UNIVERSITY POLICY AND PLANNING COUNCIL
2009-10 CHAIR: JOHN DELANO

OCTOBER 22, 2009
MEETING MINUTES


GUESTS: B. Hedberg, B. Weaver (representing Provost Phillips)

MINUTES: see below

Dr. Delano called the meeting at 3:31pm and began with a review of minutes from the October 8th meeting – the Council reviewed the minutes with discussion as to corrections. Dr. Range moved to include language regarding obtaining an extension of data provided in the past to track trends over the last five years (referring to the historical analysis he had provided at the October 8th meeting) as a fairly specific request that will satisfy the council. The council agreed that Mr. Beditz had made a general agreement to provide data at the last meeting, and that this should be reflected in the minutes. Dr. Range will submit a sentence or two to update 10/8 minutes for review/approval by the Council.

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS REPORT
No report was given.

CHAIR’S REPORT
No report was given

OLD BUSINESS

A. Strategic Planning Process

Comments were solicited at the end of the October 8th meeting. Dr. Delano distributed a chronological set of comments from members of UPPC. Discussion was held focusing on three areas:

1. Validity and weight of documents submitted for consideration

Dr. Range began with a comment on Dr. Eisenbraun’s written remarks concerning some documents already in existence and to what degree they should be required reading. Resource materials such as the mission statement and prior strategic plans seem to be missing from the provided materials. Reports of Budget Advisory Group and Middle States Self Study have gone through the appropriate governance procedures/involvement. The ‘Going Forward’ Plan and review of the Provost’s Budget Advisory Group did not involve governance.

Dr. DeBlasi added that the documents can be parsed even further – there are documents that have gone through governance, advisory documents and fully articulated policy, whereas the approved strategic plan is a level beyond that. Similarly, the mission statements from peer institutions are unconnected to the campus governance process. The different types of documents
are valuable for everybody to review all of those different elements. Dr. Johnson noted that looking at Provost’s forums, getting the opinion and ideas of the faculty, staff, etc. are good – he would not like to see that pushed through a governance process if they are truly ‘poll the audience’ type documents. Dr. Fossett commented that essentially, over the planning horizon, most forecasts put the state’s economy and budget at risk, and are not something you can trend. Since recovery indicators are several years out, as that filters down to us, we have to assume that DOB and the Comptroller are projecting huge out year deficits. Furthermore, we have to assume that we are looking at very rough financial and economic times – we do not want a plan that needs to be adjusted by short term budget hits. We have two choices – to look for alternative source of funding or say that we have to downsize to resources that are available, to play to our strengths. The planning process itself ought to be engaging the University community in how we get ourselves into equilibrium.

Mr. Bessette commented that the council should not be so concerned with consulting governance; taking documents as they are does not take away from value based on category – one should not discount the value of a document because it has not gone through governance. Dr. Delano inquired as to whether we should view the documents in a hierarchy or treat them with equal stature. Dr. Johnson wanted to make sure as we move forward that we tie as few hands as possible. There are so many unknowns, such as alternative revenue stream exploration – we should spend time and effort on things that move us forward while maintaining input from faculty and governance – things that keep discussions as free as possible. Dr. Wagner commented that all documents are not independent, e.g. Budget Advisory Group 2 was informed by Budget Advisory Group 1. He has the notion that this was just the beginning; we have to get out in front of cuts, whether the approach is informed by established policy or the governance process.

2. **UPPC and the Strategic Planning Process**

Dr. Bangert-Drowns raised a question about UPPC’s relation to process. Dr. Range responded that there should be UPPC representation on the strategic planning committee that would serve as liaison and report back to the group. The UPPC bylaws demand that the council be informed in a timely manner about budgets, elimination of programs, and a strategic action plan.

Dr. Wagner stated that it is important to distinguish between short term (mid-year cuts) and the deliberative processes of governance – how do we prepare ourselves and get out in front of these cuts - operating in crisis mode makes it difficult to see the big picture. Dr. Fossett added that it would be desirable to supplement the work with longer term forecasts, and add these types of materials to resource lists to help us get out ahead of this. Dr. Fossett will identify relevant documents and send them to Dr. Delano, and will also identify these sources for the Provost.

Mr. Ferlo expressed concerned that the council may be suggesting a negative strategic plan that will create a document that’s more what we can do than what we would like to be. He further noted that OTPS (Other than Personnel Service) is at a level that can’t be cut anymore – it has been flat for last three years. Personnel will explain 90% of the variance. Dr. Johnson remarked that if what we can do and what we want to do don’t match, it gives us time to seek alternate resources to be able to meet those goals.

Dr. Bangert-Drowns sees three products coming out of the strategic plan initiative; the mission
statement, a statement of strategic goals and 5-7 year blueprint. He queried where UPPC would expect to weigh in the most, and how to make this happen with short time frame? Dr. Delano noted that the feedback process can move quickly. Dr. Wagner stated that in order to effectively look forward, we have to be serious about cutting back more than we have to in order to proactively invest in how they ‘should be’.

3. Developing a Planning Model

Dr. Fossett wondered what kind of financial planning capability can we construct at a high level of generality? If we are working a strategic level, that can work with the big picture. Could we do something with economics Graduate Assistants? Dr. Range thought we might be able to engage School of Business students to do the analysis. Dr. DeBlasi concurred that we need modeling help, since we know that the bottleneck is in data acquisition. Dr. Fossett anticipated that this exercise might give us a reasonable projection of how we might look in 5 years; then we can start constructing positive and negative ‘what if’ scenarios. Dr. Delano closed the discussion with the comment that this is a responsible planning tool goal, and will seek input from the Provost, Vice President for Finance and Business and the President.

B. Comments regarding FYE Task Force Report

Dr. Delano had requested comments regarding the proposal at the conclusion of the October 8th meeting and opened the floor up for discussion. Dr. Bangert-Drown stated that this was not a proposal; it is hard to argue against wanting to enhance the first year experience, but what form does that enhancement take? Some elements are so specific; it has the feel of a proposal, but has not been sufficiently vetted to be a proposal. What weight to give to it at this point? Ideas are great, some elements pricey. Dr. Delano added his perspective that the price is too high, and the goals are too vague. Dr. Johnson commented that if we are spending the next year defining who we are, moving forward with FYE now may be premature – do we know how this fits into who we want to be in the face of significant resource allocation constraints.

Dr. Shaw wanted to know to what extent the proposal meets a broad need in specific ways – to what extent do these models directly reflect the voice and opinions of students? Dr. Delano responded that students were well represented on task force with two representatives. Dr. Range reiterated Dr. Eisenbraun’s written comment that there is no exploration of understanding what makes students happy/unhappy and why they leave. Dr. Delano agreed that that information is needed. In addition, he added that data from NCES (National Center for Educational Statistics) and NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) are also important since they show that UAlbany is 4th among the four SUNY centers among several important parameters involving student academic experiences. Dr. DeBlasi commented that the NCES and NAEP data are structured in such a way so that the same factors irritate some and please others.

Dr. Wagner brought up the clearly expressed need to reform the writing requirement - it took two years to come up with a plan and budget, only to see it shot down. He feels that improving writing requirement should be a priority over FYE. Dr. Delano pointed out that the syllabus of his UFSP 100 course in Fall 2008, which is at the end of the FYE Task Force report, showed that a strong writing component was included in that 1-credit course. He also suggested that the University can’t
keep adding things on top of everything else, but rather needed to decide what things to stop doing in order to mount high-value initiatives. If an FYE proposal is to be developed in the future, it will need to design an academic model that is both effective and sustainable with large buy-in from students, faculty and administration.

Dr. Bangert-Drowns stated that our large transfer population raises concerns about investment in FYE expecting this big payoff, when it may only slightly improve things for a portion of the population. Dr. Range asked whether one can one quantify what makes you happy – experience of freshmen vastly different based on what classes they get into – one of the biggest things that make them happy is access to faculty in freshman year, and there needs to be universal recognition of the importance of this aspect.

Dr. DeBlasi remarked that we can’t tunnel down to see impact at program level based on departmental enrollment models. Need 90 sections per academic year to deal with incoming freshmen – how to get 1/6 of teaching faculty to participate in that? Dr. Range cited a decrease of 50-55 positions last year. This year’s new hires listed mostly lecturers. Each of 3 models have a position for coordinator and librarian – is this the best use of our limited dollars in the face of serious faculty cuts? Can we get feedback on whether this is a good way to use funds – can we look at other institutions as backup for this staffing model?

The Provost believes a half time FYE Coordinator is necessary. Mr. Bessette offered to volunteer to be FYE coordinator at no charge, and added that any of us could find a couple of extra hours per week to help out without additional compensation; it would go a long way to making freshman experience. Dr. Delano suggested that faculty and departments need to be incentivized. One hour a week could be a rich experience and could be doable. Ultimately, the question is can we get there from here? And if we want to get there, how do we get there.

At the conclusion of the FYE discussion, Alex Rias introduced himself as the Graduate Student Organization representative.

Motion was made to adjourn at 5:10pm with Dr. Delano’s thanks to all in attendance

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy Stern