

ACADEMIC REORGANIZATION

Executive Summary:

Aligning administrative structure and functional outcomes in universities is not trivial. In the most nimble environments, administrative structures change periodically in accordance with the skills of personnel and the changing needs of the organization. This has been the case in the past at Saint Louis University where the management structure and titles associated with senior management positions have changed. Currently, a new modification is being considered that would vest high level authority in a person at the Frost campus with a vice presidential title and would eliminate the title of Provost. This would align with the vice-presidential designation for the current leaders of the Health Sciences and Madrid campuses. The reasoning behind this idea and the details of the structure being considered will be described in the paragraphs that follow.

Background:

The goals of universities and most business corporations are quite different, but the management structures used to organize administrative activities are quite similar. The title vice president (VP) is used both in corporations and universities, and is a senior management rank. Modifiers such as executive VP, assistant VP, et cetera are used to further define the seniority and scope of a particular position. Similar hierarchy is used in association with the title of provost, which is found in universities but typically not in corporations. The position of provost is defined (Wikipedia and other on-line sources) as the senior administrator in the university involved with oversight of elements of particular interest to faculty including curriculum, pedagogy, research and academic personnel. In some universities, the VP designation is used to describe this same functional position. Other titles such as Chief Academic Officer, VP for Academic Affairs or VP for Education have been used.

At Saint Louis University there have been intervals when the provost title has not been used, including times within the 21-year term of Father Biondi as SLU President. In 1989, the title was re-activated with the appointment of Dr. Alice Hayes to the position. Approximately eight years ago, Dr. Joe Weixlmann assumed the title of Provost. He performed admirably in the position and is widely respected for his work, but over the years the university changed and the requirement to effectively provide oversight for the entire organization became more difficult. The President then began to reassess the organizational structure and considered how his leadership team might cope administratively with the increasing complexity.

A recent article on organizational complexity appeared in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ October 26, 2009), and provides insight into ways that large organizations cope with growing complexity. A number of the points raised in the article have relevance to SLU. The article defines some issues of complexity as *inherent* to an organization. SLU seems to have some of these inherent complexities, e.g., the need for broader and repeated communication to achieve engagement and transparency between the administration and faculty and many other stakeholders. Other types of organizational complexity are *imposed*, and these also seem to be growing at SLU. Examples include increased oversight and demand from governmental and private sector regulators such as the NCA, LCME, ACGME and numerous others. The ever-

escalating requirements for documentation, increased trustee oversight in difficult financial times, increased media scrutiny of activities and increased service demands from employees, faculty, students and the public also make an impact. The WSJ points out that a common solution to growing complexity and inefficiency is what is known as “channeling,” i.e., creating separate roles for dealing with components of the organization by sub-dividing managerial responsibility. The greater proximity of leadership to faculty and students would reduce the risk of limited oversight and align leadership expertise more closely with the academic and fiscal content of the relevant administrative units. In addition, by developing a structure in which a small number of such channeled high level administrators report directly to the President without an intervening level of management, the President’s ability to have the effective oversight required by the Board of Trustees is facilitated. For example, in 2008 Fr. Reale became the Rector of the Madrid campus and added the VP designation for Madrid to his Saint Louis title of VP for Mission and Ministry. Fr. Reale reports directly to the President and is a weekly presence and active contributor to the Executive Staff meetings through video conferencing from Madrid. In January 2009, the President also suggested that Dr. Alderson, then Dean of the School of Medicine, begin to oversee both the academic and operational aspects of the Health Sciences campus with the title of VP for Health Sciences. Dr. Weixlmann was the Provost at that time, and supported this action as an approach that would allow the Provost to direct most of his attention to issues at the increasingly complex Frost campus. In addition, this health sciences strategy was a tested and successful approach at many universities. A management structure that provides oversight of the health sciences campus (typically schools of nursing, allied health, public health and related centers) by the medical school dean is extant at over 60 of approximately 120 university medical centers in this country. The structure provides the opportunity to blend oversight of the academic issues cited earlier with operations and supports the successful integration of academic and fiduciary responsibilities. The idea to do this at the health sciences campus was discussed with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate and included a Senate-arranged open meeting with faculty from both campuses at which Dr. Alderson and Dr. Weixlmann were in attendance and answered questions about the structure. With the support of Dr. Weixlmann and the Senate, the VP for Health Sciences position became official February 1, 2009.

Despite an improved administrative structure and delegation of health sciences duties, within several months the President and Dr. Weixlmann agreed that Dr. Weixlmann would step down from the position of Provost. Given the success of administrative approaches that combine academic and fiscal accountability in a senior administrator at both the Madrid and Health Sciences campuses, the President reasoned that a similar approach would be useful at the Frost campus. A Frost campus VP, like the VP at Madrid and at Health Sciences, would report directly to the President, be the person to whom the Deans on that campus reported directly, and have academic and financial oversight of operations. A table of organization that reflects these responsibilities at the St. Louis campus is given in Figure 1.

The structure presented in Figure 1 was developed through communication with a number of groups, including the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, Deans and Provost Office staff. Primary concerns expressed about the administrative model have related to central functions that overlay the entirety of SLU. For example, how should the issues of tenure, grievances, enrollment management, libraries, and research be handled? The current table of

organization shows these as shared functions with the emphasis directed at the campus where the majority of that function exists. For example, enrollment management has a focus on recruitment of freshman undergraduate students rather than the professional students who make up the majority of the student body on the Health Sciences campus. Accordingly, the enrollment management function is connected by a solid line to Frost campus and a dotted line to the Health Sciences campus. On the other hand, because approximately 85% of externally funded research in SLU occurs on the Health Sciences campus, the research function is connected by a solid line to that side of the diagram and by a dotted line to the Frost campus side. This in no way indicates that research on the Frost campus would not be given the full attention of the office, but reflects the fact that there is more research and thus more work involving research issues on the Health Sciences campus. Libraries are more extensive on the Frost campus, so that line is solid to the Frost campus side of the table of organization. Grievances and tenure decisions would be handled on the respective campuses using currently existing guidelines unless conflicts of interest were involved.

Summary:

A change in the SLU administrative oversight structure is under consideration. In this model combined academic and fiscal responsibility for respective units of the University would be vested in vice presidential-level leaders who would report directly to the President. The title of provost would not be used and certain central overarching functions that were part of the administrative responsibility of the Provost office would be shared proportionately among subdivisions of the University. The vesting of the entirety of academic accountability in the single office of provost is not an invariant model among universities, nor has it been the consistent model at SLU. The new approach represents an attempt to align current organizational complexities with an appropriate management structure. There has been substantial faculty unrest about the concept. These concerns were vocalized at an open faculty meeting that occurred late in October 2009, with the outcome being that a description of the rationale for the changes would be provided to allow further faculty and Senate input into the decision. This document represents that summary.

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