

Staffing Changes in the Office of the Provost

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Dear colleagues,

I write today to share information about upcoming changes to staffing under the Office of the Provost.

Since I was named permanent Provost last spring, I have taken some time to examine the needs of the current team, to consider current and anticipated vacancies, and to reflect on possible adjustments that may result from our academic strategic planning work this year.

We currently have two vacant positions in the office and will soon have at least two more. The Associate Provost position I formerly filled, as well as the role Dr. Tracy Chapman filled until her retirement at the end of August in her capacity as Associate Provost for Distance Education, are both vacant. Dr. Chapman's effort in her position was not full-time - it was in addition to her effort as Dean of SPS – however, the distance education portfolio is important given the evolving nature of higher education. We also know that at the end of this academic year, **Dr. Rob Wood** will return to a full-time faculty role in the Department of Biology as he recently shared his desire to step out of academic administration. Finally, **Dr. Denise Sleet** has also informed me of her intention to retire in early February, 2022.

Dr. Rob Wood started at the University in 1994 as an assistant professor in the Department of Biology. In 2008, he became the chair of Biology and served in that role until 2015. That year, he was tapped for his current role, in which he was responsible for leading, overseeing and coordinating - at the undergraduate and graduate levels - the development, implementation and assessment of academic programs, academic policies, and academic support services and programs.

He also oversaw the University-wide Academic Program Review process, coordinated and implemented graduate education across colleges and worked closely with the Office of Student Development on academic issues associated with the implementation and expansion of the learning communities. I want to express my gratitude to Rob for his significant contributions during his time in the Provost's Office and his decade and a half in administration. He has been a leader in advocating for students, faculty, and staff. Please join me in wishing Rob well as he returns full-time to the faculty.

Dr. Denise Sleet joined the University in 1988 as the director of student support services, which included the administration of TRIO support services and student advising. She worked on a variety of student support programs until 2002, when she was promoted to director of academic services, and served in that role until 2007, when she became assistant dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. In 2017, Denise was an essential member of the project team that ultimately proposed a new model for academic advising for the University, and in April 2018, she was appointed as the interim assistant provost for academic advising, a new role at the University. In July 2019, she became the permanent assistant provost for academic advising, and her leadership was critical to the success of our transition to the new advising model. Her commitment to collaborative leadership and her care for both students and advisors have been hallmarks of her leadership in this role.

During her tenure at SLU, Denise has served on a number of committees including Academic Advising Leadership, the College of Arts and Sciences' Advising and Faculty Mentoring Committee, SLU 101 Planning Committee, and the Ernest Calloway Scholarship Program. She has served as moderator for the

Black Student Alliance, in roles with the University's Martin Luther King Jr. Scholars Program, and as a member of the academic integrity subcommittee for NCAA Division I athletic certification. Denise has been integral to leading and serving our students in a variety of capacities during her tenure at SLU, and I want to thank her for her dedication over the last 34 years. Please join in wishing her well in her retirement.

With all of these changes in mind, and with the work we will do together this year to develop an academic strategic plan to guide our work over the next 3 years, I am taking some time to discern the optimal structure and staffing model for the office. It will take some time to get this right. I am thinking about how to appropriately cover the work that falls under the existing positions and vacancies, while also allowing time for the academic strategic planning that will obviously have implications for the office's structure.

One addition to the team will perhaps be obvious to many of you. **Dr. Debie Lohe** has been serving in a special projects-focused role in the office since the end of her tenure as Interim Vice President for Student Development last February. This is her second time in an interim role in the Provost's office, and I am pleased to announce that I have promoted her into a permanent role as Associate Provost effective October 1.

In this role, Debie's portfolio will include providing leadership for academic technology strategy, Distance Education, educational development initiatives, and serving as a bridge between Academic Affairs and Student Development. The Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning and the Distance Education Office will both report to her in her new role. Debie has shared her intention to promote **Dr. Gina Merys**, who has successfully and generously served as Acting Director of the Center for the last 18 months, permanently into the position of Reinert Center Director. Debie will work with the Reinert Center staff, their faculty advisory board, and other key stakeholders to initiate a feedback process for that promotion.

In due time, I will have additional information to share about how we will approach filling vacancies in the office and how we may restructure the work of the office. This includes working with academic advisors about the leadership transition from Dr. Sleet to our next assistant provost for academic advising.

It is important to know that, with all of the changes, I anticipate bringing on multiple faculty members into leadership roles in the Office of the Provost. Much of the work overseen by my office is work that is ideally performed by those who have been members of the faculty at Saint Louis University and have demonstrated the inclination and skill to take on administrative roles.

It is important to me that we not simply seek to replace individuals into existing roles but that we take this important opportunity to assess the needs and work of the office and identify the right next set of roles to advance our collective vision for our future.

You will hear more from me in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Mike Lewis, Ph.D.
Provost