ACADEMIC REORGANIZATION

Executive Summary:

Alignment of administrative structure and functional outcomes in universities is often difficult. In nimble environments, administrative structures change periodically in accordance with the skills of personnel and the changing needs of the organization. Currently, an administrative modification is being considered at SLU that would vest high level authority at the Frost campus in a person with a senior vice president (Sr. VP) title rather than the title of provost. This would parallel the current VP position at Health Sciences, which also would become a Sr. VP position. These two officers of the University, as the only people on the President’s Executive Staff with senior vice-presidential status, would elevate the visibility and importance of academic issues in the high level decision process of the University. The new approach also would create throughout the University a situation in which the highest level officer on each campus is close to and familiar with the details of the constituent Schools and Centers. This should result in more rapid and effective decision making for the benefit of students, faculty and staff. The new approach also aligns academic and fiduciary responsibilities more closely than in the past and serves to unify the campus through improved bi-campus committee representation. Details of the proposal follow.

Background:

The use of the title of Provost and the associated responsibilities vary between universities. 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. Accordingly, the President began to reassess the organizational structure and considered how his leadership team might better cope with increasing complexity while also delivering increased efficiency for SLU students, faculty and the community.

A recent article on organizational complexity appeared in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ October 26, 2009), and provides insight into ways that 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 such 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.” In this approach, separate roles for dealing with components of the organization are created by sub-dividing managerial responsibility. At SLU, greater familiarity of high level leadership with the academic pursuits and career paths of faculty and students will align leadership expertise more closely with the academic
content and fiscal structure of the relevant administrative units. This should result in a quicker and presumably better decision-making process for students, faculty and staff. 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. An example is Fr. Frank Reale’s work at the Madrid campus. In 2008 Fr. Reale became the Rector of the Madrid campus and reports directly to the President regarding Madrid academic issues and operations. He also is a weekly presence and active contributor to the Executive Staff meetings through video conferencing from the Madrid operation, which has improved considerably under Fr. Reale’s leadership. In January 2009, the President 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. This health sciences strategy is 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.

Several months later, when Dr. Weixlmann stepped down, the President noted the success of the VP model at both the Madrid and Health Sciences campuses, and felt that a similar approach would be useful at the Frost campus. When this was suggested initially, many concerns were expressed about how this administrative model related to the traditional concept of a provost, and how central core functions that overlay the entirety of SLU would be handled. For example, how should the issues of tenure, grievances, enrollment management, libraries and research be handled? The faculty unrest about the concept was vocalized at an open faculty meeting that occurred late in October 2009, with the outcome being a series of meetings between faculty and administrative representatives and several written re-drafts of the proposal that eventually resulted in the current recommendation. This included meetings with a Task Force appointed by the Faculty Senate to review and comment on the plans.

A diagram of the current proposal is provided in the attachment and indicates that oversight for core issues such as rank and tenure and the resolution of faculty grievances would occur on each of the respective campuses. It is important to relate consideration of rank, tenure, grievances, course offerings, curriculum and related decisions on the Health Sciences Campus as closely as possible to the current and rapidly changing world of health care. Accordingly, health sciences-based committees on credentials, rank, tenure, professional conduct, curriculum and so on would review health sciences academic issues and make recommendations to the Sr. VP for Health Sciences. Similar committees on the Frost campus would make their recommendations to the Sr. VP for Frost Campus.

Regarding high level committees, there would be only one CADD. CADD would be chaired by the Sr. VP for Frost campus and co-chaired by the Sr. VP for Health Sciences. The Sr. VP for Health
Sciences also would share with the Frost Sr. VP representation to both the Academic Affairs and Research committees of the Board of Trustees. Similarly, there would be only one UAAC and one GAAC with health sciences representatives serving on the committees and chairing or co-chairing such committees if so dictated by committee content or popular election. Thus, the health sciences campus, which represents approximately half of the faculty and staff of SLU and approximately 55% of the SLU budget, would be represented in overall SLU governance in a more proportional way than in the past.

The efforts of individuals who lead enrollment management, libraries and research would be apportioned between the Frost and Health Sciences campus with 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 a large portion of the student body on the Health Sciences campus. Accordingly, on the diagram 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. The titles of these individuals would be in the VP line, e.g., a current Associate Provost would become an Associate VP and so on. Because their functional relationships are shared, their reporting structure would be linked to the Sr. VP with whom they work the majority of the time or to the President, at the President’s discretion.

**Summary:**

A change in the SLU administrative structure is under consideration. In the new model, combined academic and fiscal responsibility for respective units of the University would be vested in senior vice presidential-level leaders who would report directly to the President. Many core functions would be shared between the two campuses in relation to the way these functions are actually carried out in the University. This new approach represents an attempt to align organizational complexities with an appropriate management structure and to create organizational efficiencies for students, faculty and staff. The proposal has been brought to this point with extensive faculty and administrative input, for which the writer is appreciative.

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