December 10, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

This Christmas season, I write to deliver tidings of great joy – as well as a few updates about Academic Affairs at SLU.

**Provost’s Office Staffing and Organization**

I have been blessed with a strong team of vice presidents and associate/assistant provosts supporting the academic enterprise. They provide critical leadership across Academic Affairs, and provide cogent insight on matters of considerable importance to us all. Several previously announced staffing changes have provided me the opportunity to reorganize and redefine my staff, and I thought that warranted some additional explanation.

As you know, we have begun a search for a new Vice President for Research following Dr. Ray Tait’s decision to return to his faculty appointment in the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry. I had previously set the position title as “Vice President for Research and Graduate Education”; note that I have now modified that title, removing the previous reference to “Graduate Education.” The purpose of this change is to more clearly communicate my intention for this position. My goal is to expand and accelerate our sponsored research and scholarship initiatives throughout the University, and appropriately leveraging pertinent, research-related components of graduate education with our primary research enterprise should help us do just that. Accordingly, this VP will oversee those aspects of graduate education associated with research and other forms of scholarship (primarily at the doctoral level), but not all aspects of graduate education. For example, oversight of and/or support for graduate fellowships, research assistantships, dissertation committees, etc. will be responsibilities of the modified Vice President for Research position.

General academic affairs administration and oversight at the graduate level – for master’s and doctoral programs – will be handled by a new Associate Provost for Academic Affairs position, which combines some of the responsibilities of two current Associate Provost positions in our office (recall that Dr. Diana Carlin is retiring, and Dr. Lisa Dorsey is returning to her faculty position in Physical Therapy). For example, the Associate Provost will, at the graduate and undergraduate levels, provide leadership for academic program development (including new interdisciplinary programs), curricular change, academic program review (APR), academic policy development and implementation, and related centralized administrative support for all academic programs. The Associate Provost will also work closely with the Student Government Association (SGA) and Graduate Student Association (GSA).

The Associate Provost for Academic Affairs is a senior-level position for which current SLU full professors with at least five years of academic leadership experience will be eligible; I hope to initiate a search for candidates in early January. The organization under the Associate Provost will, to some extent, be shaped by the person who accepts the position; however, it’s likely that areas of oversight will include: the Honors Program; Pre-Professional Studies; the new Center for Undergraduate Research; the liaison role with Student Development regarding academic support programs and academic advising; committees such as the Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Affairs Committees (UAAC and GAAC); etc.
My goal with the Associate Provost position is to provide a single point of leadership across the undergraduate and post-baccalaureate academic levels to best support the work of our colleges, schools, and centers – most of which offer programs across those academic levels.

Finally, I should note that international education initiatives previously administered under Dr. Carlin – such as consortium and articulation agreements with international universities, work housed in the Center for Global Citizenship, etc. – will, for now, be overseen directly by me. However, this summer I will review current operations to determine whether the structure is working well or warrants change.

**Parks Dean Search**

We are also searching for a new permanent dean for the Parks College of Engineering, Aviation, and Technology. The growth of Parks College is critically important to all of SLU. We are one of only 10 Jesuit institutions offering dedicated, ABET-accredited engineering programs, and the only one to offer aviation; accordingly, Parks programs help differentiate SLU from many of our competitors. Parks also offers tremendous opportunities for growth in research – in traditional areas across their engineering program portfolio, but also in the context of medicine and the health sciences; so many critical medical innovations are feats of engineering focused on improving and saving human life. And our Parks faculty’s collaborations with industry advance engineering and technological change in a manner that respects human difference and dignity as we conduct our teaching and scholarship in the full educational context of our Jesuit identity.

The position description reflects our expectation that the new dean will have strong academic credentials as well as an administrative track record of effecting position change. Thankfully, the successful candidate will join a group of well-qualified and committed colleagues.

**Support for Our Adjunct Faculty**

Efforts to increase support for our adjunct faculty colleagues began in Spring 2015, as President Pestello hosted several open fora that followed up on a University-wide survey of adjuncts earlier in the term. Results of those early efforts included a new policy guaranteeing compensation for certain cancelled courses, reduced parking rates, and expanded faculty orientation programming.

This fall, Dr. Pestello, the deans, and I have all been working on addressing the most significant adjunct compensation concerns. In mid-November, I communicated with all SLU adjunct faculty about the institution’s commitment to them, and about changes in compensation recognizing that commitment. We’ve instituted a new, higher compensation scale for adjuncts in the College of Arts and Sciences and School for Professional Studies, effective Spring 2016. The scale mandates increasingly higher minimum compensation for adjuncts based on their years of service at SLU. Additionally, we have committed to provide funds to support annual adjustments to adjunct compensation in each College and School consistent with the annual merit pool. These initial efforts reflect our commitment to advance this discussion in Spring 2016 and beyond.

**Budget Challenges**

I concede that news about our current budget challenges does not epitomize “tidings of great joy.” However, these challenges are serious and necessitate my sharing with you as much information as possible about them.
Despite great recent performances in the recruitment of new, first-year undergraduate students, we still have declining enrollments overall — at both the undergraduate and post-baccalaureate levels; the most significant enrollment declines are in several graduate programs that historically produced excess revenue that, indirectly, supported other, less financially independent programs. While enrollments have declined, our undergraduate tuition discount rate has risen — modestly, but enough to contribute to our financial shortfall. Also contributing to our decrease in revenue is an improving four-year graduation rate; while graduating more students in four years is wonderful, it does result in less overall revenue for the University. In short, despite planning for a much tighter budget in FY2016, thus far we are operating notably in the red. And projections for FY2017 are for even greater shortfalls. This is a matter that must be addressed aggressively.

President Pestello has charged David Heimburger, our Vice President for Business and Finance, and me with setting up a process to review all University operations and determine how effectively our resources are currently being allocated in light of the University’s mission. We will bring an external team to campus in the winter to work with us in identifying cost savings that do not compromise our ability to deliver on our promises to those we exist to serve. Our goal will be to modify our operations in FY2017 in ways that ensure our ability to sustain — long term — the distinctive Jesuit educational, research, service and health care programs and services through which we live our mission. To do so, we must provide long-term financial relief and stability, characterized by balanced annual operational budgets that enable us to invest in our academic priorities, and that include appropriate contingency funds to weather unexpected enrollment and related revenue shortfalls.

Many of the efficiencies we will look for might, in isolation, seem comparatively minor; but multiple minor changes can add up to significant savings — sometimes savings of money, but often savings of employee time that could be more appropriately devoted to other duties. Other changes are likely to be more significant, and might require organizational restructuring and/or changes to the size and scope of programs and services to better align them with institutional resources — human and fiscal.

The process of critically assessing how we operate is already underway in the Division of Academic Affairs. All of the deans have outlined three-year strategic faculty hiring plans that, when well-coordinated for programmatic coverage and interdisciplinary innovation, will enable us to achieve notable efficiencies in our academic staffing. Deans and department chairs are also already critically evaluating curricular inefficiencies in the form of under-enrolled courses, and courses taught by adjuncts that could be taught by salaried faculty. In some cases, the overall size and/or rigidity of our curricula cannot be justified on academic grounds; accordingly, deans and chairs have been asked to work with their faculty colleagues on ways to improve the student educational experience without sacrificing academic integrity or rigor.

Again, our near-term budgetary challenges are serious. However, I am committed to working with you to resolve them in ways that will strengthen the University in the long run. And I recognize that reducing expenses will only help strengthen SLU if complemented by strategic investments in key programs, and in our most valuable resources: faculty and staff. Faculty compensation issues continue to be a source of considerable concern — concern that will not be pushed aside amid our current budget constraints. I continue to work with the Faculty Senate Committee on Compensation and Benefits on a Compensation Philosophy to guide our analysis of data from the Mercer studies and from the Gender Equity Task Force. It is true that we must give highest priority to correcting the operating
deficit – but we must also continue to plan for how, together, we will address the compensation issues that are critical to recruiting and retaining an outstanding faculty.

I wish you the best as our Fall 2015 term comes to a close. Be assured that this is definitely not the first of 12 straight days of such letters from me – and that, surely, is my greatest holiday gift to you.

Nancy Brickhouse, Ph.D.
Provost