15 November 2013

Dear Members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

Attached please find the report from the Faculty Senate Welfare Committee regarding our investigation into the processes leading up to the School of Business faculty-wide vote on AACSB accreditation.

There are five supporting documents attached to this document.

In our opinion, this report fulfills our obligations under the charge issued on 25 September 2013 and we consider this charge closed at this time.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Sheila M. Rucki Ph.D.
Chair, Faculty Senate Welfare Committee
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Faculty Senate Welfare Committee has conducted an investigation into the processes leading up to the School of Business faculty-wide vote on AASCB accreditation. We find that the results of our investigation are disturbing and warrant further investigation. We recommend that a body external to the School of Business with the capacity for a full investigation, perhaps the University Ombudsman, be empowered to conduct a formal investigation and report back to the Faculty Senate, the Office of the President and Provost, and the full Faculty Senate.

BACKGROUND

On 25 September, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate issued the following charge to the Welfare Committee:

“Looking (sic) into issues with the vote on AACSB accreditation, including the process by which the vote was conducted and information shared with School of Business faculty prior to the vote.

a. Solicit information from:
   i. Dean Murphy
   ii. Provost Golich
   iii. President Jordan
   iv. School of Business faculty on an anonymous basis

b. Findings will be reported to the Executive Committee and a final report will be issued to the Faculty Senate”

The charge was issued in response to allegations from School of Business, presented by Caucus Chair Juan Dempere, that the President and Provost’s offices put undue pressure on, or intimidated, the faculty to vote to continue to pursue AACSB accreditation. This pressure is alleged to have occurred in a meeting with the full School of Business faculty prior to the initiation of the faculty-wide vote.

The charge was issued on the afternoon of 25 September, prior to the closing of the vote. Dean Murphy was notified by email of the charge and the EC asked her to refrain from releasing the results of the vote until the Welfare Committee had an opportunity to investigate the allegations of intimidation (see Attachment 1). Dean Murphy released the results of the election on the morning of 26 September.

At the 09 October EC meeting, Dean Murphy asked for clarification of the Welfare Committee charge and the EC confirmed that the charge was limited to an investigation of events prior to the actual faculty-wide vote, and confirmed the authority of the Committee to investigate processes that inhibit the faculty’s ability to participate in policy formation.
Subsequently, the Committee met with School of Business Caucus Chair Dempere on 18 October 2013. After this meeting, the Committee agreed to poll the affected faculty to ascertain whether allegations of intimidation, or the perception of intimidation, were widely held by the faculty.

METHODS

The Welfare Committee constructed and administered a short survey of the School of Business faculty who were eligible to participate in the AACSB accreditation vote.

This survey was administered with SurveyMonkey from 06 to 13 November. It was distributed to 52 individuals, identified by the School of Business distribution list sent by Erica Yan on 23 September 2013 that served as the basis for original vote. Thirty-seven individuals responded to the survey. The survey responses were anonymous and the Committee collected no identifying information.

The survey included three response-restricted questions and one open-ended question soliciting additional concerns. Of the 37 respondents, 21 responded to the open-ended question.

FINDINGS

The survey finds that 41.7 percent of the faculty who participated believes that the process for soliciting faculty opinion and input on AACSB accreditation did not preserve its ability to meaningfully participate in the process of policy formation and nearly 49 percent reported being either completely or somewhat dissatisfied with the process by which the accreditation decision has been reached. When asked specifically whether they felt that their vote was unduly influenced by perceived intimidation, 36 percent of respondents responded that they agreed. The Welfare Committee finds that this level of dissatisfaction indicates a serious problem with the process leading up to the vote and merits further investigation.

The open-ended responses clearly over-represent those who are dissatisfied with the process. Of the 16 responses, three found the process fair and meaningful, one found the Welfare Committee’s focus on the issue inappropriate, and the other 12 were critical of the process.

Looking only at the critical responses, the critiques fall into three broad categories: failure of the process to be faculty driven, lack of transparency and/or discrepancy in the vote itself and, perceptions that a vote against accreditation would result in losses in jobs and/or resources and intimidation of non-tenured faculty. One respondent reported a feeling of intimidation from the individuals opposed to accreditation.

Quantitative survey results are attached as Attachment 2.

ANALYSIS

The Welfare Committee finds the level of dissatisfaction with the process leading up to the all-faculty vote troubling. For whatever reason, nearly half of the faculty surveyed was dissatisfied with the process. While the Committee respects the authority of the School of Business to
conduct its own affairs, the size of the dissatisfied minority suggests to us that the process was, if not deeply flawed, certainly not indicative of an inclusive and collaborative process that was driven by the faculty itself.

Dean Murphy’s decision to release the outcome of the vote before our survey could be administered makes it impossible for the Committee to disentangle dissatisfaction with outcome versus dissatisfaction with process. However, we do note that the percentage of individuals who report dissatisfaction with the process exceeds the percentage of individuals who opposed seeking AACSB accreditation in the vote held by the School of Business (see Attachment 3). In any case, even though we would have preferred survey results not potentially contaminated by the outcome, we believe that the magnitude of dissatisfaction warrants further investigation.

To ascertain if our results are consistent with other faculty perceptions of the conduct of affairs in the School of Business, the committee correlated our findings with the findings of the 2013 Climate Survey conducted by ModernThink. In its analysis, ModernThink identified a climate of bullying and a hostile work environment as an area warranting attention in the School of Business and it specifically include the following comment as indicative of the issue:

“We are not student centered and there are people in high positions that bully others below them or try to intimidate others with power. There has to be something in place that can help those who are being targeted without being written up or bullied. Examples are departments do not talk to each other over fear that they will step on others power” (see Attachment 4).

In the School of Business, 37 percent of ModernThink’s respondents reported being aware of other employees who had experienced workplace bullying and 27 percent reported being themselves targets of bullying at work (see Attachment 5). We note that these responses are not out of line with the college-wide responses. However, in the context of the issue before this Committee, the survey data from ModernThink tends to reinforce our own findings that a substantial minority of individuals have noted a climate of intimidation at work.

Taken together with our own survey, we believe that the ModernThink findings serve as an additional data point suggesting the need for some action to be taken by the institution to ensure that the AACSB accreditation vote actually represents the thoughtful and authentic input of the faculty. It is our understanding that when President Jordan addressed the faculty concerning this issue prior to the vote he noted that the process of accreditation must to be faculty-driven. We agree and note that it is in the purview of this Committee to ensure that all University policy be the product of collaboration between faculty and administration. In that light, we reach the following conclusions and make the following recommendations:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee concludes that:

1. Regardless of the outcome of the accreditation vote, the process leading up to that vote is perceived by a large minority of faculty to be flawed.
2. The perception might be indicative of a wider, perhaps systemic, problem in the School of Business.
3. The School of Business needs to take immediate steps to both ensure a more collaborative climate in general and to revisit the question of AASCB accreditation in a climate more conducive to open and honest faculty participation

The Committee recommends that:

1. The School of Business address the issue of workplace climate, both in general and with specific reference to this issue, with a formal investigation and issue a post-mortem analysis detailing how the process generated such a profound negative response.

2. The School of Business use personnel from outside of the School to conduct this investigation to provide some level of objectivity and that the findings be reported to the Faculty Senate, the Office of the President, and the Office of the Provost. We also recommend that the selection of the individual to lead this investigation be done in collaboration with all stakeholders and further that the University Ombudsman might be the appropriate point for the investigation.

3. The Office of the President and Provost make resources available for this impartial investigation

Faculty Senate Welfare Committee