

Special Meeting of Senate Minutes

May 16, 2014
CE-339

Chair, D. Lionais, called the meeting to order at 1:37 pm.

1. Roll Call

Present:

Hosam Al-Arabi, Eleanor Anderson, Ed Barre, Debbie Brennick, Dannie Brown, Geoff Carre, George Chen, Jane Connell, Ed Davis, Godwin D'Cunha, Nichole Dixon, Brandon Ellis, Barb Glassey, Louis Guimond, Derrick Hayes, Mike Henick, Sarah Hines, Mary Keating, Dale Keefe, Jane Lewis, Doug Lionais, Gordon MacInnis, Mitch Mader-Ramsey, Alexis Manley, David McCorquodale, Martin Moy, Joe Parish, Andrew Petrie, Andy Parnaby, Sheila Profit, Joanne Pyke, Wei Shang, Mike Tanchak, Tom Urbaniak, David Wheeler, Tuma Young, Eileen Smith-Pioevsan, Shawn Bethke

Regrets:

Stephen Augustine, Robert Bailey, Judy Bailey, Keith Brown, Robert Campbell, Odette Griscti, Rany Ibrahim, George Karaphillis, Scott Moir, Jeana Wilson

Absent:

Maureen Finlayson, Cyril MacDonald, Scott Stewart, Ammar Tayab

2. Discussions

Chair, D. Lionais referred to the Cape Breton University Strategy 2014-2019 document circulated to members in advance of the meeting. This document has been in development over the last number months and was most recently endorsed by the Board of Governors during their April meeting. The document was described as a living document which is open for discussion and input from Senate.

President Wheeler referred to the process from which this document resulted, is now the basis on which CBU can use to gauge the topics covered within. Pages eleven and twelve were referred to as the steps to follow, or a road map, in the decision making to achieve the goals. The floor was then opened for discussion, questions, comments, or suggestions.

From his colleagues in the SSOB, D. Hayes advised that many felt that because this document has already been approved by the Board of Governors, their input would be moot at this point. Another common remark surrounded local students being drawn to off island institutions and questions as to why. The document did not refer to any consultations with parents and student so there is a concern that CBU may not be offering what student want to study.

President Wheeler replied that as the Chair mentioned in his opening statement, that this document will be one that will evolve and is living, and assurances were offered that any and all input received will be taken under advisement and updated as necessary.

With regard to local students being drawn to off island institutions, President Wheeler replied there is no evidence supporting that CBU has lost out disproportionately in enrolments compared to other Nova Scotia universities. The decline has resulted in the overall decline in the graduating numbers from high schools.

Programming is another piece of the strategy document that is being reviewed to ensure we are offering what current and future students want and need. This does not necessarily mean programs will change rather they will be refreshed or innovated to improve their efficiencies and marketability.

G. Chen offered comments from colleagues on what was felt to be an inadequacy in budgetary allowances for the tenure track teaching and research when compared to the allowance for administration and recruitment. He also offered comments against institutional norms for research. Because the term research can be very broad, his colleagues feel it would be very difficult and unfair to some, to establish research norms.

President Wheeler replied that teaching assumptions, and other areas, must be held back due to the constraints of inflation. He further added that he believes that the flexibility currently exists within department to ensure a complimentary mix of teaching and research capabilities and capacities. In reply to the recruitment and marketing budget, President Wheeler replied that these areas are massively underfunded and without an investment to them, an unavoidable decline in student numbers will occur.

In reply to comments offered on research norms, President Wheeler described norms as a sense of what is fair and what a research active faculty member looks like within the parameters set out in the collective agreement. Benchmarks in Dean Keefe's paper clearly demonstrate that CBU is not doing as well with respect to research as we can or should be. D. Keefe added that one standard benchmark is not the intent but rather a wide range of what research activity looks like by department is the target.

M. Henick referenced a suggestion of reducing offerings with low enrolments and requested a definition of a low enrolment number. He also questioned if there is a concern that increased class sizes would project negatively on CBU's claim of small class sizes. Although not noted in the document, a question on the reasoning for an increase to tuition\fees was requested and if this increase should be expected each year.

President Wheeler replied that class sizes will be an area for the school Deans to review. In some cases classes may have only ten or even five students. Recent literature reports that classes of this size may have a negative impact due to the lack of rich conversation and peer learning.

Mr. MacInnis responded that a 3% increase to tuition was approved by the Board of Governors during the April meeting. This increase was explained as a necessity due to universities in Nova Scotia continuing to operate in a regulated tuition environment and evidence suggests these increases may continue while operating in this environment. Mr. MacInnis also noted two of the suggestions from the O'Neil Report were to deregulate the tuition environment and that grant levels be indexed by some measure. Neither of these options was implemented by government at that time but student members were encouraged to review this report in full.

President Wheeler reassured student member concerns that this document and the proposals contained in it are not intended to impact students negatively, rather to ensure students are getting the best value for their tuition dollars. Dedication to student success remains a priority and efforts to better life chances for students, as and identified goal of this strategy through innovative thinking.

Referring to page nine which speaks of core and non-core cost, A. Parnaby requested a definition of non-core costs with specific examples.

President Wheeler replied that a very narrow definition of core costs would be teaching and research leaving non-core costs to be anything outside these two areas. Non-core costs are no less important or valuable to CBU, they are simply not directly related to teaching or research and should the financial situation tighten in the future the non-core costs could require alternative funding models. In follow up, A. Parnaby noted that some areas identified as non-core seem to exist mainly in the School of Arts and Social Sciences and questioned the equality of these possible cuts. President Wheeler replied these costs were not identified as possible cuts but rather as areas that may require alternate resource flows that are just and fair. The social institutions identified are all areas of great pride to CBU and identified in this document as non-core, only because they are not directly linked to teaching or research.

G. Chen suggested that cooperative internship programs should be offered to provide working experience for students.

President Wheeler agreed with this suggestion and noted that the government is also very interested in this and is an avenue that could provide the alternate funding referred to in the strategy document. Proposals for these programs are encouraged and would be most welcomed. M. Henick supported this suggestion noting it could also aid in retention of students.

Referring to the 2014 Plan and the noted strategy to finalise new bilateral compact with the Province and respond to outcomes of Provincial discussions on tuition fees, A. Petrie questioned if this includes the recent elimination of the Graduate Retention Rebate program.

President Wheeler replied this unfortunate decision by government is being viewed as a poor budget choice and he fully supports Students Nova Scotia's view on the elimination of this program. A strategy has been identified to address this topic and student members were reassured that the current government's rhetoric does seem to have a more positive view of the university sector.

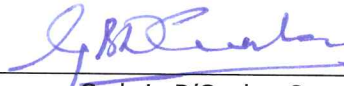
M. Keating cautioned, and President Wheeler agreed, that synergies be identified in how targets for individual departments could inadvertently impact another and that the strategy be viewed as a go forward for CBU as a whole.

Referring to the systemic underfunding by government and the recommended attempts to innovate around this issue, D. Lionais asked if the long term goals are achievable should the underfunding continue.

President Wheeler replied that this issue will have to be addressed through the recommended attempts; however a fundamental change in provincial politics is absolutely necessary.

Adjournment

With no further questions or comments the meeting was adjourned at 3:37 pm.



Godwin D'Cunha, Secretary