February 26, 2014

Dear ASCSU Members and Campus Senate Chairs:

We write to provide an update on AS-3158-13/AA Recommendation to Amend Title 5 to Re-Establish Appropriate Unit Limits for Engineering, which was approved unanimously by the Academic Senate CSU on January 23, 2014. Letters of support were also received from many campuses. Please share this communication with interested colleagues.

Post-Plenary Timeline
The ASCSU Executive Committee met with Chancellor White and the Vice Chancellors on February 10th, which was a regularly-scheduled meeting to discuss ASCSU resolutions and initiatives. We made it clear that we had concerns about the process as we understood it was being implemented and requested information about the status of the campus reports on unit reduction, specifically engineering. Chancellor White directed that we be provided with this information and that we meet with EVC Smith to discuss it. We received the requested information on February 12th (a spreadsheet and a memo explaining the process that would be followed by the Chancellor’s Office), but we were unable to meet with EVC Smith until February 20th. Upon examining the process document provided on February 12th, we continued to have significant concerns. On February 14th, we requested that a moratorium on the process be put in place until (1) the meeting with EVC Smith had occurred and (2) the Chancellor’s Office (CO) response to AS-3158-13AA was known. This request was not acted upon.

The spreadsheet detailing the campus reports (referenced above) was forwarded to academic senators and to campus senate chairs in the subsequent days. (In response to our inquiry, we were asked not to distribute the memo on the process). ASCSU Academic Affairs Committee Chair Chris Miller shared an analysis of the spreadsheet on February 17th, concluding that “…the preponderance of engineering programs seek exceptions to the limits, even in the face of what, on many campuses, has been intense pressure to conform.”
The CO response to AS-3158-13/AA was received on February 20th, and it stated:

Because the CSU is operationalizing a policy enacted by the Board of Trustees, allowing it time to unfold and mature under its current structure has merit. Engineering programs on our campuses are working with faculty to determine if 120/180 units are feasible for a degree in their programs. We realize that not all programs are similar but there is compliance in some of our prestigious programs, which has created a healthy dialogue within the context of curriculum reform. Above all, policy will be followed and language for exceptions has been included in the policy.

Executive Committee Actions Subsequent to CO Response
Of course, we had hoped that the recommendation in ASCSU’s unanimously-approved resolution, accompanied by support from multiple campuses, would be accepted. In response to our request for a moratorium on February 14th, Chancellor White informed Chair Guerin on February 21st that he is committed to a clear and transparent process that corresponds with the Trustees’ goal of reducing degree units. He recognizes that exceptions can be made to allow degree units to exceed the 120/180 limits for solid academic reasons. He directed us to work with EVC Smith to find agreement on the process.

On February 25th, Executive Committee thanked Chancellor White for his response and requested a suspension of communication between the CO and campuses concerning unit reductions in engineering programs until such time as there is agreement on the process to be used in “operationalizing” the policy.

Process as Described in Title 5
When changes to Title 5 were approved by the Board of Trustees directing, “As of the fall term of the 2013-14 academic year, no baccalaureate degree programs shall extend the unit requirement beyond 120 semester units,” provisions were also included stipulating that the Chancellor “may authorize exceptions to system or campus requirements for degree programs. In fulfillment of this regulation, the Chancellor may require adjustments to program requirements in order to achieve the 120 semester unit maximum.”

What these exception provisions specify is that Chancellor White has three options if he determines that programs have legitimate reasons to exceed unit caps: 1) establish a systemwide exception; 2) establish a campus-based exception; or 3) impose adjustments on programs to achieve 120/180 units. In this last scenario, the CO has indicated that faculty review panels will be convened before adjustments are imposed. It is our understanding that the Chancellor does not want to impose adjustments to achieve unit limits, so review panels may not be needed, but in the event they become necessary, we believe strongly that prior agreement between the CO and the ASCSU on the composition and duties of such panels is imperative.
Areas of Concern Regarding Implementation

- **Submission of Exception Requests:** Although the process described in Title 5 allows faculty to request exceptions to the 120/180 unit limit, our understanding is that exception requests were not permitted from any engineering programs on at least one campus. We have also been informed that faculty on another campus were given an alternative unit cap (albeit higher than 120/180), and only requests meeting that unit cap would be forwarded. Although these are the most egregious breaches of what we understood to be the process of faculty stewardship of this curricular matter, we have been made aware of other incidents where faculty efforts to retain control of their major program and general education curricula were stymied by administrative fiat. For instance, more than one campus was told that no exception requests would be forwarded unless unit counts were lowered first—they were not allowed to submit current programs for exception consideration. All of these examples are at odds with what we understood to be permissible under Title 5.

- **Administrative Review at CO:** According to the process description provided on February 12th, exception requests from campuses are initially checked for completeness (campus approval documents, rationale, curriculum map). Requests with incomplete documentation are returned to campuses. This is certainly appropriate. Per the process established in Title 5, our understanding was that exception requests would next be considered by the Chancellor.
  - Requests with solid academic reasons would be given exceptions, either systemwide or on a programmatic basis.
  - Remaining requests would be referred to review groups of discipline faculty and other appropriate individuals to review and recommend to the chancellor whether the curriculum should be accepted or amended.

As implemented, however, according to the process document with which we were supplied, exception requests are instead being reviewed for more than completeness before being forwarded to the chancellor. They are being compared to those of other campuses, and will apparently be returned with directions to resubmit another report and request for exceptions, until all strategies for reducing units have been exhausted. Exception requests will then be analyzed to determine next steps. Thus, the originally-submitted curriculum map and its attendant Request for Exceptions form will not be the only materials considered when acting on exception requests. We are deeply concerned about the comparative and subjective standards of evaluation in use and that no limit is specified for how many rounds of new reports and new assessments may be required. The potential to use this iterative process to force faculty compliance with curricular compromises and undermine the diversity of programs so that they all roughly match the “compliance” realized in some prestigious programs (as described in the CO response of February 20) is of major worry.

- **Review Panel Composition:** Should the chancellor reject an exception request and decide instead to impose unit reductions as specified in Title 5, the review groups to be convened will have legitimacy in the eyes of the faculty only if they include faculty representatives...
appointed by the ASCSU. Faculty currently on assignment at the CO are not sufficient to provide the analysis required in such review groups. Given that the engineering degrees are more than just the engineering major, we expect that both disciplinary and general education faculty will be included on the review panels.

- **Requests for Exceptions by Existing Degree Programs:*** More recently-established engineering degree programs have been held to the 120/180 unit limit. We expect that they would also be allowed to request exceptions to the 120/180 minimum following the same procedures used to govern unit reductions, with the goal of improving program quality in meeting desired student learning outcomes.

In sum, the ASCSU Executive Committee is deeply concerned that faculty authority with respect to development, review and control of the curriculum has been undermined by administrative actions both at the system and campus levels. Our perspective is that the "process" described last year to ASCSU has become much more iterative and paperwork-laden, wherein programs requesting an exception may be required to "prove" their rationale multiple times and forced repeatedly to explain why their programs are not the same as some other "model" [read 120 unit] program. Historically, one of the strengths of the CSU has been that faculty at each campus design programs customized to their specific student population. That diversity needs to be valued rather than deprecated. This process as it is currently being “operationalized” shows a disconcerting emphasis on conformity and compliance.

**Moving Forward**
As we work with the CO Academic Affairs Division to solve the problems we see in this process, we believe we have several areas of potential agreement.

- The process must be transparent and clear.
- Academic quality must be maintained or improved. ABET accreditation is a sign of quality in engineering programs, and should be an expected outcome for all CSU engineering programs.
- Accreditation demands offer legitimate grounds for granting Title 5 exemptions, as is done for other professional preparation baccalaureate degrees (e.g., BFA, BM), whose unit limits are set at 132 semester/198 quarter units.
- Programs with unit requirements exceeding the caps for other accredited professional preparation programs exempted in Title 5 can be examined by the campus faculty and compared to other accredited engineering programs; outliers can be asked to account for their curricular choices and provide solid academic reasons for an exception.
- The process must allow programs/campuses to forward exception requests as per Title 5.
- Campus curriculum change and approval processes must be followed.
- Students should be able to complete the engineering degree in a timely fashion.

As directed by Chancellor White, we will be working with EVC Smith toward agreement on this process.
Finally, we understand that a meeting of engineering deans will be held March 3rd at CSU Northridge. Faculty Trustee Steven Stepanek has arranged to be in attendance and will provide a report to the ASCSU Executive Committee. On the next day, Trustee Stepanek and Chair Guerin are scheduled to meet with Chancellor White to discuss shared leadership concerns involving academic issues and the ASCSU.

ASCSU Executive Committee
Diana Guerin, Chair
Steven Filling, Vice Chair
Glen Brodowsky, Secretary
Darlene Yee-Melichar, Member-at-Large
Susan Gubernat, Member-at-Large; and
Christine Miller, ASCSU Academic Affairs Committee Chair

CC:
Chancellor Tim White
EVC Ephraim Smith

Attachments:
AS-3158-13/AA
Chancellor’s Response to January 2014 Resolutions
Spreadsheet Showing Status of Campus Exception Requests (from CO)
Analysis of Spreadsheet by Committee Chair Miller