

Convocation
8-18-09

Good morning. Welcome back. I don't know about you but the summer went by way too fast for me.

This is going to be a challenging year for us. The major issues facing Academic Affairs, and the University, are familiar to most of you. They are academic program prioritization, budget-reduction planning, reaccreditation and the institutional change process the President initiated last year.

Budget reduction planning: We are going to spend a lot of time talking about budgets this year and because of that I'm not going to discuss particulars. I do want to discuss process. I am convinced that if we collaborate across divisions, departments and constituencies and coordinate our efforts in planning for these reductions we can minimize the impact on our students and maintain much of what makes Humboldt such a good university. We will come out of this a strong and competitive institution. On the other hand, I am equally convinced that if we choose to engage in an internal budget war, which pits divisions, departments and constituencies against one other, we will be much less likely to minimize the damage to students and to this university.

It has become clear to me that we do not have a viable fiscal model to sustain our operations. Our cost per student is too high and even though we are going to reduce the number of students next year that does not solve our problem. HSU is trying to offer too many programs, options, courses and services, many of which are too costly. We have to decide what we are and are not going to do and how much we are willing to spend doing them. This means that we are going to have to reduce or eliminate some programs and services and that we are going to have to reduce the cost of others.

That brings me to academic program prioritization. Like much of the rest of the University, we in Academic Affairs have been trying to do too much with the resources we have and we needed a process to help us set priorities. Through academic program prioritization we developed a set of evaluative criteria that sorted programs into five categories: those

we should enhance, those we should maintain, those we should review, those we should reduce or eliminate and those we should watch.

The idea was to use resources saved from programs in the bottom categories to reinvest in programs in the top categories – to build on our strengths and to focus our efforts. The economic crisis has changed part of that strategy. We will have to focus more attention on those programs to be reviewed, reduced or eliminated or watched and rather than reinvest those dollars we will put them toward our base budget reduction. Prioritization will play an important role in determining the mix and level of support of academic programs going forward. All programs, regardless of their prioritization category, will be examined for efficiencies in projects like the benchmarking process I have asked the deans to undertake.

We are now entering the final stage of academic program prioritization and are awaiting responses from departments and deans to the recommendations made by the committee and by me. By the beginning of spring semester we should be able to begin implementing the results of that process. I suspect some of you feel academic programs have been unfairly singled out in the prioritization process. Don't. We are reviewing all support services as well, although they are more difficult to prioritize across divisions using a common set of standards.

Reaccreditation. Professor Greg Crawford is going to give us an update on our progress and the remaining timeline so I'm going to leave the details to him. I do want to say that I believe we are making significant progress on some of those details and that I appreciate all the work you have put into this effort. It has been substantial. However, I believe we are still struggling with some of the larger, institutional-capacity issues that concerned WASC. We have a long history of fragmented and decentralized decision making on this campus. Rather than collaborate and coordinate our efforts in reaching decisions about resource allocation around a shared vision we seem to prefer to compete at all levels for those resources with different visions of what we want to accomplish. Naturally this leads to a lot of quarreling, figure pointing, posturing and others sorts of divisive and unproductive behaviors that are all too familiar.

That brings me to the institutional change process the President, in consultation with faculty and staff, initiated last fall and the Cabinet, which is trying to lead that process. The Cabinet is focusing on five key areas: Vision, Student Success, Governance, Collegiality and Evidence-Based Decision Making. Taken as a whole, I believe they represent WASC's concerns about our ability to make decisions as a university with a unified vision rather than individually as groups of loosely affiliated departments with competing and often incompatible interests. By the end of fall semester we hope to have recommendations in all five areas.

There is no question that we can find solutions in all of these key areas of institutional change. There is no question that Humboldt has the people and the resources to weather this fiscal storm and to come out of it as a more focused, competitive institution. The question is whether we have the will to adopt those solutions and to work together to see them through. In order to do so, we have to manage disagreements in ways that let us move forward even in the absence of consensus, rather than leaving us paralyzed. We have to move beyond the vested interests of divisions, departments and constituencies that have kept us from collaborating in the past. We have to agree to work as allies who have different roles, areas of expertise and responsibilities but are united in pursuit of common goals rather than as enemies trying to defeat one another.

The budget crisis, WASC's criticisms and the tensions outlined in the Keeling report provide us with a unique opportunity and a powerful incentive to change how we do business. The President and I are willing to make those changes. I sincerely hope others are as well.

Thank you.

And now, I would like to introduce Greg Crawford, Professor of Oceanography who with Jená Burges, over Vice Provost, has led our WASC reaccreditation effort.