March 19, 2014

ASCSU Senate Chair Guerin
Faculty Trustee Stepanek
EVC and Chief Academic Officer Smith
Assistant Vice-Chancellor Mallon

Colleagues,

I appreciate the conversations we have engaged in over the past few weeks regarding the matter of baccalaureate degree programs, and the trustees directive to reduce wherever possible the degrees to 120/180 credits.

As I understand matters, the procedures that are wrapping up this month with campus programs and CO academic affairs are campus-driven steely-eyed reviews --- including interactions with campus senates and CO academic affairs on details, development of curricular maps etc. --- of high quality degree programs at the campuses. The output from this is the analytical work, its outcome, and exception request if applicable for the full array of academic degrees that exceed 120/180 credits.

This is a big undertaking, as I understand several hundred degree programs are involved.

And because I believe this is new territory for the CSU in modern times, some of the procedures are being worked through. Moreover, a few weeks after I started as Chancellor, when this came around to the board in January 2013, there were strained relations as the issue was not vetted well in the spirit of shared governance at the system level. I have also heard clearly the frustration and angst about clarity, objectivity and fairness of procedures, timelines and the like.

I’d like to put these issues behind us and move forward…this is important work, and we cannot rush to decisions.

With respect to engineering degrees, the premise from our conversation is there could be some requests for exception. Therefore, as was discussed in our conversations, it is my intention to constitute a diverse, knowledgeable yet small advisory group* as supplementary and complimentary to the procedures underway. We will use this advisory group to discuss and clarify a priori the basis/criteria by which exceptions to 120/180 credits could validly be based in engineering disciplines …if and when exceptions are finally presented to me. This group is not going to make specific recommendations on any programs, and they have not yet been invited. In fact, I think it wise to wait until after the submission deadline at the end of the month to assess more accurately what we have in front of us, and then constitute the advisory group accordingly and set timelines, etc.

The trustee expectation is the vast majority of CSU undergraduate degree programs will be at 120/180 credits, unless compelling academic reasons prevail to a different total. If at the end of the day with any of the degree programs, if an exception to 120/180 credits is requested and I am able to support the request, then we are done and in line with Trustee policy.

If, however, there is a program that I am unable to support a request for exception (I hope this is a rare outcome), as I understand Title V it requires us then to constitute an appropriate committee - including discipline specific expertise - to recommend a solution. Any such committee will use the basis/criteria we develop with the advisory group if the request is in engineering. And if a request is made in another discipline, we will have to constitute knowledgeable folks accordingly.
In all cases, committees will be formed by appointees from both the ASCSU Executive Committee and Executive Vice Chancellor Smith.

As always, I am open to further discussion if this approach is insufficient to lead us forward on this important matter. If there are ways to simplify the process without losing its rigor, I am certainly open to suggestions.

* The advisory group shall have members appointed by the academic senate as well as myself.

We will serve the CSU best if the group constitutes individuals from various campuses reflecting the geographic distribution of campuses with engineering programs, the academic senate, and Academic Affairs in the CO.

I offer for your concurrence that I would chair the group, and that we have 10 additional members, including Faculty Trustee Stepanek and Senate Chair Guerin or her designee.

Moreover, I would appoint four others:
- A campus president
- A campus provost
- A senior member from Academic Affairs
- An engineering dean

And the ASCSU Executive Committee would appoint four others:
- Three well-regarded faculty members with firm understanding of engineering and accreditation issues in the main sub-disciplines of engineering.
- One faculty member with a solid understanding of general education issues across the CSU

The advisory group membership shall also be enriched by its diversity of campus geographic location, sub-disciplinary expertise, as well as gender, and race/ethnicity. While the appointment authority I suggest above would remain, it will require us to coordinate appointees so we don’t inadvertently become imbalanced.

Sincerely,

Tim White
Chancellor