17 January 2013

Humanities Faculty and Staff

Dear Colleagues:

RE: Update on Budget and Administrative Effectiveness Review

I write to give you an update on the Humanities Division’s planning for this year’s budget reduction and some results from our administrative effectiveness review.

The Division has been asked to provide a plan for taking a permanent core budget reduction of $286,300 on July 1, 2013. The good news is that this is less than had originally been anticipated. Nonetheless, this represents more than 9% of our total budget for academic support (staff positions plus funds for general operations). Last year I indicated my intention to take this year’s cut entirely from the academic support side of the Division’s budget rather than continuing to eliminate faculty positions.

Since the onset of the budget crisis, the Division has been using several tactics to recover funds from academic support budgets to hold in reserve: restructuring to allow some staff positions to remain unfilled, salary savings at turnover, and reducing or eliminating some earmarked allocations to better fit with expenses. These tactics have managed to reserve funds sufficient to cover approximately one-third of the budget cut. While we will continue these tactics in the future to restore a reserve, we need a strategy to cover the other two-thirds.

The remainder of the cut will be assigned in the first phase as an across-the-board reduction of approximately 10% to the operations accounts of all units. This is the reduction that I will report to the EVC later this month. Consequently all departments and other units should review their practices and priorities to find strategies for further reducing expenditures of core funds, whether by eliminating the expense or shifting them to other appropriate sources of funds. Reductions in paper printing and copying expenses are an obvious place to begin.

For the rest of this academic year, we will continue to review administrative practices for opportunities for restructuring and prioritization to restore a sense of sustainability to our units and programs.
In order to respond appropriately to reduced levels of support, we have been conducting an administrative effectiveness review. The goal is to identify how we can meet expectations for basic support for academic programs while retaining capacity for activities that represent reasonable aspirations for excellence.

This review has highlighted a problem that we all need to be mindful of: While the “money” budget is under serious strain, there is also serious strain on people’s “time and attention” budget. Staff, faculty, and students daily confront dilemmas about what should be given priority attention when there is more to do than can be done in the time available. We must become more alert to the invisible tradeoffs that occur when requests related to events, special projects, and new initiatives (however attractive and potentially valuable) intrude on our ability to meet core expectations of academic support. When we try to figure out how to “work smarter,” we should consider reducing the number of tasks we take on—and that we ask others to take on.

In the long run, staff and faculty must work together find sustainable levels of working that support the core academic mission without preventing us from reaching for aspirational goals. I believe that to accomplish this, there will need to be many conversations among and between faculty and staff, whose goal is to align staff time and attention as well as the use of departmental and divisional funds to the objectives that have been consciously judged to be of highest impact and broad faculty commitment. I encourage department faculty and staff to engage in frank discussions about how these issues play out within the department. Assistant Dean Symonik and I will continue to engage you in similar discussions about the larger balance within divisional and campus expectations. Attached are some reflections that may stimulate those conversations.

The Dean’s office has been practicing this already. As positions have turned over, we have taken time to review and restructure them and to reorganize the way work is distributed. This process will continue and widen to include all divisional and departmental staff positions, clarifying guidance to faculty on where and how to seek support from departmental and divisional staff and programs.

Following helpful suggestions from the department managers during the summer, we have already made a number of small policy and practice changes that reduce work in some routine processes. We have also completed our review of the operation of the Academic Service Centers and other types of academic support that is provided on a divisional rather than a departmental basis.

I greatly appreciate the spirit of cooperation among all staff and faculty and the commitment to the Humanities and our academic mission. This has brought us through a very difficult and challenging period in a state that positions us well for new times.

Sincerely yours,

William A. Ladusaw
Dean of Humanities
Attachment: Reflections on Administrative Effectiveness  
16 January 2013  
Humanities Division

The first step toward administrative effectiveness is to avoid creating unnecessary work for yourself and those who support you. Here are some recommendations:

I. Follow the procedures that facilitate routine work.

The Division has policies and procedures that allow us to accomplish important tasks: e.g. curriculum and leave planning, faculty personnel processes, and financial transactions. By and large, the best strategy for us all is to know how the processes work and to follow them in a timely manner.

While many such procedures may carry the taint of “bureaucracy,” systematic orderliness is an ally in accomplishing objectives.

The Division commits to periodically reviewing its practices to ensure that they are as clear and streamlined as possible and to presenting them in helpful formats.

Suggestions on how policies and procedures might be improved are always welcome in writing and will be considered at the next review.

II. Plan ahead, mindful of the calendar, timelines, responsibilities, and limits to capacity.

Submission deadlines help us work efficiently because they ensure enough time for review and implementation. They also ensure equitable consideration of all proposals. Failure to meet deadlines has two negative consequences.

For something obligatory, such as a faculty personnel action, it creates additional work for others in reminders and late consideration at a time when attention has moved on to other matters.

For something optional, such as an idea for a colloquium or visitor, it can mean that the proposal simply cannot be considered because the available capacity for consideration and support has been exhausted.

III. Secure endorsement and support for initiatives.

We are creative people and routinely generate more bright ideas than can possibly act on. Ideally, people with ideas should learn sooner rather than later which ideas might move forward and which will not. The potential paths to success should be clear and well lit.

The Division should ensure that guidelines for where and how faculty can (or should not) seek support for initiatives are clear, particularly regarding the roles of departmental and divisional endorsement and support.

Faculty should be prepared to make the case in advance and in writing for the value and impact of a proposal when seeking endorsement. Their own assessment of the proposal’s feasibility and cost should take into account both the direct costs and the indirect costs in work for staff and colleagues. Endorsements from colleagues and chairs should be mindful of the impact of undertaking a particular project on their own unit’s staff time and attention taken away from other, potential more important activities as well as the time and attention of divisional and campus support staff.