9-19-2013

Council of Chairs Meeting, September 19, 2013

Marshall University

COUNCIL OF CHAIRS, 2013-14
Minutes of the Meeting on September 19, 2013, 3:30 p.m.
Drinko 402; GC 134; CEB 102

1. Attendance: 16 Chairs/Division Heads: Mike Castellani (CHM), Harlan Smith (FIN/ECN), Jeff Archambault (ACC/LE), Dan Holbrook (HST), Marty Laubach (SOC/ANT), Jane Hill (ENG), Allen Stern (AST), Eldon Larsen (ENGR), Lisa Heaton (ESE), Mike Cunningham (LS), Del Chrol (Classics), Kim Broedel-Zaugg (SOP), Jeff Ruff (RST), Venkat Gudivada (CS), Steve Mewaldt (Psych), George Watson (Ed Foundations)

2. Mike Castellani called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

3. The official MU Course Prerequisite Policy was discussed. Recent perceptions that a new Prerequisite Policy is in effect have created confusion among chairs. Thus, the Council has sought clarification from Faculty Senate and the Registrar. Despite new information presented today, differing interpretations of current MU policy persist. These are:

> 1. Many understood precedent to be that prerequisites may be changed independently at the department level and enforced immediately through the Registrar's office.
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> 2. Others understand that departments may change prerequisites independently, but that changes are enforced based on when they first appear in the University Catalog(s): students entering MU under a particular Catalog would be subject only to prerequisites in that Catalog.
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> 3. Still others understand that changes involving prerequisites can be made by a chair's sending an informational memo to the appropriate college curriculum committees and to the Registrar. Such changes must be delivered to the Registrar prior to March 1 in order to take effect the following fall semester. For example, a change delivered to the Registrar between now and March 1, 2014 will take effect in Fall 2014.

Members present noted the administrative difficulties inherent in attempting to enforce course prerequisites on a catalog-by-catalog basis. Others noted that academic advisors and associate deans on occasion override prerequisites for courses in other colleges for students in their colleges.

All agreed that formal clarification must be sought from the Registrar. Harlan Smith and Mike Castellani followed up by writing to Roberta on this matter.

4. Most of the meeting focused on the micro-level functionality document prepared by Jane Hill from Council member submissions in response to a request from President Kopp at his September 5 meeting with the Council. At that meeting he emphasized that if the Council provided him with a document outlining the micro-level day-to-day operational inefficiencies and irrationalities that bedevil us and the students, and that prevent MU from operating efficiently, he would act on our concerns and seek solutions to the problems we identify.

A. The members present discussed how best to present this document to the President. There was some discussion about splitting the information up into various pieces, and possibly prioritizing these pieces. But in the end we agreed that the complete document is a powerful portrait of MU operating procedures, and that we should present the document to the President in its current format.

B. Mike Castellani, Harlan Smith, and Jane Hill will schedule a meeting with the President to discuss the document, preferably prior to the Council's October meeting. Mike will make the necessary arrangements, and Jane will finalize the document in light of today's discussion. As we discussed this meeting and how best to present this document to the President, we agreed on two points:

1. We want to emphasize the managerial context within which these problems have developed, rather than focus on specific individuals involved. Our goal is not to overwhelm the President with specific instances of obstructionism, because (1) we have too many examples to relate; and (2) those examples involve too many individuals. An anecdotal approach would be both inefficient and unpersuasive. Instead, we must focus on the structural/managerial environment within which these problems develop and persist. Jeff Archambault, our resident Accounting expert, noted that in his field this environment would be referred to as the "control environment"—and that MU's control environment is woefully inadequate. We should therefore focus, with the President, on developing an action plan to solve problems rather than only to repeatedly name them.

2. We should put one chief area of concern, along with our suggested action plan remedies, on each page of the document. This will give us a chance to talk about each problem area in depth, and keep us from bouncing from area to area. And it will give the President the flexibility to decide on the overall sequencing of the action plan.

C. Specific issues mentioned in our document were emphasized during discussion today. These included:

1. The problems we face when official forms are changed without our knowledge. We agreed that it would be very helpful if the administrative office in question (e.g., HR, Budget, Travel) would maintain a file of "completed sample forms" that we could access as models of how to complete the forms. Maybe we could even ask MU to institute a policy whereby no form can be changed unless and until a new "completed sample form" has been published and disseminated?

2. Another problem to emphasize to the President is that we often get held to policies that are not published and disseminated. This happens, in particular, when it comes to Travel.

3. A problem noted in our draft document, which is one of the threads that ties the entire document together, is the fact that in many cases there is only one person in a particular office who has the training and authority to implement or approve a particular request. Should that person become ill, or be absent for any period of time, or be less-than-solution/customer-oriented, all activity on that request stops. Cross-training staff and preparing substitutes to step in and take over for front-line staff in case of emergencies or sudden increases in work flow must become an administrative priority.

4. One factor contributing to managerial dysfunction is the fact that administrative support offices are understaffed and those on staff are overworked and underpaid. The administrative support staffing structure must be part of any comprehensive solution to our day-to-day operational inefficiencies.

5. The "hiring freeze" is contributing to day-to-day dysfunction. In the context of the freeze, how can we improve worker quality and/or create incentives for improved workplace behavior?

6. Steve Mewaldt noted that staff members themselves, and even students, could contribute much to some of the solutions we seek. As we develop an ongoing action plan with the President we should collaborate with staff, and seek student input, to make effective changes. Psychology faculty could facilitate focus groups of administrative support personnel or students to learn what they see as day-

to-day problems and how they might solve them. Marty Laubach and Jeff Archambault noted that they each know some students who would be interested in participating in such an activity.

7. Several noted that administrative offices, in light of problems that people experience regularly, should engage in planning designed to improve office functionality. Currently, such planning does not seem to be taking place: Chairs repeatedly face the same problems, and, as we attempt to work with the offices in question, we are met with a familiar set of (non)responses. Any effective action plan must have the administrative support offices develop the capacity to solve problems with which all campus department chairs and their staffs are intimately familiar.

5. At the October Council meeting we hope to report on the meeting with President Kopp. Mike Castellani will keep members informed on that meeting and on the October meeting agenda. As for the November meeting, Mike Castellani plans to invite the Provost to join us.

6. Finally, we discussed the possibility, raised last summer, of expanding the BWG. There seems to be momentum across campus to make sure that all colleges are represented on the expanded BWG. Since faculty are being represented by Shane Tomblin (Faculty Senate) from the COB and by the Council's Dan Holbrook (from COLA), if we get a chance to elect a second Council member to the BWG maybe we should focus on members outside the COB and COLA. Jane Hill noted the lack of women present in today's meeting, and suggested that we think about diversifying the membership of the enhanced BWG along gender lines. The members present discussed which regular Council attendees might be best for this position, and Mike Castellani contact those mentioned to see if any are interested in serving on the BWG, if a second position for the Council materializes.

7. The meeting adjourned around 5 p.m.