Seas Employee Council Meeting – Special Q & A Session with Dean Aylor
Wednesday, December 14, 2011 • 9:30 – 10:30 am, Rodman Room

SEAS Employee Council Members present: Natalie Edwards, Jayne Weber, Patricia Ashley, Lisa Stanton, Rusty Wright, Bill Ordel, Vanessa Pace, and Kim Doerr.

The meeting was called to order by Kim Doerr at 9:35 am. Kim welcomed and introduced Dean Aylor. Natalie Edwards reviewed the meeting format — that she would read aloud each question and allow 10 minutes for Dean Aylor to respond and staff to ask follow up questions.

Q1. The Strategic plan states that SEAS “is committed to providing the human resources necessary to meet its mission. SEAS will examine the distribution of staff functions in order to make better use of economies of scale where appropriate, and will hire staff where necessary to support implementation of the strategic plan”. Where is the immediate funding coming from to support the hiring of additional staff to handle the projected increase in students until the redistributed tuition plan is implemented?

SEAS has accumulated $6 million in debt on a $30 million budget, lost 15 faculty and 8 staff positions.

Next academic year the Dean hopes to enroll more students. SEAS is negotiating for permission to charge differential tuition of $2k more per student to raise additional funds. 25% of these funds go to the Provost for student aid. Three of the eliminated staff positions are being evaluated for possible re-staffing: a CS position may be a ‘shared’ (within SEAS) position. Pam Norris will evaluate the staffing needs in the Graduate Office; Dean Berger is doing the same in the Undergraduate Office.

Q2. In general the staff will often work voluntary overtime to support special projects and grant funded research. Indirect costs attached to so many grants do create more work for staff. Much of this work is done as an additional load on top of their full time jobs. Can staff receive additional salary, or at least overtime comp time, for that extra work?

Overtime comp time is only okay if approved in advance. It needs to be documented for audit purposes. When asked if it could be approved ‘after the fact’, the Dean thought that would not be in line with UVA comp time policy, but promised to have Lisa Meadows follow up with Bob Bremer on the possibility.

It was pointed out by staff that only non-exempt employees are eligible for OT comp time.

Q3. Many staff work to find ways to provide services for their departments/offices that will save SEAS money. If staff can save the school money, and show that savings in a budget year, can staff be rewarded financially?

Staff may not be rewarded for saving the department money—we should all be looking for ways to save money for SEAS. The state has a confidential Fraud and Abuse line where waste can be reported. Employees are not compensated for reporting waste and/or saving their departments money. http://www.doa.virginia.gov/DSIA/Fraud_and_Abuse_Hotline.cfm

Two suggestions the Dean had were:
1. It might be possible to reward SEAS employees who save their Departments money through Rewards & Recognition.
2. SEC approach other UVA Employee Councils about this idea.
3. That employees be sure their supervisors are aware and include this information in the employee’s evaluation. Be sure to complete the exceptional performance plan.
Q4. The School of Engineering orders thousands of dollars of equipment every year, which is not being used because of lack of funds for installation, maintenance, and training. Can SEAS initiate a better system of planning prior to ordering equipment, especially during the grant writing process, to advise faculty on the actual indirect costs of the equipment?

Research equipment is the biggest issue. The Dean didn’t think it was very cost effective to try to resell unused equipment, but said if individual departments wanted to take it on, they could utilize the money refunded.

Staff suggested UVA might want to create a university wide “Reverse Buying” staff position. Council suggested a staff advising team be created to consult with and advise faculty before big equipment is purchased. This could be done via email/not overly time consuming. The Dean liked this idea and said he'd bring it up at the next Chairs Meeting.

Q5. With an almost assured decrease in revenue from state government, and the increased dependence on outside funding sources such as the Department of Defense and military industrial industries, there is concern that the University and the Engineering School are placing themselves in a precarious position in regards to two areas:

Q5-a. In light of Congress’s inability to produce spending bills, balanced budget legislation, and mandatory across the board spending cuts, has the department identified other funding sources not dependent on federal monies in this weakened economy?

The Dean described this as a “tough problem” with future funding “up in the air.” The current model — with money allocated from the top down within UVA doesn’t encourage innovation. SEAS only receives 35% of research overhead at present.

Development is being pushed in SEAS:
1. Targeting alumni to donate for Graduate Students. (Alumni focus tends to be on Undergraduate programs, which receive the most money).
2. Merit based scholarships
3. Special projects

Q5-b. Given the current political climate, what has the department done to assure its autonomy, when a politician or corporation is not satisfied with our research results or is promoting a different agenda?

SEAS is looking at ways to generate it’s own funding through:
1. Programs that bring in 100% tuition such as SIE’s Accelerated Masters Program (AMP)
2. Activity based money
3. Cultivating relationships with the corporate world (Rolls Royce)

Q6. The response to the Strategic Plan by the Staff and Faculty of SEAS indicated a lack of trust in the Dean’s office and a lower morale among some groups. How can the Council help the Dean’s office address this issue within the School?

“Big Issue — times are different. We are doing more with less money.” SEAS faculty salaries are not competitive with others nationwide. The Dean stressed the need to be consistent in our policies. Encouraged anyone with a perception of inconsistency to let him know.

Communication from the Dean’s office to staff needs to improve. Changes are occurring which affect staff directly, but staff are not given the consideration of being forewarned, even when the person is directly affected. A recent example is: the Undergraduate Office and copier suddenly
moved in early December with no notice to staff or faculty. *(Follow up: A message was broadcast to all SEAS staff and faculty about the move within 2 hours of our meeting).*

Discussion ensued on how much information staff needed to receive and how best to communicate it (via email). Dean suggested council meet with Office of Sponsored Programs, and the Undergraduate and Graduate Offices. One idea was a monthly communication for staff from the Dean with an option for feedback on one or two issues, similar to the email communication sent to Alumni.

Staff asked who from SEC would serve on the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee as proposed by the Dean. The Dean didn’t know and asked Lisa Meadows to look into it. *(Follow up: Jayne Weber will serve on the Committee on behalf of SEC).*

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 am

**ACTION ITEMS:**

1. *(DO)* Lisa Meadows will follow up with Bob Bremer on the possibility overtime comp time being approved ‘after the fact’.
2. *(SEC)* The SEC will approach other employee councils with the idea of rewarding staff who save their departments substantial amounts of money (through Awards & Recognition).
3. *(Dean)* At the next SEAS Chairs meeting, Dean Aylor will introduce the councils’ suggestion of a staff advising team for equipment purchases.
4. *(SEAS Staff)* Staff will report to Dean Aylor any perceived inconsistencies in SEAS policies.
5. *(SEC)* Council will meet with OSP, SEAS Undergraduate and Graduate offices to become informed on any upcoming events or changes as well as to strategize on better communication.
6. *(DO)* The Dean’s office will communicate, via email, any events, which affect SEAS staff. Other communications options will be explored.

Submitted by: Jayne Weber