

Faculty Council Transcript
Provost's Report and Discussion
Faculty Council Meeting on 2/7/2022

REPORT:

Provost: I also want to take a moment to pause and respond to you know the concerns that I have increasingly become aware of through letter from the from executive council in collaboration with college senates and um college and school senates and other discussions that I have had regarding the dean searches in particular, but also broader issues of communication and transparency and understandings of shared governance. This is important. It is important for all of us, and it is certainly important to me that in reality and perception that we find better ways to work together on these issues and if we are going to improve that starts with me. And, um it will take us working together but I also recognize that where there are concerns, we need to put some approaches and vehicles in place to address them. Ya, as of this morning we have launched four dean searches this year in addition to doing the CLA dean search last spring. In every case I have worked with HR to ensure we are engaging in procedures and processes that are consistent across all top-level searches here at UMass Boston. These are rigorous national searches that require integrity of process. But that also includes being responsive to the two searches that we have already had actively going of a large amount of feedback and input that I have received from the campus and where dean searches are concerned, particularly the faculty. Um, I hear your concerns and again I want to reiterate I want to be appropriately responsive. You know, having a clear process right, that begins with the formation of committees that includes names that are gathered from the different senates and colleges, nominations from the student government bodies from FSU to construct committees that are broadly representative in many ways of not just the unit for which the search is being conducted but also have a broader campus perspective. And then, to um take seriously the recommendations of the finalists that all, each of the committees recommends all as being worthy of being finalists on campus and then to receive as I say quite a bit of feedback in the searches conducted so far, uh, I will say there have been some diversions in feedback and I need to work through all of that. But it has raised some questions about what I am looking for in the search, I think. So I just want to clarify that across any of the Dean searches, what am I looking for. And I'm looking for individuals whose values align with our commitments as a public urban research university as an ambitious and practical vision for the type of university we are and can be, is forward looking with experience in strategic planning and implementation, has the ability, the demonstrated ability to prioritize equity, diversity and inclusion in teaching and learning. Which then requires that we provide that kind of support for our faculty, for our students, for our staff, has demonstrated the ability to utilize and engage in data informed decision making, not data driven but data informed, um and I think that is an important distinction. You know, brings new ideas and how to build and sustain infrastructure that better supports teaching and learning. So, that for example faculty have more bandwidth to focus on core faculty responsibilities such as teaching and research.

TIME LIMIT MUSIC PLAYS. (REPORTS GIVEN ARE ALLOWED TEN MINUTES)

Provost: Heike, do you mind if I take two more minutes please?

FC Chair: I tried to get your attention, but I, ya, wrap it up, yep, wrap it up.

Provost: But, also, um, you know bring new insights on how to better facilitate, cultivate and manage the resources that can help us accomplish these things and support the people in our colleges and on campus, our champions of community engagement and develop specific ideas on how to simultaneously be champions for their unit and stewards of the broader campus. I'm not looking for someone who does one or two of these things well, but really a synthesis, um, of these things. Clearly there is concerns about how these decisions are being made by me, and as I said before, improvements in communication and understanding about how we work together in shared governance starts with me. So, in order to be more responsive I do need to um be able to interact and dialogue in meaningful ways so I am launching a series of meetings where I will meet with each senate leadership group and then all department chairs in small groups so there can really be dialogue and understanding, same with the GPDS, one of the things we have agreed to in principle with the dept chair union is a monthly meeting with them uh, just as I have with FSU and I have found those meetings to be incredibly, um, helpful. Uh, build on some of the meetings we have already have with FC committees and make sure we get around to meeting with all of them over time but also creating some monthly drop ins where different faculty members and other members of our community have the opportunity to meet directly with so that we start having these discussions, um, in real time and more proactively. Oh and I forgot an also the centers and institutes, directors, although I've started to work with the centers and institutes council since I've been provost. And then to create mechanisms, by which I come back and meet, perhaps even more frequently with the faculty council on the executive committee or others, I'm open to your ideas to make sure that we're, uh, improving our understandings as we go through lots of changes in very turbulent times, um how we're thinking and working and making decisions together. Um, thank, thank you very much.

DISCUSSION:

FC Chair: Okay, great, ya um. Thanks. Anyone have any questions? For the Provost?

FC Rep (Marlene Kim): I have questions if no one else does.

FC Rep: You guys there?

FC Chair: Go ahead, Marlene.

Provost: Yes, please Marlene.

FC Rep.: Okay, I have two questions. I'm wondering about computer replacements, some of us needed these and haven't gotten them and we're told we were going to get them. Our computers are dying. And, two um, I'm wondering about the second committee on enhancing NTTs in governance and if this committee is advisory, making recommendations ,looking at best

practices, what exactly is the committee doing? Because I agree that NTTs are really valuable uh and um the University wouldn't work without them, but how departments decide how to evaluate teaching, uh departments through their constitutions decide who participates in voting in departments, so is this committee going to, I'm wondering what the nexus is between the departments making these decisions and this committee making this decision or advising or what.

Provost: Ya, great thanks Marlene. Um to great questions. So computer replace, you know that is something for a number of years that the University has been trying to keep up with. There were some this year, that budget is in IT. We're just starting to, essentially the budget season looking ahead to FY23 and I agree that you know, we've last early summer did an inventory to get a better handle on where we were with computer replace and that is a high priority, right to get more computers, um

FC Rep.: But some of us we're supposed to get it this year.

Provost: Okay, I will follow up with, with IT um to see where that's at.

FC Rep.: Okay, great.

Provost: Yep, you know in terms of the second committee, um, one of the reasons I felt it was important that we create a committee like this, um it had been proposed that perhaps this would go in the collective bargaining agreement, is because I do believe that uh, when you look at existing departmental constitutions in practice that that's an important part of shared governance that we need to honor and respect. That being said, I think that we need to do an examination to provide some guidance in asking questions because some of the constitutions have remained unexamined for a long time. So this gives us an opportunity to really as a larger community to talk about what are the appropriate ways to more fully involve NTTs in the governance of the um campus at all levels and to recognize their contributions. But we do have to respect, right, that there are departmental differences in how this is handled and that there are certain levels of autonomy that if we are going to address how that works, then we need to do so, um, together. This is an advisory committee that will make recommendations that will come to me, um I expect that uh, this is the type of work that should be done very transparently as we work with the departments, um and that there is going to be a lot to work through together because I think there are some real differences in different parts of the campus in terms of what different departments feel is appropriate. Um, but I think it is a really important question to be asking and to be purposeful and intentional about how we can improve this particular part of our governance.

FC Rep.: Thank you.

Provost: Heike

FC Member (Heike Schotten): Hi, ya, thanks Joe. And thanks for addressing um the uh, the question of the dean searches and shared governance. And I appreciate there are going to be, sounds like a lot more forums or meetings or opportunities or sites for faculty feedback on, in future dean searches. But, it um, also strikes me that that already happened with the two dean searches that already happened on this campus. At least in CLA, in my college, the Chairs did give their feedback, the CLA senate did give their feedback, the CLA faculty did give their feedback, um, so I'm wondering why having meetings akin to the kind that have already happened are going to lead to any kind of difference in how faculty feedback is weighed or taken into consideration when making decisions about Deans.

Provost: Ya, thanks Heike. So, one, these meetings are more than about Dean searches, right. Because I think that really having better lines of communication at a more personal level in addition to the formal channel it is sort of all of the above, right so that we understand each other better not just when a particular decision comes up. I think that is partly what is needed on this campus and as I have really been reflecting about what I've been hearing from folks, that can be really helpful to all of us including me because I do benefit every time I meet with folks and talk with them. You know, and as we've had some other discussions, yes, I took the feedback very seriously that I go from the faculty and from the others, and there was, um, well there were strong preferences with some, there has been divergent feedback that I have received and uh, I have made the absolute best decision that I felt given those criteria for each of the searches and in the upcoming searches but I do also think that more communication when there are concerns, um and me being open, right so that we all learn, right so we learn together and to all of us being open to hearing each other and advancing, I do take faculty input incredibly seriously I think some of these are difficult decisions, that's one of things about being in the hot seat, as the Provost um but I also think that every opportunity that we have to engage in more dialogue about things will improve, um, my decision making and others. Um, so I think we need to continue to find ways to work together to have more trust and confidence that even when we don't agree on decisions we may make in different venues, decisions I may make as provost the decisions some one else may make in their role, that we have better understandings of where we're coming from and how and why we're making those decisions. Ya, Michael.

FC Rep. (Michael Mahan): I apologize if I missed this at the December meeting but could you give us a really brief update as to the discussions regarding the class schedule. I know we had talked about this prior to COVID and there were some tabled in terms of rather than the MWF 50 minutes, I think there was some discussion of leveling it and having a 75 minute schedule MW TuTh, where does that stand are we still moving forward with that scheduling with the academic calendar.

Provost: Yes, Michael, yes, we are and we shared some information late last semester about this, that a hybrid block schedule is we're piloting next year. WE actually have folks working on implementing that right now. And, um, you know we've working with in my Office and Andrew Perumal, whose been leading that and working with, we've looked at a heat map to see where courses are, working with scheduling to um put that in effect. But again we're doing that as a

pilot in response to all the great work that was done previously to make sure that as we implement this in ways that it works for everybody involved. Kevin.

FC Member (Kevin Wozniak): Hi Joe. To follow up on the question of the process about Dean Searches. Thank you proposing additional meetings. I think it will be a very valuable step, um, I think many things we have all learned over the last year, year and a half, we can all do much better in terms of facilitating the lines of communication across all levels of the faculty governance infrastructure so I think that is a really good first step. An additional recommendation I would encourage you to consider ways that you could um, make additional changes is thinking about ways to make the data process more open and transparent. In most of the Dean searches, faculty are given the opportunity to provide our feedback through surveys, which is excellent and very appropriate, but that creates data, right. And I always think as scholars one of the primary maxims is that data should be public and transparent so that everyone can double check the numbers ourselves. Um, I, I think we all recognize that there are always going to be a diversity of opinions amongst the faculty, that like complete, one hundred percent unanimity is almost never going to be the case. But even your reference to diversity of opinions, that's kind of an unquantified and precise term, um a minority of opinions is still a diversity of opinions but generally the standard within democratic systems but generally the standard in democratic systems is the majority preference kind of dictates the day, right. And I definitely, I would see major qualitative differences between like 60% of faculty weigh in on one direction and 40% weigh in another, versus like an 80/20 split or a 90/10 split, right. Anyone could still say there is a diversity of perspective there but the overall balance of sentiments would be quite different under those different scenarios and I think a lot of us would appreciate having more transparent reporting of what the faculty are communicating to you and in terms of overall numbers. So, I encourage you to think about additional ways to make the data you receive public for consumption and analysis by the faculty.

Provost: So, thanks, Kevin. I will take that under serious consideration. You know, one of the things we are looking at for Deans level searches, vice chancellor level searches, chancellor level searches what are some consistent ways as I work with HR and campus leadership to be consistent there, I think some of it there is not quite easily quantifiable in the way you are talking about on the other hand, you know in terms of, you know like one of the things that's important to me as I meet with the search committee about the finalists, is for them to provide me with information about why all these people are qualified and then the interview process really matters. And then from there, as we discussed previously, there is a lot of feedback to consider from the different parts of the campus community. A lot of it qualitative, a lot of it is not rankings or you know pure yes or no. But I will absolutely take that under advisement and consideration and that can be something that we talk about prior, you know in the immediate future as we go into these other dean searches. Thanks. And, Kibibi.

FC Member (Kibibi V. Mack-Shelton): Yes, hi. My question is not connected to the Dean Search but is connected to the Africana Studies search. I know February a lot of times, schools tend to use that time when they interview candidates, they also can speak on their topics, which is connected to their studies, but I'm confused because I know that the Africana Studies search,

the semi-finalist list, has been submitted to your office since December and I guess I reached out to find out whether or not they were going to have campus talks based on those semi-finalist or finalists, I don't even know where they were because I'm not on the search committee anymore, but I would like to know if there is any reason why your office has not approved the semi-finalist list that has been sent there since December from the Dean's Office.

Provost: Ya, thanks Kibibi. Those searches are proceeding. Um, so yes. Ya, I'm sorry. Jeff.

FC Member (Jeff Melnick): Thanks, um I really appreciate your comments and I want to give you an opportunity to be more transparent that is currently unfolding which is that I noticed you just named the search committee for the Ed. School Dean, uh position, and the Chair of that search is the current CLA Dean which is a matter of some controversy in terms of CLA faculty and what kind of input you got from CLA faculty, so I'm just wondering if given that the Dean of CLA is fairly new on campus and hasn't really had a chance to build good will, uh, with um, the faculty, I'm just wondering if you could speak to what your process was on that.

Provost: Ya, thanks Jeff. So first, let me say, I am confident in all of our Deans. It is typically a Dean who chairs those searches. Um, it is also a good way for a Dean to get to know others across campus. Um, and, we have many dean searches, and we're trying to distribute you know who is providing leadership for the different searches. And I think that uh, we all have to work together right, as new people come into our community. It is not up to any one person to generate good will. Certainly all Deans have the responsibility to bring faculty along with them, um, but um, I have confidence that the, again it is chaired by a Dean but all of the committee contributes and that this will be a very strong committee. I mean clearly, CEHD is very near and dear to my heart and I want to make sure it is a successful search and I am confident that it will be.

FC Member: But, I guess that is exactly my question, that is given your own investments in CEHD, how do you bring in a brand new Dean who came in under some fairly intense and I'll just say it, you know, stressful circumstances, I guess, how are we, how do you want us to receive that as faculty in terms of that fact that we haven't really worked out the feelings about that last search.

Provost: So, I think that it is very important, right, and I'm concerned that we make it difficult for any new person coming in, faculty, Dean or otherwise, um, if we don't allow them to fully fulfill their roles. And, um, you know, and so I believe that, right, that this is a way that the, uh Tyson can fully fulfill his role and again working with an entire committee, that this can be very positive and constructive for everybody involved.

FC Chair: Okay, any other questions or comments for the Provost? Okay, thank you, Joe.

Provost: Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.