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Senate Executive Committee Minutes

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SEC Meeting with the President and Provost
September 9, 2022
11 a.m to 11:45 a.m.

In attendance: Carl Reiber, Leigh Price, Bill Dawers (senate president/CAH), Hayden Wimmer (PCEC), Kwabena Boakye (PCOB), Wilhelmina Randtke (LIB), Annie Mendenhall (CAH), Ed Mondor (president-elect/COSM), Rob Terry (senate secretary/CAH), Bill Mase (JPHCOPH), Marieke Van Willigen (CBSS) , Linda Thompson (WCHP)

Absent: Kyle Marrero, Christine Bedore (senate librarian/COSM)

Meeting began at 11:03

President Marrero was unable to attend the meeting because of Chancellor Sonny Perdue's investiture, so Provost Reiber was acting in his place for this meeting.

Provost Reiber began by providing an update about admission standards just updated at the September 8 BOR meeting. He indicated that they would extend the GPA only option rather than require SAT and ACT scores over the next year. He said that the Board of Regents had a spirited discussion on the topic of testing at the meeting. Provost Reiber said that with this decision for next fall, more data will be collected over the year and will inform future decisions. Ed Mondor provided a link to Statesboro Herald news coverage of this discussion and decision: <https://www.statesboroherald.com/local/university-system-waiving-standardized-test-scores-admission-most-campuses/>

In response to a question from Marieke Van Willigen, Provost Reiber indicated that this change will affect spring 2023 admissions as well, and that this aspect was being advertised in nearby states to let them know that in-state tuition was being offered at Georgia Southern. He said that one of our strengths in these markets is that Georgia Southern's tuition is very competitive.

The next update Provost Reiber provided from the Board of Regents meeting was about the formal elimination of many degrees and certificates that had been suspended as a result of the consolidation. Georgia Southern can now update SACS so that obsolete programs will not be a part of the accreditation process.

Provost Reiber said that the Board emphasized the need to dig into majors that are not graduating many students. He said that these lists have been forwarded to deans in the colleges to begin discussion with chairs and faculty about these programs

Provost Reiber then said that since the Post-Tenure Review process was approved by the Faculty Senate at our last meeting, he wanted to meet with Marieke Van Willigen to discuss minor changes that need to be made before the final policy document goes forward to the BOR well in advance of the hard Oct. 17 deadline.

Marieke Van Willigen asked if those undergoing post-tenure review currently would be evaluated under these new standards or if they would be used only after BOR approval. Provost Reiber indicated that he wanted to take a “middle ground” option here that would pragmatically address the situation and be realistic about aligning new expectations with the ways faculty have been evaluated in the past.

Provost Reiber said that the budgeting process continues. After all colleges submitted their list of vacant positions to be considered as part of the necessary cuts, the needed total was not yet met, so the administration is looking at additional areas for further cuts. Some decisions are pending the results of the final census; however, next year, we will face further reductions because of the reduction in formula funding for FY25. He said that both FY 23 and FY 24 would require continued austerity, and he is working with deans to look at any remaining unfilled lines to determine which can be set aside to address further budget cuts.

Provost Reiber admitted that this was an unpleasant topic and one he didn't enjoy, but he opened the floor to discussion and thoughts from the SEC. Bill Dawers expressed concerns that delays in filling positions may lead to courses in programs not being offered, leading to a loss of attractiveness and even viability of some programs. Provost Reiber responded that his goal is to work with the deans to help identify the key positions and lines that need to be filled.

Bill Mase asked what Provost Reiber wanted to use as the unit of the analysis, meaning that he wanted to know if he was looking at colleges or looking across colleges for “low hanging fruit” that could be cut. He stressed that what he felt the faculty really wanted was a transparent explanation of this process, and that if the rationale of the process is made clear to faculty, it will help ease concerns.

Provost Reiber stressed that we are not looking at layoffs or reductions in force at this time. He said that there may be a need to move things around, but he wanted changes to be more strategic and well-considered. He said that he is considering a committee that would include members of the faculty senate that would make recommendations about programs that might be cut due to low enrollment and graduation rates. He said that the approach he is taking that looks in advance to FY 23, FY 24, and FY 25 funding is meant to help making measured, considered decisions.

Annie Mendenhall asked about concerns about loss of faculty for next year, especially in her department where five visiting instructors will be leaving and other faculty will be leaving due to retirement. She indicated that the “first major” approach is driving deans to make decisions that may have damaging consequences and may be harming overall credit hour production within the college, including potentially harming accreditation for specific programs. She said that she has heard from faculty that they would like a much more nuanced sense of what is being evaluated. Provost Reiber indicated that deans should be engaging faculty in these discussions, and that if they are not, he wanted to be made aware of it. He said that it is essential to keep positions that are required for accreditation.

In addition, he said that it's important to recognize that cutting vacant positions isn't strategic but opportunistic, and that the strategic aspect comes in terms of redirecting funds to programs that are growing. He reiterated that deans should be communicating with chairs and faculty.

Hayden Wimmer spoke about his experience in the IT program where low enrolled classes are running at the Armstrong campus, while on the Statesboro campus, it isn't possible to staff all their courses. He said that service loads are very high, and that expectations for additional service and research need to be balanced against the number of cut positions that result in increased teaching and service loads for those faculty members that remain.

Provost Reiber responded that while he agreed that the workload policy should be flexible to some degree down to the department level, allowing for faculty to emphasize different areas. He said that not every department needs to be focused entirely on research and that some faculty might devote more time to teaching.

Bill Dawers asked whether the Senate Executive Committee should get access to the list of low enrollment programs from the provost's office or from the deans. He said that previous comments by SEC members overlapped in many respects, especially the concern about primary majors versus secondary majors. He added that a work team in the Armstrong Task Force should soon have good data on secondary majors to add to the data on primary majors. He said that secondary majors may be overrepresented in some colleges, which could then have to absorb budget cuts disproportionately despite generating credit hours and meeting student demand. He brought up the example of the philosophy BA, which has more than 50 primary majors but also more than 30 secondary majors. He shared Dr. Wimmer's concern about Armstrong courses with very low enrollment, but stressed that cutting courses will not help programs grow.

Annie Mendenhall said that she was concerned that when thinking about the smaller courses on the Armstrong campus, we need to consider the effects of cutting some programs that were unique to Armstrong State. She expressed concern that failure to secure Armstrong's future would only lead to more attrition of faculty and continue a cycle of enrollment decline that would harm all of Georgia Southern's campuses.

The meeting ended at 11:45.