

August 11, 2003

President David J. Skorton
101 Jessup Hall

Dear David:

It is the customary for the Provost/Vice President's office under review to write a response to the review committee's report and I am pleased to do so.

I want to thank the Review Committee and its chair, Professor Cain, for the time and effort they committed to the review process. To the extent that this important effort took time away from traditional teaching and scholarship duties of these faculty I am particularly grateful.

On behalf of the staff of the Office of the Provost, I want to thank the Committee for their positive and encouraging view of the productivity and effectiveness of the Office over the past seven years. From my perspective, the Office is blessed with excellent Associate Provosts, each of whom has taken time away from their primary role as faculty to provide first-rate administrative service. These Associate Provosts have helped guide dozens of academic initiatives of the University to completion, including such wide-ranging projects as developing new promotion and tenure guidelines, advancing diversity hiring, expanding the Honors program, developing DEO training workshops, doubling the number of students studying abroad, initiating interdisciplinary health-sciences projects, to name only a few. More recently, the Office under the guidance of the Associate Dean for Graduate Education successfully negotiated a long-sought tuition scholarship policy for graduate assistants. A full accounting of such initiatives is contained in the Office of the Provost self study and can be accessed directly at this website (<http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost>). As well, the Office is fortunate to have a highly-productive and congenial staff without whose service none of the projects outlined above could have been completed. It has been a professional and personal pleasure to work with these dedicated faculty and staff.

It should also be noted that almost nothing of major import gets done in the Office of the Provost without involving vice presidents, deans, DEOs, and directors from around the campus. Most of the Office's projects are designed to aid colleges, departments, and other academic units in their quest for greater excellence in teaching, research, and service. Of special importance to the Office is the development of a close working relationship with the leadership of the Faculty Senate. These dedicated officers have initiated or assisted in the development of all new faculty policies and most academic activities that are outlined in the Office's self study.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

III. Organization and Responsibility

Page 4. Staffing Interdisciplinary Initiatives.

The engagement of a one-third time Special Assistant to the Provost to guide and develop university-wide interdisciplinary initiatives was initiated as a stop-gap measure due to the loss of the Vice Provost position resulting from budget cuts. Two separate faculty committees studying interdisciplinary development at The University of Iowa recommended that the Provost's Office hire a full time faculty member to oversee interdisciplinary initiatives. We chose the less-costly route of making do with a one-third time position. While I fully agree that interdisciplinary projects should be initiated by faculty, many have languished due to reluctance of discipline-based units to support them. Support from the Office of the Provost for interdisciplinary lines for projects such as the Iowa Informatics Initiative has been well received, as has support for interdisciplinary course development. The newly-developed Policy on Faculty Appointments to Non-Departmental Units has already made interdisciplinary appointments possible in several units. These activities have been facilitated by the Special Assistant to the Provost for Interdisciplinary Initiatives. This part-time, temporary position has been extremely effective.

Page 5. Associate Provost for Diversity

This position was created in 1996 following the study and recommendation by a faculty committee appointed by Interim Provost Sam Becker. It is entirely appropriate that this Office and set of responsibilities be thoroughly reviewed. Indeed, you charged a committee to review all University-wide diversity efforts, including the Associate Provost for Diversity function, and I look forward to receiving their report. I will consider the next steps to be taken in light of that report.

IV. Budget Decisions

Page 5-6.

The model that The University of Iowa has used for budget development and decision making for the past decade was recently studied at some length by a faculty/staff review committee chaired by Jonathan Carlson. That committee recommended that the University not change its budget process, although it did make a suggestion to develop a more transparent budget accountability report. Under the current budget model, the Provost works closely with the Vice President for Finance and Operations and with the Vice President for Research to coordinate the priorities for budget requests for funding from the state and for the setting and expenditure of the General Fund budget. The Provost provides a leadership role in presenting academic priorities to the President and to the Vice Presidents' Group, which makes recommendations to the President. The Provost reviews with and seeks advice on all proposed budget recommendations from the Faculty Senate leadership and the Faculty Senate Budget Committee (now the Faculty Senate/Staff Council Budget Committee) before any recommendations are finalized and sent to the Regents. This is an ongoing, iterative process and all major requests for new dollars from the state have gone forward with the endorsement of faculty leadership and the faculty budget committee (now Faculty Senate/Staff Council Budget Committee).

You have stated a desire to have the Provost initiate the budget process each year, and we will certainly carry out your request.

V. Constituencies

The Board of Regents, State of Iowa

Page 6. We welcome the Review Committee's recommendation that the Provost's Office work with the Regent's staff to try to streamline monthly reports to the Regents.

The Board hired MGT (a consulting firm) to (among other things) review the monthly reports to the Board Office from the Regent's institutions. MGT recommended that a more thorough review take place over the next six months with an eye toward streamlining many of these reports. The Provost's Office will work with the Board Office to conduct this review. UI has already indicated to the Board where several reports can be focused and stripped of excess data and verbiage.

DEANS

The Provost reviews each dean annually. Faculty committees review deans every five years. The current Operations Manual guidelines are cumbersome and difficult to implement. The Faculty Senate leaders agree. The Provost's Office is working with the Faculty Senate leadership to develop a clearer set of dean's review guidelines. The Senate appointed one committee to address this issue, but no report was forthcoming. A second Faculty Senate Committee is now at work. The Provost's Office plans to share the committee report with the deans and ultimately fashion a new set of evaluation guidelines that are satisfactory to all constituents.

Page 7. Spousal hiring is a difficult issue that usually involves multiple constituents on campus: deans, DEOs, the Dual Career Network staff, and, often, the Associate Provost for Faculty. The suggestion that the Provost's Office might become more involved in the process will be examined with an eye toward improving the process. It should be noted that we have many successes in dual career hiring each year, and some failures, too. UI's Provost's Office was an early adopter of having a dedicated office (Dual Career Network) working full time to find matches for spousal hiring needs both inside and outside the University.

FACULTY

The fact that the Faculty Senate and its officers believe that the Provost's Office communicates with them effectively is significant and important. With some 1800 faculty it is impossible to establish one-on-one relationships with every individual faculty member. Elected faculty representatives (senators and their leaders) are the most important group of faculty members for the Office of the Provost to interact with. They represent the faculty interests across the whole University. The main venue for interaction is through a one-hour weekly meeting the provost holds with the four Faculty Senate officers. With no formal agenda, these meetings provide an opportunity for the Provost to find out about the aspirations and concerns of the faculty in an informal, yet timely fashion. As well, the Provost and several Associate Provosts attend each Council and Senate meeting and often make presentations and/or answer questions.

Because there is always a danger of getting out of touch with the faculty, the Office of the Provost developed and implemented a communications plan that was designed to provide small group meetings, informational sessions, and developmental opportunities. Examples of such communications efforts include:

- Two open meetings each semester for DEOs (one on each side of the river)
- “Coffee and Conversations” -- open discussions about current topics
- Lunches with small groups of endowed professors or chairs each semester
- Welcoming dinner for new faculty
- Lunches with new faculty during their first year
- DEO developmental training workshops
- Visiting departmental faculty meetings each semester
- Visiting individual faculty research labs each semester
- Over two dozen meetings with faculty and staff during the fall 2001 budget cuts

The report makes it clear, however, that even with these new initiatives there is a continuing need to improve communication between the Provost’s Office and faculty. The report suggests holding more meetings with small groups of faculty. This suggestion will be carried out.

The Provost has an open door policy. Any faculty, staff, or student who wants to meet with me does so. Evidently there is a perception among a few faculty that this is not true. I will review with scheduling staff the access policy and re-enforce my willingness to meet with individuals in as timely a fashion as possible. Other suggestions for improving communication are welcome.

VI. STRENGTHS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Library initiatives, the creation of the College of Public Health, time spent on tenure cases, significant improvements in undergraduate education, and the new promotion and tenure guidelines have all been positive accomplishments. Many other advancements are recorded in the self study. I am very pleased that the report acknowledged the value of these accomplishments as they are all projects or initiatives that the University considers important.

VII. PERCEIVED WEAKNESSES AND PROBLEM AREAS

The Office of the Provost goals and initiatives for a new academic year are presented to the Faculty Senate at their first meeting in September during a fifteen minute time slot. Normally the Provost’s Office has some 50 to 75 projects that it plans to work on during the new academic year (all of which are posted on the Office of the Provost’s web site). As suggested in the report, I will highlight and concentrate on the four or five most important goals for the year at the first senate meeting and on the web, but the Office will continue to make available on the web the full range of initiatives. We will also continue the practice of listing which associate provost is in charge of each project or initiative so that faculty can make direct contact.

Page 11. Writing Initiative

Since the report was written, all of the funding has been distributed to bolster writing initiatives across the whole University, which was the original intent of President Coleman's plan. While not all colleges received as much funding as they would have preferred (especially since some original funding was cut from the overall budget during recent rescissions), most colleges have developed exciting projects and have reported valuable gains in writing opportunities for their students.

Page 12. Interdisciplinary Advancement

The question of hiring a part time special assistant in the Provost's Office was answered earlier in this response.

The Provost's Office has repeatedly responded to the recommendation in the report that The University of Iowa should work to "remove some of the current barriers to effective interdisciplinary work" (e.g., joint appointments). Well over a year and a half ago, the Provost and the Associate Provost for Faculty convened a faculty committee, chaired by Alan Nagel, Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature, to develop recommendations on removing barriers to faculty participation in interdisciplinary research and teaching. The report was taken to the Faculty Council and Senate for review. The faculty approved most of the recommendations from the Nagel Committee and they have been put into place. Both the report and recommendations passed by the Senate can be accessed from the Interdisciplinary Activities page on the Office of the Provost website: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost/about/intdisc.htm>.

FINAL SUMMARY Page 12.

The report's summary indicates that the Office of the Provost is efficient, effective, and well respected and that the major constituents that work directly with the Office and those that report to it have developed a positive and efficient working relationship. Earlier sections of the report clearly state that the Office of the Provost has done an effective job of communicating with the elected representatives of the faculty—the Faculty Senate and its leaders. The primary area of stated concern is that the Office has not found the right way to communicate effectively with the larger cohort of faculty, most of whom have no regular contact with the Office. We will put on our thinking caps and talk to faculty leaders to find ways to reach out in more meaningful ways to the faculty at large and to faculty as individual contributors to the University community.

Again, I would like to thank the Review Committee for confirming the smooth and effective operation of the office and for making useful suggestions for further improvements. We will act on those suggestions. Of course, I would welcome any suggestions that you might have.

Sincerely,

Jon Whitmore
Provost