

Minutes

Senate/Faculty Consultative Committees July 23, 1991

Present: Thomas Scott (chair), Mario Bognanno, Amos Deinard, Judith Garrard, Michael Handberg, Norman Kerr, Stanford Lehmborg, Burton Shapiro, Shirley Zimmerman

Guest: Senior Vice President and Provost E. F. Infante

Professor Scott opened the meeting by announcing that there would be a short Senate Consultative Committee meeting and then a closed meeting of the Faculty Consultative Committee to discuss personnel issues. He welcomed Dr. Infante to the meeting and explained that Dr. Infante had requested the opportunity to meet with the Committee.

Dr. Infante began by telling the Committee that he wanted to introduce himself and to establish as quickly as possible a good working relationship with it. He also solicited advice on how the interactions should take place.

Dr. Infante also outlined some of the things that will take place over the next two months. Some things will be occurring very rapidly, according to the President's schedule. He also elaborated on his own views of the situation in which the University finds itself.

The sky is not falling, he told the Committee, but the University does confront a series of difficult decisions and circumstances--a situation which will continue for the next three or four years. Last week Governor Carlson made it clear, Dr. Infante said, that it will be necessary to cut another \$300 million from the State budget next year. The University will be dealing with financial circumstances which will be difficult.

The University, this year, has a shortfall of at least \$15 million. After careful computation, however, one must conclude that the shortfall actually approaches \$30 million--out of a total O & M budget of \$600 million. This is in addition to the problem of no increase in compensation for faculty and staff.

Negotiations are now being conducted with unionized employees. The shortfall could be compounded by labor agreements; the State, for instance, recently agreed to 2.5% increases for bargaining employees for each year of the biennium.

Dr. Infante reflected, however, that he is an optimist in the sense that if the administration and the faculty take the long range view about what kind of strong university this University should be in the next century, and take appropriate action in that direction, he has faith that that strength can be attained. The fate of the University is in its own hands, he declared. He expressed disappointment at the topics raised by the Governor in their last conversation: graduation rates, faculty teaching loads, recruits for the basketball team, and his (Infante's) arrogance in response to the Governor's vetoes.

It would be a terrible mistake, he told the Committee, to take the viewpoint that the University cannot deal--in an effective and efficient manner--with its future.

He has been in office only a week, he observed, and has in that time been disappointed at some of the things that have crossed his desk. In particular he has been disappointed in the results of some recent and still-unresolved searches for senior administrators. He noted that matters concerning the appointment of Dean Bruininks occupied much of his time during his first week in office. He expressed regret that as a consequence he has been unable to spend more time learning about the rest of the University (beyond I.T.) and said he will do so with all deliberate speed.

Dr. Infante next told the Committee that many people in Morrill Hall are engaged in planning in order to deal with the budget shortfall. No specifics have yet been developed, but there has been developed a good understanding of what the shortfall will be (depending on how one looks at it). He and his colleagues in Academic Affairs have agreed on the premise that they will not just fix this year's problem or next year's problem; they want to be sure that it is on the right course for the long term. The University will be here in 50 and 100 years; the last thing they want to do is fix problems for one year, only to be confronted by the same problem in the future. Nor do they want to rely on temporary solutions which are not in the long-term best interests of the University.

Finally, he told the Committee, he has become convinced that the University, for the past 10 - 15 years, has been "eating its physical capital"--it has not been making the investments in its buildings and facilities to sustain them. He said he wants this taken seriously into consideration as part of the planning being done in Academic Affairs. To continue this practice of neglect will be very counter-productive for the long-term health of the University.

He would not have agreed to serve in the position, he said, unless he had a great deal of faith that the University will go forward--because it is a strong university. He has been approached for other positions at other places, he recalled, and when he has thought about it, he has failed to think of another place he would rather be than at Minnesota. Between all of us--and especially those charged with the responsibility--if the work is done well, and the community understands what will and will not happen, he has no doubt whatsoever that this will in the next 15 and 20 years this will be a great and strong university.

Dr. Infante was asked how he would have done things differently, in the last 15 years, in terms of spending money on the physical plant. He said it will be important for the University, as soon as possible, to devote between 1 and 2% of its budget--on a constant basis--to keep up the physical facilities. This would amount to \$20 or \$25 million per year. He reported that he and Senior Vice President Erickson had spent three hours walking through some of the worst parts of the campus.

Had the money been set aside, it was noted, the funds would not have been available for other uses, such as salaries or new hires. There must be a balance, Dr. Infante said. The commitment to the physical plant has been approximately \$7 million per year, but should have been much more.

Dr. Infante was asked to elaborate on his disappointment with the searches. It was not the Education Dean search in particular; he is in the process of cancelling two other searches. Searches have not produced what was desired. He said he was also crestfallen that after two and one-half years there is still no Vice President for the Health Sciences.

Another Committee member said there is considerable concern about the policy issues

surrounding the appointment of a Chief Information Officer (CIO). There is no permanent leadership in the management of computers; what is his vision of what the "computing environment" should be? The current acting CIO will not continue in the position; instead, two people will assume the responsibilities, one at the 5% level and one at the 95% level. He also does not intend to re-open the search until the Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School is appointed, because he sees a possible intimate relationship between the two positions.

Concern was expressed about the relationship between the Supercomputer Institute and the rest of the "computing environment," e.g., will funds be taken away from the "mainframe distributive computing environment" and channeled to the Supercomputer Institute? Dr. Infante said he has not done the homework in this area that will be required before a decision can be made, but he told the Committee that he has always held the view that there should be a central facility that provides computation capabilities and that it should be designed so that it has the highest performance/price ratio. A high level of economy should obtain in order to put the maximum amount of resources and know-how into the micro and workstation networking facilities. The University is far behind its peer institutions in eliminating much of the paper which flows around it --and the reason is because it does not have the networking and micro-computing capabilities. On the other hand, he said, he has always had the feeling that the University is not obtaining the desired level of efficiency in order to invest in that realm; there are a number of antiquated mid-range machines in various units which are not operated in a fashion which deliver the price/performance ratio which is necessary. As a result, the micro groups and networking groups are five years behind a place like Michigan.

Faculty with research budgets and large data sets only use the mainframes for downloading and file-serving; many faculty have moved to micros. There is concern, Dr. Infante was told, that there will not be an environment conducive to research if the funds are sent to the Supercomputer Institute. Dr. Infante said there is good reason to be concerned, but it would demonstrate a "high level of stupidity" for the University to make it impossible for the faculty to do their work in an optimum fashion.

The appointment of a new CIO, he said in response to a question, is perhaps four or five months off.

Dr. Infante was asked about the union negotiations: Would it not lead to serious problems for non-unionized faculty and staff if a union can negotiate increases? He agreed that it would. That is one reason for the University's very high level of concern about the negotiations. The impact on the budgets is another; once the first settlement is reached, it will become a base from which all others will go up. It was pointed out by another Committee member, however, that the unions and the State agreed that the 2.5% increases will be a "lay-off settlement": the increase comes at the cost of jobs.

In light of the serious budget shortfall, one Committee member inquired, is there any prospect of cutting back on the reallocation plans? If the University goes ahead with the full reallocation, it is telling the Governor "we were able to afford all those cuts anyhow." How can the University let him know that it is hurting?

Dr. Infante said that we must address the problem ourselves, independent of the Governor and

legislature. The most damaging thing that the University could do is to sit still--because others are running. He told the Committee that in the past week he has caught himself looking up and thinking "Oh Lord, please send the Holy Spirit down to this new Provost, with a little bit of wisdom but with a lot of cash." It isn't working, he confessed. He said he believes that the period through which the University will go--as will a large number of its peer institutions--should include not making the same mistakes that some of those peer institutions will make. The University, as a result, will come out advanced and having taken advantage of other people's mistakes by not making them itself.

Dr. Infante related that his colleagues in the School of Management always tell him that periods like these can in many ways also represent opportunities which can be worked to advantage. He would like to forego such opportunities, but the University must face it. He does not like the idea of viewing the shortfall in the context of budget-cutting; he views it as a further increase in reallocation. It is inevitable that this be done if there is any concern about what the University will be like not in a year or two but in 20 years.

These problems will recur for the next two or three years, Dr. Infante repeated. He predicted, moreover, that in real terms higher education in the United States will be lucky if it does not lose more than 2 or 3% over the next four or five years. Higher education used to be at the front of societal concerns; that is no longer true. Health care and K-12 education have become the primary social concerns. These will not be easy times, he observed, but an institution like the University of Minnesota can continue to be strong and move forward. There is no doubt it should strive to be better, but it is not in the cards for the University to be bigger. "Bigger is not better; better is better."

Dr. Infante reiterated that he intends, as part of the planning process, to take the long view. In reviewing the budgetary history of the University for the past 15 years, he concluded that it has constantly gone forward on the basis of "gee, we're having problems now, but the next biennium is going to be great."

It should not be thought that the question about reallocation meant not moving ahead, Dr. Infante was told; perhaps the University should simply move less speedily ahead. Dr. Infante responded that "I would suggest to you that maybe the thing for us to do is to go ahead with double the speed." That will be acceptable as long as he is aware of the potential wreckage, it was said; Dr. Infante said there will be no wreckage; there will be no "slash and burn." While institutions like Minnesota are "fantastically robust," at the same time their excellence is extremely fragile. The last thing to be done is to damage that excellence--but he said he does not want to continue the policy of believing that tomorrow will be a lot better than today.

Dr. Infante concluded by asserting his optimism and pointing out that "this is a great institution."

At this point Professor Scott adjourned the SCC meeting. The Faculty Consultative Committee met in executive session to take up personnel matters. The Committee members discussed with Dr. Infante the status of various searches for administrative positions. Considerable concern was expressed, both by Dr. Infante and by Committee members, about the conduct of searches. Among the problems identified are the numbers and quality of finalists, the failure of the University to actively recruit individuals, and the size and logistics of search committees. Also a concern was the

appropriateness of the concept of "representation" when it comes to appointing search committees.

It was agreed that the Committee would seek a meeting with Dr. Infante and President Hasselmo to discuss these issues.

The Committee also agreed that it should serve as the body to meet with the President and Dr. Infante to discuss the budget cuts and reallocation that will be necessary.

The Committee adjourned at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand