April 23, 2010

Humanities Faculty, Staff and Students

Re: Humanities Division Advisory Task Force on Reconstitution – A Follow-Up

Dear Humanities friends and colleagues,

In my earlier message of April 21, I outlined our guiding strategies given the current budget uncertainties, namely 1) to maintain the division’s liquidity in order to meet anticipated future costs; 2) to mitigate reductions in services as other campus units reduce their budgets and eliminate staff; and 3) to invest strategically in rebuilding and rebalancing our curricular and research capacities.

As I mentioned, the latter aim requires the ongoing pursuit of the ATFR process to a wider level of consensus and resolution. Let me once again thank all of you who spent the time to provide such valuable and helpful responses to the initial ATFR report. Although I do not feel that we have reached sufficient consensus to warrant a different divisional strategy than the current “default” scenario (whereby FTEs vacated by retirement or separation will not be replaced), I would like to share some thoughts and suggestions on how we might nonetheless move forward.

For me, the most important part of this collaborative process has been to reaffirm the fundamental importance of the curriculum to any planning or reorganization process. We must be organized in ways that allow for students to negotiate their degree pathways in the most transparent, efficient and effective ways, while recalling the need for the faculty who mount teaching programs to retain their autonomy to determine curriculum as per academic senate regulations.

INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

There are a number of programs sponsored by the division and its departments that are interdisciplinary or cross-departmental in structure. There remain lingering questions regarding the governance as well as the support of these programs, such as, among others, Classics, Jewish Studies, Italian Studies, German Studies and East Asian Studies. Recently, a group of faculty presented me with a proposal for a unified Spanish major, something with obvious multiple benefits to the division and the campus as a whole, and all the more so since the faculty resources essentially already exist to mount such a
curriculum. Indeed, if it were a department, it would instantly become the fourth largest in the division. Enticing as this example is, it immediately runs up against the same conundrum, namely how can the faculty who want to teach in such a program maintain curricular responsibility and receive priority resources for it, and how can a curriculum that depends upon courses offered by a variety of departments be made clear and accessible to students? Should such a unit, or the others I mention, be represented at the Council of Chairs, or not? Should it enjoy direct reporting to the dean, or be administered by a department which may not always have the interest of the program at heart? Should we consider some dramatically different set of structures, such as the “board of studies” model? Or, a single administrative unit to serve all our interdisciplinary programs? These are questions that need to be addressed if we are to move forward with the student and faculty aspirations represented by the rise of these programs. The Council of Chairs will take up these questions at our April 29 meeting, but I again invite your individual and collective input on this and the other issues raised below.

HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS, FEMINIST STUDIES, AMERICAN STUDIES

A number of questions also remain regarding a number of departments that have become, or are on the verge of becoming too small to be sustainable (in particular, there is a great deal of concern regarding the History of Consciousness department, as well as the Feminist Studies department and the American studies department). The issue here is compounded by the frustrated aspirations for graduate programs in FMST and AMST, and by the egregious lack of faculty resources in HISC. Graduate Council suggests the development of three graduate groups in lieu of the three departments, plus the maintaining of undergraduate majors in FMST and AMST. Other proposals have been made to launch a feminist studies track in HISC (as per the closure document for the external review of the FS department). Still others have voiced a desire to facilitate the transfer of faculty (either in whole or part-time) into or out of these departments. I am responding to these suggestions with two actions. The first is the creation of a task force to study these various proposals and work with the relevant departments to achieve a workable, resource-neutral, resolution of the needs and aspirations of these three critical units. I will be convening the task force and will ask for a formal response no later than May 28.

FACULTY TRANSFERS AND SPLITTING OF APPOINTMENTS

Second, I would like to make available to the faculty, not only of our division, but others as well, the possibility within a limited timeframe to express their desires and reasons to re-affiliate their FTE with another unit, in whole or in part. I realize that a faculty member may make such a request at any time; however, for the purposes of this reconstitution effort, I would like to initiate a process that captures as many such proposals as might exist during this period of time. Interested faculty should first acquaint themselves with two Campus Academic Personnel Procedures:
1. CAPM 416.220 - Guidelines for FTE Transfers: http://apo.ucsc.edu/academic_policies_and_procedures/cappm/416220.htm
2. CAPM 417.220 - Joint Appointments for Senate Faculty: http://apo.ucsc.edu/academic_policies_and_procedures/cappm/417220.htm

If an FTE Transfer or joint appointment is being contemplated, interested faculty should write confidentially and directly to me at humdean@ucsc.edu, no later than Friday, May 14. Requests for FTE moves should minimally include answers to Questions 1-5 of CAPM 416.220. Requests for Joint appointments (other than 100/0 splits) should comply with CAPM 417.220 E. a) 1. “An updated bio-bibliography should be submitted with the request for either type of action.”

After May 15, I will review each of the requests and begin dialogues with the faculty who have expressed interest regarding the feasibility of initiating the formal process for FTE transfer or joint appointment. When it is decided that an FTE transfer or joint appointment should go forward, existing campus procedures will apply. An MOU will be drafted as a starting point. I will then initiate the action by transmitting the request and draft MOU to the home department and receiving department (or coordinate this with another dean if the action crosses divisions); the departments will deliberate and submit their recommendations (including votes where applicable); I (or I and another dean) will insert a recommendation and forward the complete request to the Campus Provost/EVC for vetting with the appropriate Academic Senate Committees; the Campus Provost/EVC has final authority over these types of actions.

In addition, I will impose the following guidelines on Humanities Division departments:

1. There will be no compensating of FTE by the Humanities Division to units that lose FTE through such transfers or joint appointments (this should be taken into account when assessing the impact of an FTE transfer out of the unit or a joint appointment).
2. All transfers and joint appointments must demonstrate responsibility to the curricular needs of the division (this must be addressed when assessing the impact of FTE transfers into and out of units).
3. All transfer agreements and joint appointments should demonstrate a teaching commitment of no less than two undergraduate courses per year with a total estimated student enrollment per academic year on a four-course load of at least 150 students.
4. Transfers into or affiliations with units offering graduate programs must also document a commitment to the individual teaching, mentoring and advising of graduate students.

WRITING

A number of questions were raised by ATFR regarding the organization and future of the Writing program. These concerns are less budgetary than administrative in nature, especially as regards both inefficiencies and inequities produced by the hybrid approach.
to lower-division writing, with different allocation models, compensation and assignment protocols across the Writing Program and the College core courses. I have begun conversations with VPDUE Ladusaw to explore the possibility of a coherent, overarching administrative structure than can administer and support a robust lower-division writing curriculum with clarity, efficiency and an emphasis on excellence in learning outcomes. And while I believe we can achieve such an improvement, this should be understood as a good on its own merits, not as a cost-saving measure.

LANGUAGES

Finally, much of the ATFR and responses express concerns about the future of the Language Program, which is the division’s most vulnerable unit for at least three reasons: 1) it is mainly staffed by non-senate faculty, whose contract allows for layoffs and reductions in time; 2) the lack of either a major or campus language requirement which would make curricular support not just desirable but indispensable; 3) documentation that indicates less than 50% of students enrolled in language courses need the course to meet a requirement in their major field of study. Such vulnerabilities should not and, in my view, do not translate into a lessening of the division’s commitment to support and enhance high-quality language instruction on the campus. Nonetheless, these vulnerabilities indicate where the division would be forced to disinvest in the eventuality of continued severe budget reductions. Whence the need to maintain the current divisional liquidity obtained by recent retirements and separations as per my previously stated decision not to reallocate them in the near term to the originating departments. We have a reprieve but it may be temporary and should not be unadvisedly squandered.

With regards to the Language Program, now is the time for serious reflection on the exact depth and breadth of languages offered and on the relation of those languages to existing major programs of instruction. I am especially keen on creative strategies to integrate lower and upper-division instruction in foreign languages in ways that are both friendlier and more transparent to students and more effective in the use of our limited faculty resources.

One major issue raised by ATFR concerns language curricula taught by only a single instructor, especially when there are no opportunities for the student to major in that language, or even to pursue the study of that language at the upper-division level. This is a situation that is fair neither to our students nor to the instructor. In my view, we should either teach a subject matter well, or not at all. Ideally, there should always be a minimum of two instructors in any given area of language study. And there should be some kind of upper-division set of opportunities for students to employ their language learning in intellectually productive and satisfying ways. The two most vulnerable languages in this regard are Portuguese and Russian, which despite their small stature on our campus are major world languages with a rich literary and cultural legacy. I am committed to maintain the current level of support for those languages for the next three years, i.e. through 2012-13. However, by the spring of 2012, I want to see an improvement to the curricular situation described above. To wit, I challenge the Language Program to reassess its current distribution of languages, with a view either to strengthen or to eliminate these languages. Secondly, I challenge departments with an
intellectual relation to these languages and who wish to see them preserved to prioritize course offerings and potential hires in areas that would strengthen the need for these particular languages (Russian and/or Luso-Brazilian history, literature, linguistics, culture, art, music, cinema, theatre, politics, economics, sociology, environmental studies, ethnography, etc.). I also look to the guidance of the external review process for the Languages Program, scheduled for this coming academic year, to help address these issues and to move the program forward, hopefully to department status, as so many have wished over the years.

In closing, I look forward to the continuation of the reconstitution process and appreciate the input of so many who have contributed so far to a serious reflection on our future in a time and place that could not be more sobering but that is also not without opportunity and adventure.

Yours,

Georges Van Den Abbeele,  
Dean, Humanities Division

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