

Planning and Finance Committee
Report to the UALR Faculty Senate
March 13, 2015

Background:

Recognizing that the responsibility for the budgetary and planning process rests with the Chancellor and administration, the Planning and Finance Committee has as part of its informational and advisory charge to assist in these areas by reviewing proposed plans that have an impact on the academic mission of the University, such as revenues and revenue projections, budgets and budget projections, and the relationship of academic and capital planning to finance and budget matters.

During the fall semester the committee met with Chancellor Anderson to gain an understanding of the current financial challenges facing the campus and to discuss appropriate ways for the committee to be responsive and timely in implementing its charge. Provost Toro provided to the committee the process and questions she used to begin the academic planning process she implemented during the fall. In early December and then again during this spring semester, the Provost shared preliminary data summaries, dashboards and recommendations from the college deans that she received in response to her questions and meetings with the department chairs and deans. In addition, she shared the summer school and workload policy memo that was distributed on January 27, 2015.

As a result of conversations between the committee and the Provost, the following agreements were reached.

On the policy regarding establishment of a summer school salary break-even for faculty compensation including fringes, it was agreed that the break-even point would be averaged across departments and not individuals.

Committee members questioned the use of “trends” on the dashboards since in some categories the data were not evaluated over a period of time. Additionally, members were interested in working to assure accuracy of the data used to develop the dashboards while agreeing that the dashboard concept can become a useful tool in the future. The Provost agreed to provide access to the data so that accuracy could be assured and to review the reference to trends, but she indicated that the dashboards would not be used in formulating recommendations for this year’s proposed budget reductions. She offered to share her recommendations with the committee as soon as they were available. The draft of the Provost’s recommendations for realigning resources was shared with the committee at the same time it was shared with the campus community on Friday, March 6.

Committee engagement with the Provost's report:

Two meetings have been held during week of March 9, 2015. As a result of these meetings the following plan has emerged.

- Recognizing the importance of a rapid response to proposed budget reductions, the committee plans to separate its recommendations on the specific dollar reductions proposed (short term changes) from those proposals that are more focused on academic / curricular modifications (long term changes).
- At the time of the meetings on 3/9 and 3/10, a strong concern about the lack of adequate time for providing thoughtful responses was voiced. The Provost has responded to these concerns, expressed also by many other campus groups, and provided an extension for comments until April 3.
- For each of the specific budget reductions, including those that are listed as college specific, the committee will provide its recommendation.
- For each of the twenty general recommendations from the academic planning process document, the committee will provide its assessment of the recommendation. These recommendations will include both comments and an assigned evaluation category analogous to the dashboard concept (group 1 suggesting agreement with little question, group 2 needing some additional clarification or adjustment and a third group that the committee believes warrants additional information or requires modification). The committee may add additional recommendations as well.
- The committee acknowledges the need to make significant reductions and realignments in budget allocations for the coming fiscal year. At the same time it believes that such decisions must also be based on academic benefits and that faculty engagement at the department / unit level is important to assuring long term stability.
- The committee will continue to meet to develop its recommendations and share its draft report with the faculty as quickly as possible and prior to the Provost's revised comment deadline.
- To propose suggestions or seek additional information, senators and other faculty are encouraged to contact their college representatives or any committee member.

Submitted by Rosalie Cheatham, chair, Planning and Finance Committee