Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, February 15, 2007
12:00 – 2:15
N204 Mondale Hall

Present: Carol Chomsky, (chair), Gary Balas, Jean Bauer, Nancy Carpenter, William Durfee, Megan Gunnar, Emily Hoover, Mary Jo Kane, Scott Lanyon, Judith Martin, Richard McCormick, Steven Ruggles, Martin Sampson, Geoffrey Sirc, John Sullivan, Jennifer Windsor

Absent: Barbara Elliott, Kathleen Krichbaum, Nelson Rhodus

Guests: Vice President Karen Himle

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) legislative liaison report; (2) discussion with new vice president Karen Himle about communications and related issues; (3) committee business]

1. Legislative Liaison Report

Professor Chomsky convened the meeting at 12:10 and asked Professor Sampson, the faculty legislative liaison, to discuss the situation at the Capitol

One point that came up in the discussion was the risk, in some states, of public universities becoming mostly private because of the lack of state support.

2. Discussion with Vice President Himle

Professor Chomsky now welcomed Karen Himle, the new Vice President for University Relations.

Vice President Himle said she was delighted to be at the University. She has never worked in higher education although she has been involved with the University as a volunteer (the HHH Institute dean search, the new media task force under former President Yudof and Dean Rosenstone).. She began on January 9, coming out of semi-retirement after a long career in corporate America, the longest part of which was at The St. Paul Companies. She was trained as a lawyer, is also a farmer, has worked in state government, as a lobbyist, and finally in government/public relations/community affairs at The St. Paul Companies.

Ms. Himle said she had a couple of observations after being on the job for a month. First, she would never again say about the University that "it's too big" because that is a block to getting inside it. If she is to be the bridge between the University and the business/outside community, she'll never say it's too big; it's the right size or it's not big enough. Second, the view in the business community is that one can never get a decision from the University (which implies that it is inefficient). That is not true; she said she

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has seen solid decisions being made every day, and perhaps the business community could learn from the solid decision-making at the University. When former Regent Perlman stepped down from the Board, he said the University is not a business, it should not be run like a business, and to do so would destroy it. Ms. Himle said she agreed.

Ms. Himle said this was a unique opportunity for her because she has a business and civic organization background: She can provide voice on behalf of the University to people who have not heard it. It is difficult for those whose only experience at the University was as a student to understand its dynamics.

She has much to learn, she said, and she will look to the Committee to help teach her. Her only job, she said, is to be the best possible advocate for the University, including at the legislature. Legislators, she said, are proxies for the University's "investors," the people of the state. She said she has an obligation to make the University understood by its investors. She said she did not want to see happen here what has happened in states where the decline in public support has nearly made the public research universities private; she said she finds that frightening.

Professor Martin made two points. First, for those who have been involved in governance for some time, it is apparent that the University is doing more and more reporting and responding to accountability measures. That is an exercise in frustration because the message is not getting through. The University is not top-heavy for an organization that has a $2.6-billion budget. It would help if the legislative and business communities were made aware the University does have accountability measures and that it has been analyzed to death. Second, it is easy for the University to help the business and legislative communities understand research, especially when it involves a patent that can translate into a business. For those in the liberal arts and other areas where one does not obtain patents, where people ask why obtain a social science degree at the University rather than MNSCU or elsewhere, there is a need for the story to be about more than visible economic drivers. The story about the core of the University is more complicated than one about patents and business and it is difficult to get people to understand that the core and the visible economic drivers are intertwined.

On the second point, Ms. Himle related that she had been in a meeting about research with four disciplines represented and was struck that an independent legislative observer said that it took five people to describe what one person could have. Her response was to ask why anyone would want the University to be populated by generalists. One wants depth in education and research—and there is no benefit to interdisciplinary research if there is no depth in the disciplines because "there's no there there." Those in the business community believe a generalist can do anything and solve any problem—and that that is more efficient.

In terms of accountability, people are quick to apply a financial accountability methodology to an institution (the University) where they should not. There are different ways to talk about performance and success—and they are just that, different. One does not measure the performance of a surgeon by the finances of the suture. She wants a well-paid doctor because he or she is more likely to be happy and produce higher patient satisfaction. By the same token, faculty salaries are important. She said she would like to avoid the privatization of the University, and is prepared to say that if the legislature and business communities force too much government and business accountability on the University, they will end up with a result they do not want.

Translating the role of a public research university is not unique to Minnesota, Professor Windsor observed; what is it about this university that makes the business community think it is slow at decision-making and filled with generalists Ms. Himle said she didn't believe the problem had anything to do with this university. Minnesota has an abundance of higher education but people seem not to discern between the levels; proximity can become more important than excellence, which detracts from the ability of the state to achieve excellence. There is need for more focus. There is a long history of understanding of the importance of higher education in the state; the question is "how much is too much?"

Professor Balas asked Ms. Himle what her portfolio includes. It includes government relations (federal and state), community relations, marketing and branding, the news service, course catalogues, the annual report, the University's home page, and M magazine. She does not handle communications for the President but does work with his office on them. Professor Balas said he was interested in government relations: the University does not have a person in Washington who EDUCATES legislators. Will she pursue that possibility? Professor Sullivan noted the University does have a lobbyist who works with Congress; Professor Balas said he was talking about someone who educates, not lobbies. The University does not have street-smart political operatives who can find out what's going on and what's coming down the pipeline.

Ms. Himle agreed the University has no one full-time and resident in Washington; the question is what could be achieved if the University had a representative embedded there. She said does not know yet what the University's national affiliations are, what lobbying groups it belongs to, and she needs to identify the ones that are most effective. She also wants to see what other successful universities are doing. It is fair to ask what could be gained.

Professor Lanyon told Ms. Himle that this Committee has discussed the disconnect between the goal of becoming one of the top three public universities and the fact that a top research university excels in teaching, research, and service. The quick interpretation of the University's goal is that it will excel in research. Professor Martin said she has asked the President to talk about teaching, too.

Professor Gunnar said a research university is very different from a non-research university or a corporation because when one talks to faculty at a place like Minnesota, their primary identification is with the discipline or the department, not other people at the University. She said she spends most of her time every day discussing ideas with people not here, and that has a profound effect on teaching—because what is taught is what people are thinking about, not what has already been published in the book or journal. She asked Ms. Himle if that was that different from her idea of a university. It is not, Ms. Himle said. Two years with Children's Hospital helped her understand: not all of the physicians practicing at the hospital supported institutional goals, but the best and the brightest do not want to affiliate with a mediocre organization; excellence is a draw. The public does not view the University that way, Professor Gunnar said, so they fail to see its strength. The University is sometimes seen as too arrogant to be loyal to the community, Professor McCormick added.

Ms. Himle said these comments indicate part of the challenge of meeting the top-three goal. At the same time, one of the reasons that December had the highest amount of private funds ever given to the University is because of the top-three goal. People want to donate to excellence. She agreed that there should be more effort to establish a shared understanding of the "top three" goal. The University should not abandon the quest for excellence in education.

Professor Chomsky observed that sometimes the messages intended for the external community are also heard inside the University, and can mean something different to the internal audience.

Professor Chomsky asked Ms. Himle to discuss the internal communications audit. Ms. Himle said that a number of people have talked about developing internal communication tools. Communication means many things and it isn't possible to make everyone happy, but it is possible to measure what people are hearing. There is an audit underway to learn what people are hearing, what disturbs them, what vehicles are effective, in order to get a baseline and then develop a plan to communicate more effectively. (One faculty member expressed remorse that the "orange sheet" disappeared--BRIEF.) In the quest to fully use electronic communication, the institution communicates less effectively than it did before. There is no way, with email, to tell what is important and what is not, what is timely and what is not. She has learned that no one calls any more, everything is email—and everyone seems to use "reply all." It is not clear how many read an electronic BRIEF, and it may come back in paper form unless the audit indicates it is not needed.

Professor Martin agreed; she said that she used to receive a lot of paper that she would look at; now one must spend an entire day at the computer to read everything that comes. Professor Chomsky related that a public relations agency had sought faculty and staff for focus group sessions on communication; staff attended but the faculty sessions had to be cancelled. When she looked at the email from the agency, she realized it was something faculty would quickly delete. Ms. Himle said that communication must constantly be measured and that it cannot be static; doing so is hard work but it is not expensive.

Professor Martin said it would be helpful for Ms. Himle to know what has changed at the University in recent decades. Most faculty have no secretaries or clerical help; "we are all our own secretary." Faculty are expected to do more administrative work in the department (e.g., make their own copies, arrange their own travel).These changes are the results of cuts starting in the 1980s and they have changed the character of faculty work. Ms. Himle expressed dismay at the changes and said she appreciated being informed about them. In addition, Professor Chomsky said, there is less staff help and more compliance issues, more things one must read, fill in, agree to, take on-line. There is little time left for faculty to get their work done. Professor Lanyon said the situation might be summarized by a point he has made in earlier meetings: ten years ago, his graduate students wanted his job (professor); now they want to finish their degree and go to a liberal arts college. Professor Hoover said that the situation was different in agricultural disciplines.

Professor Kane said she has been suggesting to various members of University Relations that one important story to tell should draw on the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, to which a number of Committee members belong. It is not true that faculty are all doing research and are not in the classroom. What is different at the University, compared to liberal arts colleges, is that Academy members are not sharing other people's knowledge, they are sharing information that THEY produced. There should be spots on MPR with undergraduates saying how a faculty member changed their lives. Just because faculty do research does not mean they are not fabulous teachers; there is an intersection between teaching and research, not a wall between them. Ms. Himle agreed that the key to translation is story-telling, and that is her primary means of communication. That notion also speaks to the top-three goal; it is a metric, but it is also a perception. In some disciplines there are more numbers; in others, there are more perceptions. The very best can be communicated through both.

The University cannot truly achieve top-three status without more resources, Professor Windsor said. Is it part of her portfolio to convey how good the University is and that it needs more money to reach

its goal? It is, Ms. Himle said. The University is already good and worth the investment, which is why donors gave more recently. The message does not resonate well internally, Professor Windsor said because faculty have a different understanding of what it will take to get to the top, that is, that there will need to be changes to the status quo. Thus, the message about being in the top three seems to be more for the external community. That may be so, Ms. Himle said, but many who come to work at the University want that goal as well. Perhaps the problem with faculty emptying their own wastebaskets is they are then not available for student work, which means students complain to their parents, which means legislators receive negative messages, and the conclusion is the University is not worth the investment. It will be important to get parents to make the case for the University; she will also work with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce to help its members understand the University is not just a large organization spending tax dollars but is an important investment for the long term.

Professor Chomsky pointed out that most of the University's vice presidents (not the three senior vice presidents) have a connection with a governance committee, but she does not. How will it be possible to keep her connected to these kinds of conversations? Ms. Himle said she will rely on the Committee to guide her to the right connections. The Committee will know when something is important for her to understand and should inform her when she should be involved. Professor Bauer said that Ms. Himle should also feel free to ask to join the Committee whenever she wishes a faculty perspective.

Professor Kane commented that the new Big Ten TV arrangement will give the University a lot of opportunities to tell good stories. Ms. Himle agreed and pointed out that the channel will be on the air in August. Each Big Ten university will have 60 hours of non-athletic programming per year; the target audience is 18-35-year-old males. The goal is to have an academic element in the programming; she is exploring having the University produce its own programs (with a professional production house), with a professional cast talking about academic success stories in a way that would make people want to watch the next installment. This will require an investment of money and faculty time, and it needs to engage students.

Faculty would love to do this but there must be a carrot, Professor Balas said. They are asked to do a great deal, so it would help if there were funding for research or for their students. Some would do it without the carrot, but that is always the same group of faculty.

Professor Chomsky thanked Ms. Himle for joining the meeting.

3. Committee Business

The Committee approved unanimously the docket for the March 1 Faculty Senate meeting.

The Committee took up a resolution from the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs concerning the Governor's budget recommendation and its impact on faculty salaries. The Committee made a number of editorial changes and agreed to bring it to the Faculty Senate that afternoon as an item of new business.

Professor Chomsky adjourned the meeting at 2:15.

-- Gary Engstrand