lukken as the Associate Provost. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the campus for entrusting me with the opportunity to play a role in shaping WSU's future.

Sincerely,



Michael Vaughan, Provost
November 30, 2004